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A Family Tradition

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LD 2094 An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Support Maine's Agriculture and Forestry Sectors

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and members of the committee I am Penny Jordan, one of the owners of Jordan's Farm a 5th generation mixed vegetable farm in Cape Elizabeth. I am here to testify in favor of LD 2094, which will provide \$40,000,000 in funds to the *Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund*.

Over the past several years I have come before various committees on bills that can truly position Maine farms to produce the food needed to feed our state. Maine farms aren't looking for handouts what we ask is that food production be viewed as a critical part of our state's infrastructure and be treated accordingly. Providing food (key element to sustain life) should be prioritized along with clean water, safe roads and bridges, and public education.

I will highlight a few aspects of this bill that are important to ensure a resilient food system for Maine and support this vital infrastructure. This is not to diminish the importance of other aspects of the bill.

Farmers Drought Relief Grant Program - Over the past several years, Maine farms have experienced drought conditions resulting in crop loss. Funding provided for drought relief programs will help farmers implement irrigation methods to mitigate the impacts of drought and manage water usage on their farms. Irrigation systems aren't just about putting water on fields they include conservation and management of water sources. The use of tools such as sensors to ensure you are optimizing water usage and providing plants what they need helps reduce costs.

Maine Healthy Soils Program - Soil health is a key element to food production and water management. Farmers seek tools that will increase yield and product quality while reducing the cost of production. Building and maintaining soil health through focused and consistent practices does just that, while helping mitigate impacts of climate shifts.

Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program - It is becoming more challenging for farmers to keep their land in agriculture as the cost of production continues to increase while margins decline. Many times, one must sell land to keep a farm operating. Funds provided through the *Working Farmland Access and Protection Program* can help keep farmland working through programs that will protect the land. Over 20 years ago we sold development rights so our farm will be a farm for perpetuity. Once farmland is transitioned into houses it is gone forever.

Dairy Improvement Fund - I stand with dairy farmers across Maine. They are a key part of their communities, and I strongly feel we need to work to retain our remaining farms. Dairy farming is expensive and the markets can disappear because Maine is at the end of the road. I have heard people say if a farm can't make it then let them fail. I disagree and am saddened by statements like this. Join a farmer on the ground and you will understand that tightening of the belt is not enough when there are factors out of your control – tariffs that increase costs, market swings, droughts and more. I will go back to a key point - food production is infrastructure and needs to be recognized as such.

The dollars associated with this bond are focused on key aspects of Maine's Agricultural industry aiming to keep farms viable and help prevent conversion to non-agricultural uses and supporting economic activity in the agricultural sector. Our tag line at Jordan's Farm is *Growing Maine Agriculture*. This funding is a step toward truly recognizing the importance of food production to the people of Maine.

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