



JANET T. MILLS  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY  
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER  
22 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

AMANDA E. BEAL  
COMMISSIONER

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

IN OPPOSITION TO LD 942

*An Act to Safeguard Sustainable Food Sources Provided by Certain Maine Farmers*

March 13, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, I am Craig Lapine, Director of the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF). Today, I am speaking in opposition to LD 942, "An Act to Safeguard Sustainable Food Sources Provided by Certain Maine Farmers."

DACF is home to several grant and loan programs aimed at supporting agricultural producers. From the Dairy Improvement Fund to the Farms for the Future program, we understand how grant and loan programs can have a significant and lasting impact on farm and producer planning, growth, and sustainability. We recognize that meat and poultry processing remains a major need for investment and expansion within Maine. Given the significant resources needed to build and operate these types of entities, we understand the desire to prioritize funding in this area, and Deputy Commissioner McBrady and I provided an overview of our grant programs with the sponsor last fall. However, **LD 942 as written, could actually prevent Maine from participating in future federal grant initiatives, and it also contains provisions that are redundant to our existing state-based grant processes.**

LD 942 requires that DACF "ensure that federal grants designated for livestock farmers give priority to small and midsize farms." Yet when administering federal grants, it's the federal agency – most often USDA – that sets the priorities, terms, conditions, and policies defining eligible entities, including business size. It would be atypical for a state to be able to set priority for **federal** funds based on a business's size outside of the rules and guidelines provided by the federal agency. What this bill will likely do is restrict DACF's ability to participate in federal grant programs if we have a state mandate to overlay small and midsize processing priorities on the grant – something we simply can't do when the federal grant sets the funding parameters.

HARLOW BUILDING  
18 ELKINS LANE  
AUGUSTA, MAINE



PHONE: (207) 287-3200  
FAX: (207) 287-2400  
WEB: [WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF](http://WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF)

Over the past four years, our department has leveraged significant state and federal resources to support small and mid-sized farms in Maine through both existing grant programming and new grant opportunities supported by pandemic relief funding. Despite this influx of funding, the need for investment across the agriculture sector far outpaces available resources. Our Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program (AIIP) saw over 850 applicants requesting nearly \$180M in funding – more than nine times greater than what we had on hand to award (*see image below*). Examples of the impact of federal funding are offered below.

<b>Program</b>	<b>Deployed</b>	<b>Total Funded</b>	<b>Funding to Farms</b>
State of Maine CARES Act Agriculture & Food Infrastructure Reimbursement Program (DACF)	2021	\$17,365,573.00	~\$11M total. ~\$1.4M to meat and poultry businesses (farms, processors, value-add)
State of Maine CARES Act E-Commerce Reimbursement Program (DACF)	2021	\$251,989.89	Majority to farms.
State of Maine American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program (AIIP) (DACF)	2022-2023	\$19,277,859.60	~\$8M (\$5.9M awarded to meat and processing businesses, including farms)

Next, LD 942 requires DACF to issue clear state grant application requirements and, in collaboration with stakeholders, create a process for evaluating state grants. Last year, DACF published Rule Chapter 8 which requires that DACF’s grant materials clearly state eligibility requirements, scoring metrics, and other relevant grant parameters. Further, Review Committees are required to assist in grant application assessment. DACF often includes subject matter experts with relevant experience to participate in grant Review Committees. DACF has also embarked on a process with Maine IT to secure a grants management tool that will simplify and streamline processes for both grant seekers and grant administrators. Given the competitive nature of these grants, we strive to conduct robust, thoughtful, and organized assessments, which are time-intensive. For example, the Resilient Food System Infrastructure Program (RFSI) infrastructure grant, on average, required 48.5 hours of individual reviewers' time.

