



**Testimony of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association in support of
LD 2094 - *An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue
to Support Maine's Agricultural and Forestry Sectors***
January 20, 2026

Good afternoon Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Agricultural Affairs. My name is Heather Spalding and I am deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for LD 2094 - *An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Support Maine's Agricultural and Forestry Sectors*.

A broad-based community, MOFGA is transforming our food system by supporting farmers, empowering people to feed their communities, and advocating for an organic future. MOFGA certifies 533 organic farms and processing operations representing more than 72,122 acres of production and \$161 million in gross sales. We're working hard to create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people, and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum.

We are very excited about LD 2094 because it is an unprecedented opportunity to invest in Maine's farming and forestry sectors, not only to create meaningful and long-lasting economic opportunities but also to protect the health of our population and natural resources and move us closer to the critical goals of Maine's Climate Action Plan. The LD 2094 Bond would provide:

\$24 million to capitalize the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund, which is established to make strategic investments in the state's agricultural infrastructure and processing capacity. The \$20 million Agriculture Infrastructure Investment Program was oversubscribed, and we know that many more farmers could benefit from improved infrastructure. Recent census data is sobering, indicating continued farm decline in the U.S. and a 7.4% decline in the number of farms in Maine. This reflects the disruption that farmers have experienced in recent years due to the Pandemic, escalating costs of production, labor and housing shortages, dramatically shifting weather patterns, geopolitical unrest, and increasing consolidation of agribusiness. The numbers underscore the need for further investment in Maine's food and agriculture system so that farmers are not getting squeezed at every corner, so that farming is restored to a viable and vibrant livelihood throughout our state, and so that all Maine people can have access to local, healthy foods on their tables each day. Of utmost importance to our farmers is: purchasing or building more infrastructure; extending seasonal availability of existing products; and increasing scale of existing products. Funding the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund will be a great help to our farmers as they work to meet the demands of Maine consumers.

\$5 million for the Working Farmland Access and Protection Program, which provides funding to protect Maine's most productive and economically significant farmland. Placing conservation easements on farmland will help ensure that land is available for agricultural use by both new and established farmers. We are pleased with Maine's commitment to the Land for Maine's Future Program (LMF) but when it comes to Maine farmland, there is a real urgency to go beyond LMF's current 41 farms representing 9,884 acres. Farmland is under serious threat of development and pollution, and we must do everything we can to protect it. The 2022 Census of Agriculture showed that between 2017 and 2022, Maine lost more than 82,000 acres of farmland to development pressures and escalating land prices. Maine has the lowest amount of protected farmland in any state in New England.

\$4 million for the Farmers Drought Relief Grant Program, which helps alleviate risks associated with drought conditions by providing farmers with grants to establish a sustainable and affordable source for irrigation water. MOFGA farmers of all crops and livestock would be very happy to have additional support for addressing the challenges of drought and dramatically shifting weather patterns. The University of Maine's 2020 Maine

Agriculture and Drought Report indicated that nearly 70% of farmers intended to invest in irrigation in the near future, but more than half stated that they did not have the financial resources needed for those investments. The severe drought conditions of 2025 resulted in dry wells for many farmers. Despite a wet start to the growing season in the spring, by June MOFGA was receiving many calls from certified organic producers, particularly dairy farmers, who were extremely concerned about their pasture health. Hay yields were reported down 5 to 40% and the need to supplement feed on pasture started early in the grazing season, including feeding winter hay reserves, borrowing money to purchase feed, or culling animals. Organic farmers must keep livestock on pasture so the drought has been particularly challenging for our community.

\$4 million for the Maine Healthy Soils Program, which provides information, tools, and assistance to help more Maine farms use practices to build soil health. All farmers need healthy soil and all farmers can embrace climate friendly land management practices incrementally to build soil health. Continuously improving soil health is the cornerstone of organic agriculture. Organic management practices:

- enhance the ability of the soil to remove carbon from the atmosphere and store it in healthy plant roots, and the soil fauna and microbes that support the roots;
- prohibit the use of synthetic fertilizers, which represent about a fifth of agricultural greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions worldwide;
- prohibit the use of synthetic pesticides, which harm life in the soil microbiome; and
- improve soil structure to help absorb and retain sufficient moisture levels, and generally help farms build resilience to extreme weather events.

Maine's landmark Healthy Soils Program came in with great fanfare but has not been given the critical financial support it needs so that the broader Maine agricultural community can sequester carbon and mitigate the effects of climate change. Farmers need healthy soils information, technical support and funding opportunities to implement best practices for improving soil health and this bond initiative is a critical need to ensure access to these resources.

\$3 million for the Dairy Improvement Fund, which provides dairy farms with funding for capital improvement projects. The economic impact of the dairy industry is felt throughout the agricultural sector in Maine. Because of the enormous expenses associated with maintaining a herd (feed costs, milk transport, equipment purchases and repair, and labor), the economic ripple effects of losing a dairy farm are felt far and wide. Our dairy farms maintain so many of the services that vegetable and fruit producers, homesteaders and even gardeners rely on. We are nearing a tipping point at which we'll have too few dairy farms to support our diverse community of producers. A stable and thriving dairy sector is necessary for Maine to become more self-reliant in food production and consumption. We are critically dependent on food from away and we have the land, water, knowledge and climate to change this if we invest generously and wisely in our dairy sector. Also of great significance to the wider public is the open space that dairy farms maintain. When dairy farms close, hundreds of acres go out of production, making them vulnerable to the pressures of development. These open acres currently provide extensive opportunities for hunting, snowmobiling, and tourism in Maine. A stable and healthy dairy sector in Maine's agricultural landscape also is critical for climate resilience.

All of these investments will help move Maine toward the climate action plan goals of conserving 30% of Maine land by 2030, and increasing the amount of food produced and consumed in Maine to 30% by 2030. We understand that Maine currently relies on producers outside of the state for about 96% of the food we consume though we have the soils, the water, the climate and the know-how to produce a healthy, diverse and delicious diet. Significant investment in Maine's farm sector is essential if we are going to increase our self-reliance in the food and agriculture system. The LD 2094 Bond would help Maine ensure the infrastructure, landbase and technical services needed for a thriving and resilient agricultural economy that provides a nutritious and delicious diet for all people in Maine and many beyond. We urge you to support this legislation and we appreciate your consideration.