



**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 1925 – *An Act to Improve Access to Grant Funding for the Maine Farms for the Future Program*.

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.

Many Maine farmers rely on public programs to grow and strengthen their businesses. The State's Farms for the Future Program is a competitive grant program that provides helpful business planning assistance and investment support to farms. Programs such as this provide farmers with the skills and capital to improve the profitability and stability of their farm businesses.

LD 1925 presents an important opportunity to make some updates to Statute so that the Program's eligibility requirements can be more accessible to and able to benefit more farmers. MFT supports LD 1925 because it seeks to ensure that farmers who lease rather than own land, those who farm on less than 5 acres, and/or those who farm on land that is already protected by an agricultural conservation easement are all able to fully participate in the Farms for the Future Program. Currently investment support is *only* available to farmers who own at least 5 acres of land in agricultural use and who are able to enter into a new 7-year farmland protection agreement with the department.

For many farmers in Maine, including both established and beginning producers, leasing is an important and affordable land access strategy. According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, 20 percent of Maine farms lease some or all of the land they use for farming. It is important for farm businesses operating on leased land to be eligible for investment support through State programs like Farms for the Future.

A fair number of farms in Maine operate on 1-9 acres of land; 1,251 farms fall within that range according to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, with the market value of agricultural products sold by farms that size averaging \$29,669 per farm, per year. It is important for smaller scale agricultural enterprises to also be eligible for all aspects of State programs like Farms for the Future to support their growth.

Additionally, since a requirement for receiving grants through the Farms for the Future Program is agreeing to protect your farmland from non-agricultural development for a set period of time, it is a common-sense change to ensure that farm businesses that are operating on land that is already protected by a permanent agricultural conservation easement are eligible to fully participate in the Program.

I'd be happy to answer any questions now or at the work session.