



**Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs**  
**In Support: LD 2094, An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Support Maine's Agricultural and Forestry Sectors**

**1/20/26**

Dear Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and Members of the AFA Committee:

My name is Amy Winston. I live in Edgecomb and am testifying on behalf of CEI, a nonpartisan CDFI (Community Development Financial Institution) founded in 1977 in Wiscasset and now based in Brunswick. As a mission driven investor, CEI provides free business advising with industry expertise and financing for small businesses in communities that are underinvested and underserved by mainstream financial institutions. We integrate financing, business expertise, and policy solutions to build a vibrant and sustainable economy for people and communities in Maine and rural areas.

Our team has decades of experience working with sustainable farming and fishery producers and processors. Our Tastemakers grants, Wicked Fast microloans, traditional business loans and equity investments are designed to meet each business's unique needs. Agriculture and food system businesses represent nearly three quarters (72%) of our program engagement partners. In 2025, CEI invested \$10+ million in 27 agricultural businesses which created and retained 236 jobs. In the last five years, CEI has invested \$71 million in 123 food and agriculture businesses which have helped retain and create 330 jobs. These loans provided working capital to purchase precision equipment, upgrade production facilities and install efficient energy systems on vegetable, meat and dairy farms in 10 – Androscoggin, Aroostook, Cumberland, Hancock, Kennebec, Knox, Somerset, Penobscot, Waldo and Washington – counties.

CEI strongly supports LD 2094. We are thankful to Commissioner Beal and the administration for bringing forward a coordinated approach to investment in Maine's agricultural and forest economies. For decades, Maine agriculture has been underinvested. This bill rectifies that reality by *capitalizing existing programs* like the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund. Modeled on successful programs in Vermont and Massachusetts, this fund was established as a flagship financing program, to provide sustained, long-term funding for Maine's iconic "heritage" industries.

Maine's Economic Strategy promotes business innovation and growth in Maine's farm, fishery and forest product sectors by value-adding. Maine's Climate Action Plan also centers local and regional food systems, pledging to increase purchasing and consumption of Maine grown/harvested food to "30% by 2030." Transforming natural resources into higher value, premium products and experiences creates local jobs, builds local wealth and strengthens communities, and preserves the culture, lifeways and livelihoods that have been built around these economic activities. Increasing value-added production boosts wages and grows the economy. It is carefully tracked by Maine's Economic Growth Council as a Measure of Growth. Processing facilities provide regions with value-added opportunities, supporting local jobs, providing stable outlets for agricultural products. As long as Maine's processing capacity is unable to support the levels of production that exist in Maine, food manufacturing will continue to lag behind the rest of New England and US.



The University of Maine School of Economics has estimated that additional investments in ag and food processing infrastructure in four priority sectors – dairy processing, meat processing, grain storage and drying, and fruit and vegetable co-packing and custom processing – would generate an additional \$181 million in annual food sales, supporting, including the multiplier effects, 1,367 Maine jobs, \$321 million annually in state sales revenue, and \$62 million in increased income for the food and farm economy workforce. The DACF's federally (ARPA) funded Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program (AIIP) received 850 proposals requesting more than \$180 million for processing infrastructure projects. The department provided \$19.3 million to 64 projects. CEI's Tastemakers grant program is equally oversubscribed, funding a dozen of 83 shovel-ready project requests worth \$8.3 million.

The literature is replete with research reinforcing the opportunities to cultivate prosperity through strategic investments in Maine's food economy. Supply chain gap analyses and case studies illustrate transformational effects on critical businesses, benefits to additional businesses and ripple effects across communities. Additional studies conducted by Maine DACF, FocusMaine and the Harvard Kennedy School, among others, show that there is demand for Maine products; but, without state support, growers don't have the margins to value-add and small food manufacturers aren't able to scale up, to source and process all that Maine farms produce. This is a missed economic opportunity.

MAFFPIF pairs technical assistance and capital access to facilitate these strategic investments in critical business infrastructure to get more Maine food to more people in Maine and beyond. Absent a budget appropriation for programs supporting farmers and foresters, bonding is a low-risk, cost-effective way to finance these up-front costs needed to build the processing infrastructure and value chain business relationships that are needed to support existing harvest levels. Maine's bond rating is strong, and food systems are as critical to Maine homes, schools and businesses as transportation, water, broadband and electricity infrastructure. The annual payments and overall interest paid on a \$40-50 million bond are an economical and worthwhile – one could say essential – investment for the return that is projected.

This committee has an opportunity to complete careful work that was begun in the 129<sup>th</sup> legislature. These existing programs require funding to fulfill their intended purpose of serving Maine's agricultural and forestry sectors. The MAFFPIF advisory board is currently establishing eligibility criteria and program design to fulfill the fund's intent to support small businesses that make critical infrastructure investments that will benefit additional businesses up- and downstream and expand market access for Maine producers. LD 1252, which is on the Special Appropriations Table, appropriates \$5 million to MAFFPIF and includes similar provisions that will ensure accountable investment with maximum impacts.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 2094. We respectfully ask each member of this committee to vote Ought to Pass, and to encourage your colleagues in both chambers to provide Maine voters with an opportunity to support Maine's agricultural, food and forest products sectors.

# MAINE AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND FOREST PRODUCTS INVESTMENT FUND



## QUICK FACTS

- Established by the 130th Legislature to facilitate strategic investments in the state's agricultural, food and forest products processing and manufacturing industries.
- Received \$500,000 in initial funding during the 131st Legislature.
- DACF has established advisory board and hired experienced staff to structure and lead the Fund, including investment priorities and funding processes.