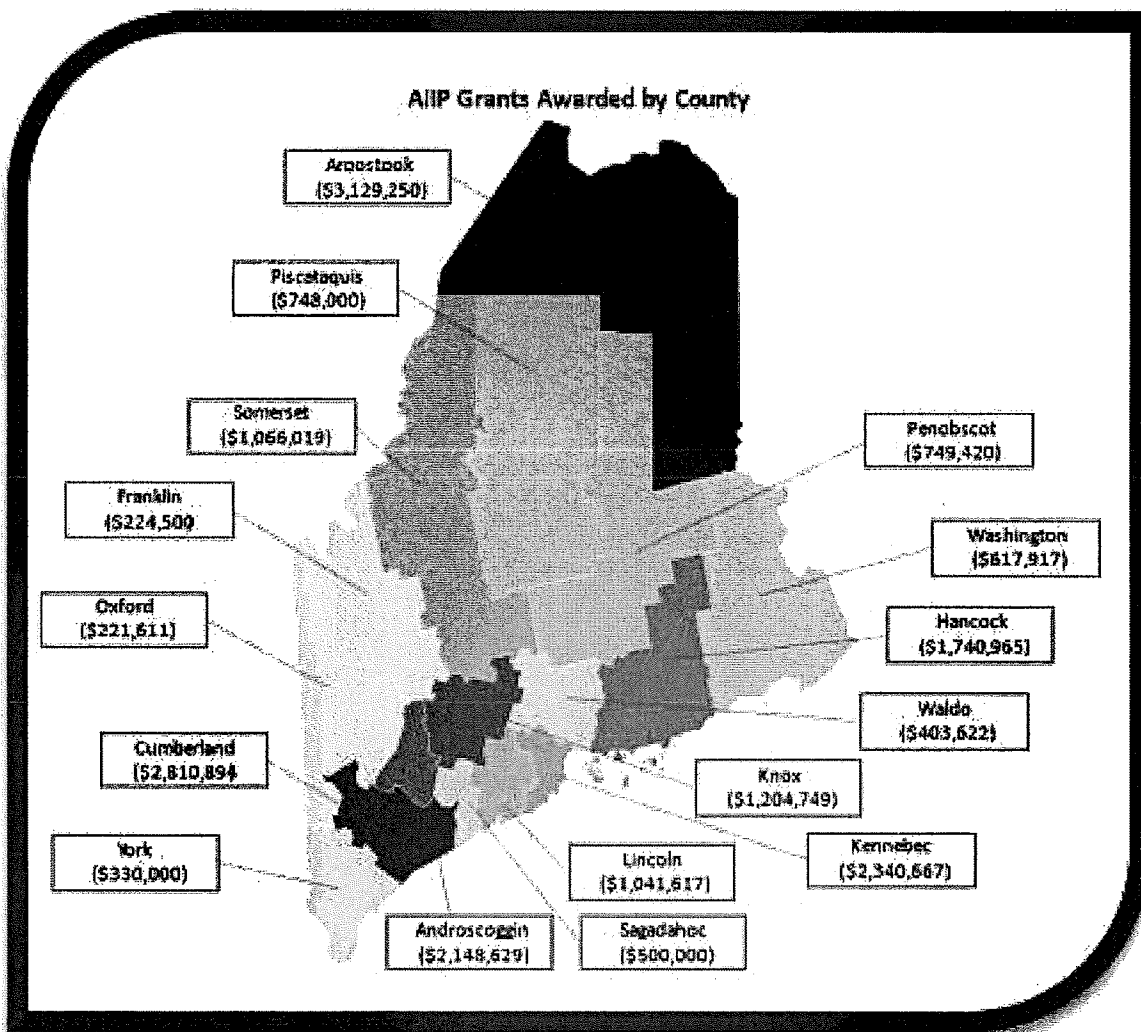
Last, LD 942 directs DACF to “Develop, establish and prioritize shared-use kitchen programming to enable midsize farms to build shared-use kitchen infrastructure and increase processing capability for agricultural products for personal use and local community demand.” Notably, DACF launched RFSI in 2024. Of that, less than 4% of RFSI equipment applications requested funding for shared-use kitchens. We also note that, without funding to develop and establish shared-kitchen programming, these efforts may not be successful.

In addition, LD 606, which DACF supports, requests listening sessions to gather feedback from producers—including meat and poultry producers and processors--on improving our grant programs and processes. Over the past several years, DACF has employed numerous tools to best understand the needs of grantees, including conducting a Heritage Industry Survey, holding listening sessions, and conducting webinars. As an example, when the Department was preparing

to roll out RFSI funding, more than 70 farmers and food processors provided input in listening sessions, and more than 120 provided input via an online survey. We are also actively analyzing trends in recent grant applications to understand the level of need that remains in various sectors within agriculture. In addition, we work with numerous partners and communications channels to ensure opportunities for grant programs are widely broadcast. We have also provided technical assistance to those interested in applying for specific grants by offering webinars and regular “open office” hours where questions can be asked and answered in real-time. While we appreciate the intent of LD 942 and sincerely want to see Maine's meat and poultry processors thrive, DACF feels strongly that this bill is not necessary.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I’m happy to answer questions now and at the work session.

# ATTACHMENT 1: Example of Grant Geographic Distribution and Totals (AIIP)



*AIIP awards were distributed across key agricultural product categories in all 16 counties. Aroostook County received the most cumulative grant funding, in part due to having the highest number of farms in Maine and a relatively large proportion of potato production and processing. The next highest were Cumberland, Kennebec & Androscoggin counties.*