



**Testimony of Shelley Megquier, Policy & Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust, to the 132<sup>nd</sup>  
Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry  
May 13, 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 473 – *An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Task Force to Support Commercial Dairy Farms in the State*.

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.

Maine farms face significant challenges that threaten their viability. One of these challenges is the rising costs of production, which are being felt by farms of all types across the state, and can be especially difficult for dairy farms that ship milk and face significant volatility in the price they receive for their milk. Maine's Dairy Stabilization Program, or the Tier Program, provides critical economic support to dairy farmers, allowing more dairy farms to stay in business when the price they receive from the marketplace for their milk falls below their cost of production. It was no surprise that funding the Tier Program at the current cost of production level was the number one recommendation of the 2024 Task Force to Support Commercial Dairy Farms in the State. MFT strongly supports LD 473 because it adds more security to the Tier Program by requiring that the target prices are not set at less than 25% of the short-run break-even point within each tier as determined by the most recent Cost of Production study and increases the rate of milk handling fees. Though these changes would not be as impactful as fully funding the Tier Program at the current cost of production, elevating the floor to a minimum of 25% of the break-even point would be an economic benefit to commercial dairy farmers and, indirectly, farmers and residents throughout the state.

Ensuring the economic viability of dairy farms in Maine is important for Maine's entire agricultural sector. Dairy farms are often described as "anchor farms" because they provide the necessary threshold of business for veterinarians, feed suppliers, and machine suppliers to set up shop in the towns containing these farms. In doing so, these dairy farms contribute to the success of all different kinds of farms across the state and to the economic vitality of the sector, solidifying a critical segment of Maine's economy. Dairy farms also help to ensure food security for our state and region in the face of climate and supply chain disruptions. Finally, dairy farms steward vast acreages of high-value farmland across Maine, and the ability of these farms to achieve economic stability during times of low milk prices helps to keep our agricultural land base in farming and safeguarded from conversion to non-agricultural uses.

Thank you to Committee members for your ongoing support of Maine's dairy sector and your consideration of LD 473. I'd be happy to answer any questions now or at the work session.