

I am Tom Stevenson, the second-generation owner of Stevenson Strawberry Farm in Wayne, Maine. The farm was started by my parents in the early 80s. I returned to the farm in the early 2000s to grow vegetables and sell them through our farm stands. In 2015, my wife and I bought the farm, and my parents retired. I am testifying today on behalf of our farm, as the President of the Maine Vegetable and Small Fruit Growers Association and a member of the Maine Farmers Coalition.

In 2015 I joined the North American Strawberry growers Association and have spent the past 8 years on the board of directors with 2 of those years serving as president. Members include farms from Mexico, Canada and the US. We have 2 meetings a year in different spots across North America. I have been fortunate enough to attend some of the meetings and go to big Ag states. It is very interesting to see how big Ag states operate, their state governments create an environment where the farmers feel safe and are constantly evolving their growing methods and trying new crops.

One of the positive things with our climate warming is that Maine is in a good position to greatly increase crops that we can produce and sell in and out of our state. Peaches and sweet cherries are a couple of high value crops that we could successfully grow. Maine farms do not feel that support and that will impede Maine farms from experimenting with new growing techniques and crops. Limiting our crop protection tool from PFAS, that none of our neighboring states or countries have done is a good example of lack of support.

We need to touch on our market. Our location is tough, in the small fruit and veggie markets we are last on the east coast to have crops for market. Southern states flood our markets with cheap produce. To the north Quebec subsidizes their farmers to grow fruit and veggies at a lower production cost than we can. Their main target market covers New England, New York and Maryland. Both to the north and south farms can grow crops cheaper than Maine can. Losing crop protection tools will increase our costs even more.

I am very concerned about the loss of crop protection tools we are using now. Each season, after we have picked our strawberries, we apply two crop protection products: Brigade and Spartan. These are carefully chosen and precisely applied tools that help us manage pests and ensure our crop remains viable. These products are applied after harvest, which limits both environmental exposure and consumer contact.

However, under current Maine law, we face a troubling restriction: we are prohibited from accessing any future chemistries that may contain trace amounts of PFAS, regardless of whether they are safer, more effective, or pose no practical environmental threat. This puts farmers like us in a bind. Without access to evolving, science-based innovations, we risk losing the ability to protect our crops effectively and responsibly. That's not just a risk to our business — it's a threat to local food production and agricultural sustainability in Maine.

Limiting crop protection tools will result in less agriculture products produced in our state. Do you want to see Maine grown products on our shelves?

Sorry I could not be there today in person, May is a very busy time on the farm. If this meeting had been held during late September, October, November, December, January, February, March or early April I would be there in person. If you have any questions my email is stevensonstrawberryfarm@gmail.com please reach out!!

Thank you
Tom