



**Testimony of Shelley Megquier, Policy & Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust, to the 132nd Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
April 1, 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 1141 – *An Act to Increase the Procurement of Maine Foods by State-funded Institutions*.

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.

Institutional purchasing of local food allows for more food grown in Maine to stay in Maine. Institutions have significant purchasing power and, when they purchase local food, use that power to support the local community and economy. These dollars then stay in the state to directly support food producers and the surrounding communities within which they are embedded. More local food purchasing also improves the quality and nutritional value of the food being served at such institutions – allowing for more Maine people to be able to enjoy healthy, local food. From the point of view of producers, a wholesale customer, such as a state institution, is often core to a farm's business plan. The predictability of these buyer contracts helps farmers to plan how much to produce each season and anticipate their sales, lowering the financial risk of up-front production costs and infrastructure investments. Though Maine has made progress in expanding local purchasing by state-funded institutions, more progress needs to be made if Maine is going to reach the State's goal of increasing the amount of food consumed in Maine from state food producers to 30% by 2030.¹

LD 1141 moves Maine towards a more proactive approach to local food procurement by state institutions. In current statute there are clear mandates for the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry to establish and promote a local foods procurement program with the goal of 20% of all food and food products procured by state institutions coming from Maine, designate staff capacity to assist with local food procurement, establish guidelines, and convene regular meetings that bring together various stakeholders. What is lacking in current statute is specificity on which strategies will be employed to reach institutional local food procurement goals.

LD 1141 updates the goal that the State is striving for to 30%, in alignment Maine Won't Wait, and gives permission for the State to engage in off-contract purchasing. Off-contract purchasing allows the institution to purchase foods or food services outside of an existing contract, in cases where there is a

¹ Maine Climate Council, *Maine Won't Wait: A Four-Year Plan for Climate Action*, p. 116, (2024), available at: <https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/the-plan>.

20% or more cost savings. This would allow for the flexibility to turn to more local procurement options in times of the year when that's possible and cost-effective. One suggestion on the bill would be to add detail on allowable preferences for local vendors, even if the price is up to a certain percentage above a comparable product from out of state. Other states have language like this in statute that allows for institutional purchasing that preferences local products, even if they cost a bit more - factoring in the multiplier effect that these state dollars can have when they feed back into our local economy.²

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1141.

² These states include Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Oregon, South Carolina and Wyoming and range from allowing 5-15% of a higher price, if locally procured. ChangeLab Solutions: Law & Policy Innovation for the Common Good (2011), *State Laws Promoting Use of Locally Grown Food and Agricultural Products in Public Contracts*.