



Testimony in Opposition of LD 113 An Act to Require Food Labels to Disclose Use of Messenger Ribonucleic Acid Vaccine Material in Food Production

Honorable Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee:

My name is Julie Ann Smith, and I represent the Maine Farmers Coalition. The Coalition was established in 2023 by farmers who recognized the importance of advocating for state policies that honor our rich farming traditions while integrating innovative practices. As a group of progressive farmers, we are committed to ensuring the sustainable growth and protection of Maine's vital farming industry while fostering a community where farmers can share knowledge, resources, and opportunities.

Vaccinations are commonly used in animal agriculture to prevent disease. As new technologies emerge and additional diseases pose threats to animal health and human food security, research into innovative methods for improving animal health continues to advance. One promising new technology being extensively studied is the use of messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccines in livestock.

mRNA occurs naturally in all cells and instructs them on how to produce a protein that triggers an immune response. After administration, immune cells break down the components of the vaccine, ensuring that no trace of the vaccine remains in the animal's tissues. It is also required to observe withdrawal periods before animals can be slaughtered following the administration of any vaccine.

Research into the use of mRNA vaccines in livestock medicine has been ongoing for over a decade. Before mRNA vaccines can be licensed for use in livestock, they require significant review and approval from the USDA. Any vaccine approved for animal administration undergoes thorough testing to ensure safety, effectiveness, and quality. Moreover, once a vaccine is available on the market, the USDA continuously collects data.

mRNA vaccines for livestock are currently available only for swine, targeting strains of the influenza A virus, porcine circovirus (PCV), rotavirus, and others. Given that swine production in Maine has been minimal over the past several decades, there is a significant opportunity for local farmers to increase their swine production. However, the creation of state-specific labeling, as proposed in this legislation, could pose a substantial barrier to market entry for Maine farmers, who are already at an economic and geographical disadvantage.

We support consumer-friendly, science-based labeling of agricultural products that clearly provide essential information about ingredients and nutritional content. Agricultural products produced using approved biotechnology should not be required to list individual ingredients or specific technologies on their labels. Misleading labeling statements which suggest that food produced using certain practices is superior or safer than food produced with other approved practices.

Maine farmers are resolutely committed to delivering the highest quality and safest food available. It is vital that we protect and promote access to both existing and innovative technologies that support this mission. Upholding these standards is essential for ensuring that our locally produced food remains accessible and competitive for all. We urge the committee to safeguard the future of Maine's agriculture by voting Ought Not to Pass.

We look forward to working with you to develop policies that ensure Maine's agriculture thrives in a competitive global market.