

Jason Tessier, Dairy Farmer in Skowhegan  
Regarding Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee  
LD 2188, HP1402 Testimony  
February 7th, 2024

Thank You Chairs and Committee Members

My name is Jason Tessier. My wife and I own a 35 head dairy farm in Skowhegan. All of our milk is processed on our farm and sold in the greater Skowhegan area both retail and wholesale. Furthermore I am on the Board of Maine Dairy Industry Association and serve as secretary for MDIA, as well as serving as Facilities Director at Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association.

I would like to testify in support of LD2188. The past several years have been very volatile and emotional for the dairy industry. Maine has lost around 30% of our dairy farms since 2020. The number remaining is 149, down another 11 farms since I was last here, 11 months ago.

I am deeply afraid we are nearing the point where we will lose the critical mass necessary to maintain our infrastructure, and the other businesses who depend on the dairy industry. Small farms like mine could easily be a casualty of these losses, as we depend on the same suppliers for our feed, chemicals and dairy equipment as the larger farms.

According to a June 2022 news release by Governor Mills, Maine dairy farms steward 700,000 acres of fields, pastures, and croplands. These acres are a critical piece of Maine's open space used for recreation by hundreds of thousands people each year. Folks hiking, skiing, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, ATV's and many other activities use open space maintained by Dairy Farmers. What are the alternatives going to be for land owners when there is no one there to maintain this space. Many other types of farms, as well as homesteaders, utilize nutrients produced by dairy farms. Manure and compost are both used for commercial production and home gardens. This past season the former dairy farmer mowing the fields at MOFGA stopped mowing, he no longer has cows to feed. MOFGA paid \$100 per acre to get the fields mowed and cleaned up for the fair, at a cost of \$12,000 dollars, over our projected budget, to the organization. The ties to Dairy Farming are far and wide, and the loss of the industry would have far reaching impacts, changing Maine's very way of life, "The Way Life Should Be"

The Producer Margin rule is simply based on a short run, break even, cost of production. This does not make the farm whole! It does not account for depreciation or unpaid family labor. The program has proved successful many years here in Maine and has been a shining example for other states. I ask that you support the program, and its proven track record, by keeping it current with the latest cost of production study numbers.

Respectfully submitted  
Jason Tessier  
Skowhegan