

Maine Dairy Industry Association
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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY**

in OPPOSITION to

“LD942 An Act to Safeguard Sustainable Food Sources Provided by Certain Maine Farmers”

Good morning Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of Joint Standing Committee On Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Annie Watson and I, along with Heath Miller, represent Maine Dairy Industry Association. (MDIA)

MDIA represents the 138 cow-dairy farms in the state shipping milk. Our farms are located in 15 of Maine’s 16 counties. MDIA represents all of Maine’s dairies, no matter the size or style of operation. Our producers range in size from five to 3,000 cows. We have 91 farms producing milk using conventional systems of production, and 47 using organic systems. Twelve of these farms are producer dealers, while the remaining 126 ship their milk to a processor. All but two of these farms are owned and managed by Maine families. Some are multi-generational families who have stewarded Maine’s farmland for hundreds of years, while many are first generation farmers, just starting on their own family's farm journey. It is on behalf of these farms that we would like to submit this testimony against LD942.

First, let me express our gratitude for recognizing the importance of an equitable food system. As I have just described, Maine’s dairy industry is made up of a wide range of styled and sized farms, but at the end of the day, we are all in the business of feeding our neighbors, and every farm contributes to the agricultural community in our state. The animals we care for, land we carefully tend and manage, local businesses we support, and people we employ on our farms are all necessary and important parts of our food system and our food security as a state, regardless of their size.

It is nearly impossible to characterize or prioritize a farm’s importance, based on their size. To do so would be to the detriment of all our farms. We all play an important role in the agricultural community. We are all a part of stewarding the 700,000 acres in Maine in dairy production. We all purchase fuel from local companies, run to our local hardware stores and equipment dealers for a much needed part, and have local vets tend to our animals when needed. The only real difference is scale. While the agricultural industry in our country has changed and we are often faced with an “industrial-style” of agriculture as seen in other places, that is simply not the case here in Maine.

To require the Commissioner to use rulemaking to define a farm by its size, would most certainly be prohibitive and cause our food system to be less equitable. We should be increasing access to programs and opportunities for our State's agricultural community, rather than setting barriers. The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry has been working through an overhaul of their State grant programs to ensure they offer the most benefit to our farms. Commissioner Beal has made this a very clear directive, and communicated her priorities clearly to our entire Ag community. The Department also knows the importance of Federal Assistance, and placing any in-state guard rails or forcing prioritization of certain styles of production for Federal Funds would not only make it harder to administer programs, but also keep Maine at a disadvantage. Given the chaos in our Federal Systems, we feel it is not the time to be making decisions that could ultimately be prohibitive for our state's ag community.

At a time when so much feels uncertain, you can be certain our dairy farm families are waking up every morning to milk their cows and tend to their chores, all with the goal of providing our communities with nutritious food for their tables.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and please reach out with any questions.