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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION, AND FORESTRY

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 2096

An Act Regarding Scheduling of Agricultural Fairs and Pulling Events

January 27, 2026

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Michelle Webb. I am the director of the Agriculture Resource Development (ARD) Division within the Bureau of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Resources. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF), neither for nor against LD 2096, *An Act Regarding Scheduling of Agricultural Fairs and Pulling Events*

Title 7 Chapter 4 directs the DACF Commissioner in administering and overseeing agricultural fair licensing, performance standards, and the distribution of Stipend, Fair, Agricultural Fair Promotion, and Agricultural Fair Support funds to qualified licensees. Current law contains provisions that are misaligned with other statutory sections and modern fair practices. LD 2096 addresses many of these issues through targeted amendments to definitions, clarification of timing requirements for licensed fair activities, and enhanced enforcement provisions.

Modernizing the Definition of "Agricultural Fair"

The proposed changes to the definition of "agricultural fair" are better aligned with current Chapter 12 departmental rules, which, since 1983, have required licensees to offer competition for premiums or purses on three or more species of livestock throughout the licensed fair dates. Additionally, the bill expands the current requirement for horticultural products to include any stipend-eligible non-livestock competition, such as arts and crafts, home-canned goods, baked goods, and mechanical arts, in meeting the definition of an agricultural fair.

We recommend that the bill be amended to have the proposed definition of agricultural fair read: Three or more *stipend-eligible* youth agriculture competitions and events. Further, we recommend that the "or" between sub-paragraphs D(2) and (3) be replaced with "*and*" to

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align with the intent of both current statute M.R.S. §81 and Department Rules 01-001 CMR ch. 12. These recommendations are shown in the Appendix to this testimony.

In addition, LD 2096 makes statutory changes by enacting a new subsection (7 M.R.S. §84(4)) that the Department recommends be reconsidered, particularly in the use of the word “event.” The word “event” is already defined in 7 MRSA §81 as “a pulling competition or livestock exhibition,” and its use in this bill may add confusion to an already complex law. We suggest substituting “event” with “exhibition” to remain consistent.

Furthermore, the bill’s subsection 4 proposes that food, entertainment, amusements, and other activities be considered to determine if a licensee is hosting an operation that constitutes or is similar to a fair. The Department does not support using these factors when determining if a licensee is operating outside the boundaries of their fair license, as the definition of fair in §81(1) does not include such elements.

Clarifying Timing Requirements

The bill proposes that licensees offer stipend-eligible competitions and events for public viewing for a minimum of three consecutive licensed agricultural fair days. This requirement clarifies that both non-pari-mutuel and pari-mutuel fairs conducting harness racing must offer at least three consecutive fair days to qualify for Stipend Fund eligibility. This aligns with the current statute (7 M.R.S. §89(1)), which requires pari-mutuel fairs to maintain agricultural exhibits for a minimum of three consecutive days during one annual harness racing meet.

Strengthening Enforcement Authority

The bill adds clarity to the commissioner's authority in licensing, suspending, and revoking agricultural fair licenses when violations occur, providing better tools for maintaining standards across all licensed fairs.

Ensuring Pulling Event Compliance

The proposed revisions to 7 MRSA §86 add clarity for fair licensees that offer pulling events requiring that such events be conducted in accordance with 7 M.R.S. §97 to qualify for Stipend Fund payment. However, the Department requests reconsideration of the bill’s proposed revisions to §97 itself. As proposed, pulling qualifiers and events such as the International Horse Pull and International Ox Pull may not be considered allowable to be hosted on a fairground outside of the fair’s agricultural license dates. These local, regional, national, and/or international qualifiers and events provide an economic boost to an agricultural society operating a fairground. In 2025, at least four pulling events were held at Maine fairgrounds outside of licensed agricultural fair dates. To avoid this issue in the future, the Department recommends the following wording replace the current §97 language: “Any pulling event conducted on a Maine fairgrounds must take place during the dates for which the applicable agricultural fair license is effective pursuant to section 84 to qualify for Stipend Fund payment.”

In summary, DACF supports many of LD 2096’s statutory revisions as they provide much-

needed clarity to agricultural fair licensees and strengthen the framework for administering Maine's agricultural fair system. DACF is suggesting some adjustments we believe are necessary to further improve the clarity and alignment amongst the statutory provisions pertaining to fairs, as detailed in the Appendix.

We appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with the Committee on these important statutory improvements. Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions now or during the work session.

Appendix. DACF proposed edits to LD 2096 (in italics).

Section 1: Amendments to 7 MRSA §81, sub-§1 (Definition of Agricultural Fair)

Sec. 1. 7 MRSA §81, sub-§1, as enacted by PL 2005, c. 563, §3, is amended to read:

1. Agricultural fair. "Agricultural fair" or "fair" means an exhibition that is designed to promote education and encourage improvement in agriculture and that ~~includes, but is not limited to, the following:~~

~~A. The awarding of premiums for livestock competitions;~~

~~B. The display of and awarding of premiums for horticultural products; and~~

~~C. The display and presentation of agricultural activities and projects undertaken by youth organizations.~~

D. Offers displays and competitions for premiums on:

(1) Three or more species of livestock or poultry;

(2) Three or more stipend-eligible non-livestock competitions; ~~or~~ and

(3) Three or more stipend-eligible youth agriculture competitions and events;

E. Operates under the authority of a license issued under section 83; and

F. Offers stipend-eligible competitions and events for patrons to view for a minimum of 3 consecutive licensed agricultural fair days.

Section 2: New Subsection 7 MRSA §84, sub-§4 (Prohibition)

Sec. 2. 7 MRSA §84, sub-§4 is enacted to read:

1. **Prohibition.** Except as provided under subsection 5, a licensee may not:
2. Operate an agricultural fair outside of the fair dates assigned by the commissioner under this section; or
3. Advertise or market an agricultural fair as taking place outside of the fair dates assigned by the commissioner under this section.

For purposes of this subsection, holding an event exhibition within one week of a fair's assigned fair dates that, in the commissioner's determination, offers activities largely similar to those offered during the fair's assigned fair dates, including but not limited to food, entertainment, amusements or other activities, is considered operating a fair outside of the fair dates assigned by the commissioner.

Section 8: New Subsection 7 MRSA §97, sub-§4, ¶S (Pulling Events on Fairgrounds)

Sec. 8. 7 MRSA §97, sub-§4, ¶S is enacted to read:

S. If a public or private pulling event is scheduled at an agricultural fair, the pulling event Any pulling event conducted on a Maine fairgrounds must take place during the dates for which the applicable agricultural fair license is effective pursuant to section 84 to qualify for Stipend Fund payment.