

STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY  
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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 2188

*Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 26: Producer Margins, a Major Substantive Rule of the Maine Milk Commission*

February 7, 2024

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Craig Lapine. I am the Director of the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). I am speaking neither for nor against LD 2188, *Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 26: Producer Margins, a Major Substantive Rule of the Maine Milk Commission*.

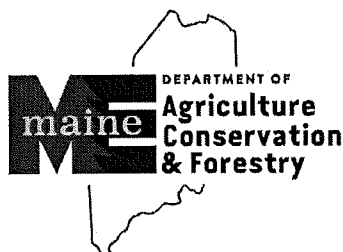
The Department takes no position on the Cost of Production study itself, other than to note that we believe its methodology produced an accurate snapshot in time of the costs and associated challenges faced by Maine dairy farmers in 2022.

I would like to take the opportunity to highlight the importance of dairy farms in their own right as well as the critical role they play in the agricultural sector. The 145 dairy farms currently shipping milk in Maine are widely dispersed. They are embedded in every farming community—and, indeed, near urban centers—throughout the state.

Dairy farms operate at a different scale from many of Maine's producers. The labor and machinery needed for dairy production create a critical mass that has the secondary impact of supporting businesses like equipment dealers, feed and seed stores, veterinarians, and other professional service providers that all Maine farms rely on.

The Department is broadly committed to the health of Maine agriculture as part of our vision for a robust economy and thriving communities. More specifically, two ambitious goals included in Maine's climate action plan, *Maine Won't Wait*, are helping shape the direction of our work: conserving 30% of Maine farmland by 2030 and having 30% of our food come from within the

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state by 2030. Achieving these goals gets exponentially harder when we lose dairy farms; anything that strengthens Maine's dairy farms brings these goals more within reach.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the Department's perspective. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.