



Issues and Opportunities for Maine Agriculture in 2025

The Agricultural Council of Maine has identified the major issues and opportunities for Maine's farm and food producers in 2025. They are outlined below for your reference in creating and setting policy and budgets for 2025 and beyond.

Farm Viability: The cost of critical farm inputs has risen 78% over the last 3 years. Producers often rely on loans for necessary capital to improve and try to increase farm viability, unfortunately farm loan rates have risen faster in the past 2 years than at any point in the prior 40.¹ As producers struggle to find value to offset these costs, capital, infrastructure, and technical assistance to access capital becomes ever more important. To provide capital for producers to undertake projects to improve farm viability, we ask that you:

- **Fund the Maine Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Fund**
– The Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program (AIIP) was a critical investment in 2022 that made 64 one-time awards totaling \$19.3 million. Another \$160.7 million in requests were not awarded. An investment of \$20 million per year for 8 years will transform ME agriculture into a thriving community that will feed Mainers and support the Maine economy for generations. This level of funding will meet the \$160 million need demonstrated by the AIIP.
- **Support programs like the Maine Technology Institute's, Maine Entrepreneur Resource Center**
– This program in particular, and others like it, improve Maine's ability to capitalize on existing sources of federal funds.

Climate Change: Maine average temperatures have risen 3.2°F since 1895 and are expected to rise an additional 2-4°F by 2050.² Extreme weather, including droughts and late frosts, are already impacting Maine agriculture frequency.

- **Fund the Farmers Drought Relief Fund** – Currently funded at \$500k annually, we seek an increase in recurring funding to \$4 million per year. At this elevated funding level, the relief fund would still be \$6 million / year short of the Agricultural Water Management Boards assessment of what is needed annually to create resilience.³

¹ US Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. 2023. USDA Says High Farm Production Costs Not Easing in 2024. July 13, 2023.

² Maine Climate Council. 2020. Maine Won't Wait. A four-year plan for climate action.

³ Agricultural Water Management Board. 2022 letter send to Governor Mills from the Agricultural Water Management Board regarding Agricultural Water Management Board Outreach for Enhanced Federal and State Irrigation Support.

- **Fund the Maine Healthy Soils Program** – Currently \$600k annually, we seek an increase in recurring funding to \$3 million per year.

Farmland Conservation and Access:

- **Invest in Farmland Conservation** - Annually invest \$20 million in state funding toward permanent conservation of Maine’s farmland, with the goal of protecting at least 7% by 2030⁴.
- **Strengthen Farmland Access and Protection** – Support strengthening and increasing the capacity of the State’s working farmland access and protection program per the enactment of LD 579, An Act to Support Farmland Conservation, and include cross sector producer stakeholder engagement as the program is built out.

University of Maine Agricultural Research, Development, and Extension:

- **Support a robust Board of Agriculture (BOA)** – Support a robust BOA process for stakeholder input into University of Maine’s agricultural budgeting, capacity, and strategy to continuously improve the Maine Agriculture and Forestry Experimental Station (MAFES) and Cooperative Extension’s ability to serve the unique needs of Maine agriculture.
- **Support the University of Maine’s Agricultural Capacity** – We ask for continued support for the University of Maine as it seeks to provide crucial research, development, and extension services to Maine’s agricultural community through MAFES and Cooperative Extension.

Regulatory Environment

- **Continued Engagement, Understanding, and Support** - We recognize and thank Governor Mills and the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry for continually looking to producers to understand and act on the impacts that proposed laws and regulations have on the Maine agricultural community, and ask for continued engagement and support.

The Agricultural Council of Maine (AGCOM) is a non-profit association that brings together the major sectors that comprise Maine’s agricultural economy. The council meets monthly to provide a forum for ongoing communication and coordination between and amongst these sectors, and provides leadership and advocacy on the most pressing agricultural issues of today.

⁴ Maine Climate Council (MCC), Natural and Working Lands Work Group (NWLWG). 2024. Meeting materials from the May 15, 2024 meeting of the MCC NWLWG. <https://www.maine.gov/future/meetings/maine-climate-council-natural-working-lands-working-group-2>