## VITAL ECONOMIC SECTORS WITH SIGNIFICANT GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

- **Maine is home to over 7,500 diverse family farms** and a strong brand for locally grown food and products made with fresh local ingredients.
- Maine food businesses are poised for growth: Research conducted by the Harvard Kennedy School, the DACF, DECD and DMR, and others demonstrate potential for growth and innovation in Maine's food and beverage industry. Maine Economic Development Strategy identifies heritage industries as growth-oriented sectors.

### \$160M in Demonstrated Need in Agriculture Alone

- In 2022, the Maine Jobs and Recovery Act Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program (AIIP) awarded \$19.3 million in grants to 64 of more than **850 applicants requesting \$180 million** in funding for critical business value chain infrastructure.
- In 2024, CEI's Tastemakers program received applications requesting funding for **83 "shovel-ready" projects worth \$8.3 million** from food and beverage production businesses.

## APPROPRIATIONS

LD 1252 passed the ACF Committee and full Legislature unanimously in the 132-1 and remains on the Special Appropriations Table (carried over).

LD 1140 had a Public Hearing in AFA on 4/10/25.

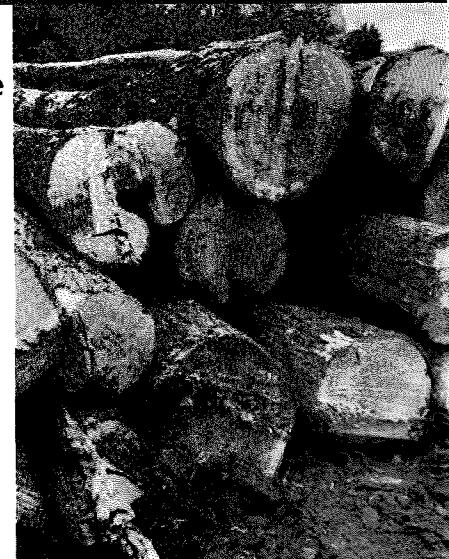
LD 2094 has a Public Hearing in AFA on Tuesday, 1/20/26.

Please Fund the Maine, Ag, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund through these bills! **This Fund is ready to launch - it just needs Capital!**

Read Testimony:  
LD 1252

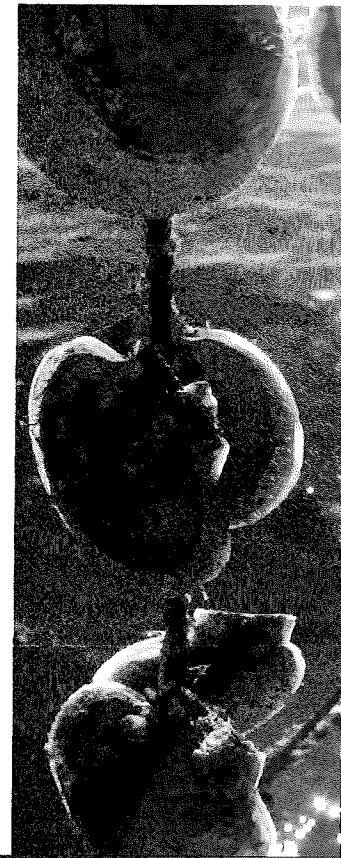


Read Testimony:  
LD 1140



## ALIGNS WITH AND IMPLEMENTS

- **Maine Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029:** A Focus on Talent and Innovation and DECD Domestic Trade Project (to value add Maine resources to ensure a resilient food supply chain, foster talent and innovation in food manufacturing, marine systems, and the biobased economy)
- **FocusMaine:** growing quality food and agriculture jobs in Maine
- **Maine Food Cluster Project Findings**, highlighted in [Growing Maine's Food Industry, Growing Maine](#)
- Maine's [Ending Hunger by 2030 Plan](#) (food security is economic security)
- **New England Feeding New England: Cultivating A Reliable Food Supply:** USDA funded project to promote supply chain resilience and self-reliance aka "30% by 2030"
- **Maine Climate Action Plan:** goal to increase local food consumption (30% by 2030); support farm viability, strengthen food systems, and natural resource economies
- **Maine Food Strategy Framework:** Tool for Advancing Maine's Food System
- **AIIP demand:** MAFFPIF was enacted but not implemented in time to deploy ARPA funds. Watch the DACF presentation to the MAFFPIF Advisory Board and read the May 28, 2025 (and all monthly) meeting notes illustrating outstanding need.



## KEY FEATURES

- **Completes legislative work begun in the 129th, 130th and 131st Legislatures**, which studied, enacted and established the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund.
- **Supports the resiliency of Maine's food supply** and production chain through strategic investments in Maine agriculture, food systems, and forestry businesses.
- **Fills a gap in needed capital and business assistance** that does not currently exist in Maine.
- **Ensures equitable access to capital and technical assistance** for historically disadvantaged populations.
- **Supports existing industry efforts from Maine-based organizations** to propel innovation, business growth and job creation in early-stage and start-up food processing/manufacturing businesses, which employ local people and source from Maine growers/producers, multiplying each investment.
- **Promotes interagency coordination and public-private partnerships.**
- **Modeled on successful programs** in VT, MA and MI.
- **All of Maine benefits from successful businesses in these sectors.**



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**CEI**

Coastal Enterprises