



Rachel Talbot Ross
Senator, District 28

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

January 20, 2026

*Testimony of Senator Talbot Ross in support of
LD 2094, "An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Support Maine's
Agricultural and Forestry Sectors"
Before the Joint Standing Committee Appropriations and Financial Affairs*

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, I am Senator Rachel Talbot Ross. I represent Senate District 28, which includes part of Portland, part of the Casco Bay Islands, and includes the University of Southern Maine Campus. I am here today as the Senate chair of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee and as the lead cosponsor of LD 2094, An Act to Authorize a \$40,000,000 Bond Issue to Support the Agricultural and Forestry Sectors in Maine, to ask for your support in moving this critical initiative forward so that the conversation can continue with the full Legislature, and ultimately, with the people of Maine.

Before speaking to the bill itself, I want to acknowledge the long-standing engagement this Legislature has had on issues of agricultural and forestry investment. This committee, in particular, has wrestled thoughtfully with how we support the backbone of our state's economy, our farms, our woodlots, and the working landscapes that define communities across Maine.

Last session, this committee heard other bond proposals aimed at supporting our agriculture and forestry sectors. Those bills proposed investments in our heritage industries that we all knew were critically important. Since then, many of us heard from producers, landowners, local officials, and community members about how we could sharpen that proposal, build on what we learned, and make it better. The result before you today is a new and improved proposal, one that reflects that careful work and that purposefully responds to our current circumstances.

However, this bill differs in meaningful ways from the Ag Bonds of last session, and because of those differences, it is appropriate that this Committee consider it on its own merits.

As you have heard, this proposal will provide badly needed investment in key popular programs where funding is limited and need is high. The programs include:

- **Drought Relief Program** - most recently funded at \$539,445 for 25-26 and \$550,470 for 26-27 (from both OSR and GF money)



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- This bill proposes \$4 million for this program.
- **Dairy Improvement Fund** - most recently funded at \$448,257 for 25-26 and \$461,705 for 26-27 (all OSR money)
- **Healthy Soils Program** - most recently funded at \$600,500 for 25-26 and again for 26-27 (includes OSR and GF money)
 - This bill proposes \$4 million for this program.
- **Working Farmland Access Protection Program** - has not been meaningfully capitalized
 - This bill proposes \$5 million for this program.
- **Maine Agriculture, Food & Forest Products Investment Fund** - most recently funded at \$500 from OSRs for 25-26 and again for 26-27. The creation of this fund leveraged federal dollars.
 - This bond proposes adding \$24M total to this fund:
 - \$12 million for forestry
 - This funding will help build new markets for wood products by helping to invest in value added and new infrastructure needs.
 - \$4 million for dairy
 - We know that dairy serves as an economic engine for much of the larger agriculture sector given the amount of investment in grain, feed, and equipment.
 - \$8 for general agricultural

Taken together, these investments make this proposal more directly responsive to where funding will yield the best results for Maine people.

This is not a dramatic expansion of government. It is not a bill to create a suite of new agencies or staffing. It is a targeted investment, one that channels capital into programs that are well established and staffed. These programs are already familiar to producers and forestland owners, they just need sustainable, ongoing investment in order for them to have their intended impact for Maine communities.

Maine's agricultural and forestry sectors are essential. They are economic drivers. They anchor not only our rural communities, but also strengthen the economic and physical health and



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wellbeing of our entire state. They are part of our identity and heritage as a state that values hard work, stewardship of the land, and opportunity for families across generations.

I believe that investing in these sectors is not optional. It is an investment in the resilience and vitality of Maine's economy and the people who make it thrive.

Therefore, I urge this Committee to support LD 2094, and move it out of committee for further discussion not because it is perfect, but because it is thoughtful, deliberate, and grounded in the real needs of Maine's agricultural and forestry sectors. We have listened, we have refined, and we have produced a proposal that strengthens existing programs, fully funds ready initiatives, and respects both the fiscal environment before us and the real opportunities for impact.

I am grateful for your attention to this important issue, and appreciate the careful work this Committee does in service to the people of Maine. Please pass this out of committee so that we can continue having this important discussion on the floor of each chamber. I welcome your questions and your input, as well as the input of members of the public and fellow stakeholders, as this proposal continues to evolve.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel Talbot Ross".

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