



Rachel Talbot Ross
Senator, District 28

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony of Senator Rachel Talbot Ross Introducing
**LD 473, "An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Task Force to Support
Commercial Dairy Farms in the State"**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
May 13, 2025

Representative Pluecker and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, as you know, my name is Rachel Talbot Ross. I represent Senate District 28 which includes my hometown of Portland and Peaks Island. I am pleased to present LD 473 with an amendment, which replaces the bill and renames it to "An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Task Force to Support Commercial Dairy Farms in the State."

This bill is the result of months of careful consideration and collaboration among stakeholders, including members of the Task Force to Support Commercial Dairy Farms, industry representatives, and state agencies. It builds on the foundational work established by Resolve 2024, chapter 146, which tasked this group with identifying ways to stabilize and strengthen Maine's commercial dairy sector, a critical part of our agricultural economy.

Dairy farming in Maine has long been a cornerstone of our rural economy, providing jobs, preserving open space, and supporting countless downstream industries. However, dairy farms have faced immense challenges in recent years, including volatile milk prices, rising production costs, and shifting market dynamics. The current pricing mechanisms and support programs have not kept pace with the economic realities they face, placing the future of this essential industry at risk.

LD 473 seeks to address these challenges by implementing key recommendations from the Task Force. It amends the Maine Dairy Stabilization Program to ensure that target prices for dairy producers are set at no less than 25% of the short-run break-even point within each production tier, reflecting the true cost of production. It also adjusts the milk handling fee to better align with current market conditions, ensuring that producers receive fair compensation even as the cost of production continues to rise. Specifically, it raises the threshold for the lowest fee tier to \$18.00 per hundredweight, providing a more stable income stream for our dairy farmers.

In addition to these financial measures, the bill could be the vehicle for more forward-looking proposals to strengthen Maine's dairy industry over the long term. These include engaging more farms in the Farms for the Future Program, expanding technical service capacity through partnerships with regional institutions, and supporting on-farm dairy processing to help producers add value to their raw milk. These initiatives are designed to help Maine's dairy farms innovate, diversify, and remain competitive in a changing market.

By setting a more realistic baseline for target prices and updating the fee structure, this bill provides immediate financial relief to Maine's dairy farmers. It also lays the groundwork for longer-term growth



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by investing in technical support, encouraging on-farm processing, and exploring innovative partnerships with regional institutions. These changes will help stabilize the industry, protect our agricultural heritage, and ensure that Maine dairy remains a vital part of our economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.