

LD 2188

Good afternoon,

I have come to you in support of LD 2188. The legislation would adopt the most recent cost of production study figures and implement those as a trigger base for the Maine dairy stabilization program. These updated figures show more accurately the increased cost that dairy farms in the state of Maine face.

I am Libby Bleakney, one of four owners of Highland Farms. We are located in the town of Cornish on top of a hill that overlooks Mount Washington and the presidential range. We are the oldest registered Jersey herd in the nation, established in 1886. We have the fourth, fifth and sixth generations working on the farm. Currently the seventh generation is just beginning to show interest in farming.

The farm consists of a land base of 1200 acres of which 200 is tillable. Our milking herd is 250 cows of which 200 are milked twice a day and we have about 250 head of young stock. We plant 180 acres of corn which is on some leased land. We employ five full-time and five part-time employees. It is all family except one full-time employee that has worked for us for 38 years the part-time employees work one day or two days a week to give the full-time employees one day off a week.

As I have stated in the past, dairy farming is a little unique in that we are in a financial vise, and it is getting harder to produce milk . We have no control over the price we get for our milk and the import costs are continually rising, so that squeeze is getting tighter and tighter.

We let our land be used for hiking, cross-country skiing, fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, etc.. We hope we can provide a little relaxing time for people to enjoy the outdoors and our views. We have a small parking area where many people come to enjoy the rural landscape watching beautiful sunrises to start their day or the wonderful sunset to end their day.

We are constantly looking for ways to get more efficient to generate more income. We have changed the way we feed and manage our milking herd which has gained us about 2 to 3 more pounds of milk per cow per day. We opened a farm store in August of 2023 selling milk, beef, cheese, and maple syrup to try to help supplement our farm income. It also has been a way to explain agriculture, and to let people come enjoy rural small town life.

We are very grateful for all the financial help that the state of Maine has been able to supply us with when our price for our milk has been below our cost of production. You are all aware of the increases in the past few years, electricity, interest rates, grain costs, labor, health insurance, fuel, building repairs and marketing costs to sell our milk to Agri-mark. As we look at the price forecast for third quarter of 2023 to second quarter 2025 it doesn't look very promising to even

meet the cost of producing milk in the state of Maine. The average price that was paid to farmers in 2022 was \$24.96, in 2023 it was \$20.01 and the projected average price for 2024 is \$20.24 and for 2025 it is forecast to be \$20.03.

The dairy farmers of the state of Maine, help support other businesses in our state; equipment dealers, grain companies milk haulers, feed stores, fertilizer and seed companies not to mention our local stores, hardware, auto parts, etc.

We at Highland Farms want to thank the state of Maine for all the help in the past and hope you can continue to see your way to support dairy farming in our state when our price paid to us is below the cost of production. Thank you in advance for your support of LD 2188.