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To the Maine Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee,

Good afternoon, I am Barry Higgins from Maple Lane farms in Charleston, Penobscot County. We have a very diverse agricultural farm in Charleston and Bradford.

We have been dairying for five generations, my son and granddaughters comprise the 4th and 5th generations.

We have operated as mostly dairy until the middle 90's and it became apparent to us that if we would continue to farm, we would need to diversify, so we gradually incorporated beef and forage sales into our business plan and from there we added a processing facility for beef, pork and lamb (red meat) and composting all our waste products.

Why did we do this? The answer is dairy has not been a lucrative enterprise for many years. This is proven by the fact that the numbers have dropped from 1200 dairy farms 20 years ago to 145 today.

The farmers we have left are very good operators who have larger operations that are adding millions to Maine's local economy. By supporting the dairies that remain you are supporting Maine's Agricultural base.

The tier program has greatly helped keep the dairy enterprise in business, but the program is based on 2019 cost of operating. It is outdated and needs to be updated to cover today's cost of doing business!

Please stop and think for a moment – Change in the cost of fuel, electricity, insurance, real estate taxes and don't forget labor – is anyone here working for the same labor rate as 5 years ago when the current Tier levels were set?

If we do not adjust the current levels to accommodate to the cost of operating in 2024 and 2025 I am afraid dairy will go the same direction as the poultry farms of the 1970's and 1980's.

Without getting into the weeds of the cost of operating and the cost to the state infrastructure. If we lose this enterprise, this could be detrimental to rural Maine's economy. Common sense should tell you without your support there will be a deficit to the rural Maine economy that far exceeds the direct cost to the state. The state will need to support this industry.

I am asking you to support LD1850

Are there any questions?

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