



**Testimony of Shelley Megquier, Policy & Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust, to the 132nd
Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
March 13, 2025**

Good afternoon Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Shelley Megquier and I am the Policy & Research Director at Maine Farmland Trust (MFT). I am providing testimony on behalf of MFT in support of LD 593 – *An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program*.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Our goals are to keep agricultural lands working and help farmers and their communities thrive. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect farmland in every county in Maine, amounting to nearly 57,000 acres across 345 farms. Our Farm Network includes more than 550 farms that have participated in MFT's programming either through an agricultural easement or through one of our programs. Our main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Stewardship, Farm Business Planning, PFAS Support, Climate Resilience, and Policy and Research.

Protecting farmland is critical for ensuring we have the land base needed to grow our agricultural economy and strengthen food security for our communities, state, and region. But, farmland in Maine is at risk. The 2022 Census of Agriculture showed that between 2017 and 2022, more than 82,000 acres of farmland in Maine fell out of agricultural production.¹ Farmland in Maine is being lost to agriculture due to increasing development pressures, a growing interest in farmland from non-farming buyers, dramatic increases in the cost of land, and farm viability challenges that are making it harder for farmers to afford to keep their land in agriculture. At the same time, less than 5 percent of Maine's farmland is currently protected – this is the lowest amount of any state in New England. Protecting farmland through a conservation easement keeps land available for agricultural use and creates more affordable access to farmland for both new and established farmers. Agricultural conservation is critical to ensure that we have the land base needed to sustain our heritage industries, grow our agricultural economy, strengthen food security, and build resilience to climate change for our state and communities.

I have attached a *Farmland Protection in Maine* briefing note to my testimony that shares more data on the status of farmland protection in Maine and suggests key actions that need to be taken, one of which is ongoing funding for the Land for Maine's Future (LMF) Program.

LD 593 provides \$10 million annually for the next two years for the LMF Program. LMF is Maine's primary public funding vehicle to protect water access, outdoor recreation, working lands and waterfronts, and fish and wildlife habitat. Since its creation in 1987, LMF has protected over 600,000 acres, including nearly 10,000 acres of farmland and 42 farms.² This funding proposed by LD 593 would serve as an important source of support for LMF until permanent, ongoing funding is secured.

¹ USDA NASS, *Census of Agriculture for 2022, Maine*, "Land: 2022 and 2017."

² Land for Maine's future project data, found at <https://www.maine.gov/dacf/lmf/projects.shtml#all>

This bill will also help to advance the goals of the state's updated 2024 climate action plan *Maine Won't Wait*, which establishes new targets specific to farmland protection – calling for Maine to secure and commit ongoing, dedicated funding for farmland conservation to double the amount of permanently protected farmland in the state by 2030 and ensure no net loss of farmland in Maine.³ In order to realize this goal, we need to meet the rapid growth in development pressure across the state with an equally rapid expansion of our farmland protection efforts, especially publicly funded farmland protection. Funding for LMF through supporting LD 593 is one step in that direction.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 593. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

³ Maine Climate Council, *Maine Won't Wait: A Four-Year Plan for Climate Action*, p. 109, (2024), available at: <https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/the-plan>.