



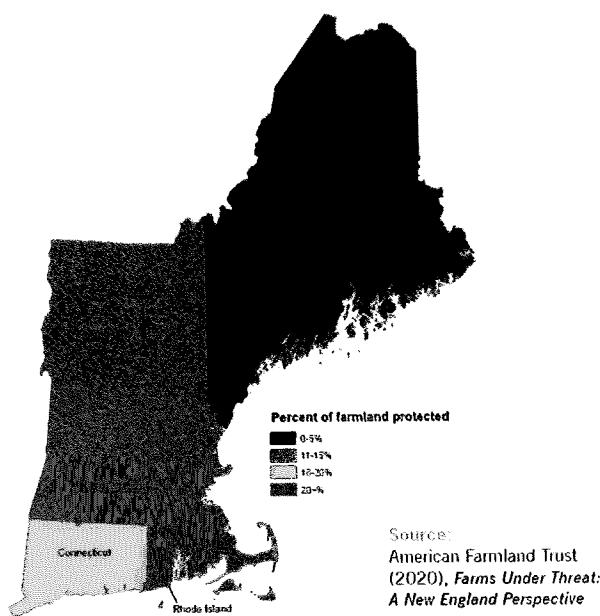
**Testimony of Shelley Megquier, Policy & Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust, to the 132nd
Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
February 4, 2026**

Good afternoon Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. My name is Shelley Megquier and I am the Policy & Research Director at Maine Farmland Trust (MFT). I am providing testimony on behalf of MFT in support of LD 2141 – *An Act to Direct a Portion of Unclaimed Beverage Container Deposits to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund and the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program*.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Our goals are to keep agricultural lands working and help farmers and their communities thrive. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect farmland in every county in Maine, amounting to over 58,000 acres across 395 farms. Our Farm Network includes more than 550 farms that have participated in MFT's programming either through an agricultural easement or through one of our other areas of work. Our main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Stewardship, Farm Business Planning, PFAS Support, and Policy and Research.

Every year in Maine, an estimated \$16 million in bottle deposits go unclaimed. Unlike in other states who use unclaimed bottle deposit funds to serve a public purpose, those funds are currently retained by the beverage industry and are not being used to address the needs of our state. LD 2141 proposes to instead direct some of those bottle deposit funds to farmland protection and lake restoration efforts—two of the state's most pressing natural resource priorities for which there is a clear statutory mandate, widespread public support, and demonstrable need—but no dedicated funding source.

Farmland Protection Progress in New England



LD 2141 creates a stream of ongoing, dedicated funding specifically for farmland conservation by directing \$2 million annually from Maine's unclaimed beverage container deposits toward the state's established Working Farmland Access and Protection Program within the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry's (DACF's) Bureau of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Resources. This funding would bolster farmland protection efforts to ensure that Maine farmers have the land they need to farm now and in the future.

Farmland in Maine is at risk. The 2022 Census of Agriculture showed that between 2017 and 2022, more than 82,000 acres of farmland in Maine fell out of agricultural production. Farmland in Maine is being lost to agriculture due to increasing development pressures, a growing interest in farmland from non-farming buyers, dramatic increases in the cost of land, and farm viability

challenges that are making it harder for farmers to afford to keep their land in agriculture. Less than 5 percent of Maine's farmland is currently protected – this is the lowest amount of any state in New England.

The state's updated climate action plan *Maine Won't Wait* establishes new targets specific to farmland protection – calling for Maine to secure and commit ongoing, dedicated funding for farmland conservation to double the amount of permanently protected farmland in the state by 2030. To realize this goal, we need to rapidly expand our farmland protection efforts, especially publicly funded farmland protection, which is an area where Maine lags behind. We can ramp up farmland protection in Maine by dedicating funding to existing state programs. The Working Farmland Access and Protection Program is a perfect vehicle for dedicated funding to farmland conservation, as the program is designed to protect Maine's most productive and economically significant farmland and DACF's Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources has a dedicated account within the program to facilitate a rapid expansion of farmland protection efforts.

Protecting farmland through a conservation easement keeps land available for agricultural use and creates more affordable access to farmland for both new and established farmers. LD 2141 would provide an important, ongoing source of funding for farmland protection and help bolster conservation efforts in a way that is needed to meet current farmer interest and accomplish our climate action plan goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 2141 today. **Attached to my testimony is a letter that MFT and MOGFA co-circulated which was signed by 78 farmers representing 48 farm businesses from across Maine** urging this committee to support the conservation of Maine's finite and critical working agricultural land by voting in favor of this bill. I've also added below some quotes from farmers, shared with permission, that speak to the value of easements.

Saving farmland is critical to Maine's economic prosperity, pursuing food independence, and maintaining Maine's distinct culture and personality.

- Reed Calhoun, Moon Beam Farm, Blue Hill

Real estate values in Maine are challenging current and starting farmers to keep and acquire new acres for food production. Agriculture is the backbone of the state and we must take any opportunity to protect it from wild swings in markets that are rooted beyond Maine's borders.

- Seth Kroeck, Crystal Spring Farm, Brunswick

Thank you again for your time and consideration of this important issue. I am happy to try and answer questions now or at the work session.

