



STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY  
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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 1198

*Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Assess Its Current  
Meat and Poultry Inspection Programs*

April 1, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Celeste Poulin. I am the Division Director of Quality Assurance and Regulation (QAR) within the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) as neither for nor against LD 1198, *Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Assess Its Current Meat and Poultry Inspection Programs*.

The Division of Quality Assurance and Regulation (QAR) is tasked with implementing state and federal laws regarding meat and poultry inspection in Maine. Our Meat and Poultry Consumer Protection Inspectors are tasked with enforcing compliance with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations regarding the slaughter, processing, and sale of meat and poultry products to consumers. This includes maintaining "at least equal" status in relation to USDA regulations. This means, in practice, that Maine must uphold the federal standards and requirements at the very least and may be more restrictive but not less.

The proposed bill directs DACF to assess the Maine Meat and Poultry Inspection program and report findings to the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee. We note that the program regularly undergoes evaluation, including these examples:

- The USDA Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) conducts an annual paper audit in coordination with the offices of the USDA-FSIS Laboratory Quality Assurance, Response and Coordination (LQARCS), USDA-FSIS Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO), and USDA-FSIS Civil Rights Staff, Office of the Administrator (OA). We submit records,

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directives, and other paperwork demonstrating we maintain “at least equal to” status in nine key areas of program operation. Our most recent audit returned no findings.

- Every three years, USDA-FSIS conducts an in-person audit assessing the same nine program parameters. The most recent audit was conducted in summer 2024 and returned no findings.
- Internally, MMPI conducts Management Controls activities quarterly, and all MMPI staff meet quarterly to review new directives or changes to old directives, review new programs, and receive training on inspection activities.

While QAR takes pride in our record of no audit findings by USDA-FSIS, we recognize that food safety and inspection programs can be complicated to navigate. We attempt to work with regulated parties on an ongoing basis to educate them on program parameters and expectations and to resolve problems earlier than later. However, we are not always successful with this approach. Should the resolve pass, QAR will study the committee’s concerns, carefully review our findings, and report back to the Legislature as requested.

Thank you for your time. I would happily answer any questions now or at the work session.