

**University of Maine Cooperative Extension Testimony in Support of LD 210, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027 (FY26-27 Biennial Budget - Pages A-638/639) – Presented by Dean Hannah Carter, February 27, 2025**

Senators Rotundo and Talbot Ross, Representatives Gattine and Pluecker, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations & Financial Affairs and Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry:

My name is Hannah Carter and I am Dean of University of Maine Cooperative Extension. I am also a proud County native and a product of the Extension system through my early years in 4-H and later as a summer insect and disease scout when I was an undergraduate student at the University of Maine Presque Isle. I am here today on behalf of the University of Maine System (UMS) to **encourage your support of the General Fund appropriation and Special Revenue allocation that advance UMaine Extension**, which you will find on Pages A-638 and A-639 of the Governor's FY26-27 biennial budget proposal.

Extension brings research, education, and outreach from Maine's R1 land grant university to homes, schools, farms, and communities in your legislative districts. Working with wild blueberry producers to improve fresh-packed berries' quality and shelf life. Providing food safety planning assistance to help new meat and poultry processors pass inspection. Developing leadership and STEM skills of 30,000 Maine youth annually. Delivering technical assistance and support to PFAS-impacted farmers in partnership with the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. These are just some of Extension's statewide activities that strengthen and grow Maine's agricultural economy and dependent rural jobs, and protect public, plant, and animal health.

**Tick Laboratory & Pest Management Fund (A-638)**

In 2014, the Legislature and Maine voters generously funded the construction of the UMaine Extension Diagnostic and Research Laboratory (DRL) to bring Extension scientists — including students — together to do research that matters to Maine and to provide unique diagnostic and testing services that matter to Mainers. Today, the DRL supports aquatic animal health research necessary to the development of the state's aquaculture and biotechnology sectors; veterinary diagnostic services vital for vets, game wardens and pet owners; plant disease testing that farmers depend on for crop management; and testing of ticks and other insects for you and your constituents.

Extension is supported within UMaine's existing and constrained budgetary resources and by other local, state, and federal competitive and formula funds and our own program

revenue. This targeted \$250,000 General Fund appropriation, for which there is no new initiative proposed, specifically supports the DRL's ever-expanding tick-related education, outreach, and research activities, including testing each year of thousands of tick samples, more than half of which test positive for a least one pathogen, including the causative agents of Lyme. Because of this ongoing funding, for example, our lab charges Mainers just \$20 per tick test, compared to \$57 for just Lyme disease and upwards of \$127 for the full panel at the University of Connecticut (the nearest public university lab that also provides this public service).

### **University of Maine Cooperative Extension (A-639)**

There is also no new initiative for the UMaine Extension integrated pest management (IPM) and pesticide safety education programs on Page A-639, which are funded by \$200,000 in Special Revenue.

IPM is a science-based approach to pest management that reduces the use of pesticides and their impact to public and environmental health while preserving the treated crop. Extension leverages the State's investment to attract external funding to further extend the positive impact of our proven IPM programs on Maine farms. We estimate that each year, our IPM education and recommendations to hundreds of Maine's licensed applicators generate more than \$10 million in increased crop yield and reduced pesticide costs just for Maine's potato industry and more than \$5 million for Maine's apple industry. There are similar success stories for the state's strawberry, cranberry, and sweet corn growers, and with this flat-funded allocation, we can continue this critical work.

I want to thank you for your continued commitment to University of Maine Cooperative Extension. Earlier this month, the Appropriations Committee heard from Chancellor Malloy that State funding has not kept up with the System's rising operating costs and that our region-leading affordability has limited revenue growth from student tuition, despite enrollment increases. He shared that this has required difficult choices, including a UMS-wide hiring freeze, retrenching of faculty and staff, incentivizing faculty retirement, and leaving positions vacant. You should know that Extension has not been immune from those impacts and has had to restructure some staff and services to do more with less.

Maintaining the investments in Extension before you today helps us help Maine people help themselves through education and research. It also enables us to strategically partner with many of the other organizations you've heard from today, including Maine DACF, the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine, and the Maine Potato Board, all of which are also deserving of your support and are vital to the future of Maine's agricultural-dependent businesses, communities, and families.

Thank you, and I look forward to taking your questions.