



Mike Tipping
Senator, District 8

THE MAINE SENATE
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Good afternoon Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry.

My name is Mike Tipping, I represent Senate District 8 in Penobscot County and I'm proud to present LD 1450, An Act Regarding the Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program.

We all know that protecting farmland in Maine isn't just about fields and fences—it's about our future. If we want strong rural communities, a resilient food system, and an economy that works for everyone, then we need to keep our farmland in production. But Maine farmers are being squeezed—by rising property taxes, by development pressure, and by a system that too often makes it harder, not easier, to keep farms alive.

LD 1450 is about giving our communities the tools they need to support the folks who feed us. It strengthens a program we already have on the books—the Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program—but that's barely been used. That program lets towns offer real property tax relief to farmers in exchange for a commitment to keep farming and conserve their land, at least for a time. It's a win-win for farmers and for towns that want to keep their rural character and avoid the long-term costs of sprawl and unplanned development.

LD 1450 modernizes and strengthens the existing program in a few commonsense ways:

- It moves the program to the right part of state law. Right now, the program is located in Title 7 (Agriculture), where local officials might not even know to look. This bill moves it to Title 36 (Taxation), where town planners and staff are more likely to find and use it.
- It makes the program more flexible. The bill shortens the minimum conservation commitment from 20 years to 10 years, so more farmers—especially those nearing retirement—can consider participating.
- It streamlines local approvals. Right now, if a town adopts the program, every single farm application has to go to the full legislative body—like Town Meeting or the City Council, depending on the system of local governance in that municipality. That's a barrier, especially in smaller towns where farmers may feel uncomfortable going before their neighbors or in larger towns where it clogs up the process. LD 1450 lets towns decide for themselves how to handle approvals, whether it's through staff or a designated committee. Local control remains intact.
- It clarifies the program's purpose. The bill spells out that part of the program's value is helping towns avoid the high long-term costs of unplanned development. Farmland isn't just beautiful and productive—protecting farmland and reducing low-density development is cost-effective for municipalities.

- It simplifies rulemaking. The proposed amendment we've submitted makes the rulemaking process routine technical rather than major substantive. This makes sense given the small scale and voluntary nature of the program.

We have an opportunity here to breathe new life into a program that could help farmers, help towns, and help preserve the Maine we love. LD 1450 doesn't force anyone to do anything. It simply makes it easier for communities that want to step up and support farming to do so. That's something we should all be able to get behind.