February 4, 2026

Dear members of the Maine Legislature's Environment and Natural Resources Committee,

We, 78 farmers representing 48 farm businesses from across Maine, ask you to support the conservation of Maine's finite and critical working agricultural land by directing a portion of unclaimed beverage container deposits in the state to funding for farmland conservation.

Farmland in Maine is at risk. The 2022 Census of Agriculture showed that between 2017 and 2022, more than 82,000 acres of farmland in Maine fell out of agricultural production. Farmland is being lost to agriculture due to rapid increases in development pressures and land prices. Protecting farmland through an agricultural conservation easement keeps land available for agricultural use and creates more affordable access to farmland for both new and established farmers. Yet, less than 5 percent of Maine's farmland is currently protected – this is the lowest amount of any state in New England.

LD 2141 creates a stream of ongoing, dedicated funding specifically for farmland conservation—a need and strategy identified in the state's *Maine Won't Wait* climate plan—by directing **\$2 million annually from Maine's unclaimed beverage container deposits toward the state's established Working Farmland Access and Protection Fund**. Every year in Maine, an estimated \$16 million in bottle deposits go unclaimed. Unlike in other states who use unclaimed bottle deposit funds to serve a public purpose, those funds are currently retained by the beverage industry and are not being used to address the needs of our state.

Farmland is an essential public good. Agricultural conservation is critical to ensure that we have the land base needed to sustain our heritage industries, grow our agricultural economy, strengthen food security, and build resilience to climate change for our state and communities.

We hope you will invest in agricultural conservation in Maine by supporting LD 2141.

Sincerely,

Signatory #	First Name	Last Name	Names of other household members that should be added to the letter, if applicable	Name of your farm business or farm employer	Maine town in which the farm business is located
1	Alyssa	Adkins		Farthest Field Farm	Freeport
2	Daniela	Aldrich	Colby King	Dancing Harvest Farm	South Portland
3	Bethany	Allen	Eric Ferguson	Harvest Tide Organics	Bowdoinham
4	Cameron	Barone		Hart Farm	Holden
5	Peter	Beckford	Julie	Rebel Hill Farm	Liberty
6	Jeff	Benton		Orange Circle Farm	Berwick
7	Carrie	Braman	Vincent Guarino	Frontier Maple Sugarworks	Jackman
8	MC	Brower		Lindenleaf Farm	Blue Hill
9	Reid	Calhoun		Moon Beam Farm	Blue Hill
10	Emily	Davis	Brien Davis	Hope Orchards	Hope
11	Molly	DellaRoman	Tim Skillin	5 Star Nursery and Orchard, LLC	Brooklin
12	Aaron	Domina	Angela Domina	Dragonfly Acres, LLC	Hampden
13	Heather	Donahue	Doug Donahue	BALFOUR FARM LLC	Pittsfield
14	Ali	Elashram	Jeanien Elashram, Idris Elashram, Mona Ayad, Noora Elashram	Maine Local Living School	Temple
15	Julie	Fernee		Hayland	North Berwick
16	Jonah	Fertig-Burd		Celebration Tree Farm & Wellness Center, LLC	Durham
17	Catherine	Field		Fields Fields Blueberries	Dresden
18	andrew	fiori	melissa fiori	campo di fiori	bowdoinham
19	Eileen	Flanagan		Junction Garden, LLC	Vassalboro
20	Jami	Fowler	Abigail and Sparrow	Fern light Homestead	Hope
21	Phyllis	Gardiner		Oaklands Farm	Gardiner
22	Robert	Gardner	Deborah Gardner	Obros Farm	Farmington
23	Peter	Garrett		Simply Grande Gardens	Winslow
24	charles	Hamblen		hamblen farm	gorham
25	Brady	Hatch	Brendan McQuillen	Morning Dew Farm	Newcastle/Damarscotta
26	caitlin	hathaway		downeast mushrooms	deer isle

27	Mark	Heidmann	Maple Springs Farm	Harrison	
28	Julie	Jacob	Smith Ridge Farm	Dennysville	
29	Nancy	Johnson	Ravenswood flower farm	Union	
30	Seth	Kroeck	Crystal Spring Farm	Brunswick	
31	Nicolas	Lindholm	Blue Hill Berry Co.	Penobscot	
32	Laura	Mangan	Lunasa Farm	Nobleboro	
33	Brandon	Manuele	Prospect Farms	Prospect	
34	john	matulis	pine station farms	Hebron	
35	Alessia	McCobb	Sound Pine Farm	Brunswick	
36	Jean	Noon	The Noon Family Sheep Farm	Springvale	
37	Dion	Olmstead	Olmstead Farms	New Sharon	
38	Kelly	Payson-Roopchand	Anil Roopchand	Pumpkin Vine Family Farm, LLC	Somerville
39	Michael	Perisho	Andrews Farm LLC	Gardiner	
40	John	Pincince	Ashgrove Farm	Lincolnville	
41	Anna	Shapley-Quinn	North Branch Farm	Monroe	
42	Seren	Sinisi	Old Crow Ranch	Durham	
43	Andy	Smith	The Milkhouse	Monmouth	
44	Collin	Thompson	Johnny's Selected Seeds	Albion	
45	Andrew	Toothacker	Rebecca Sullivan	Hart Farm	Holden
46	keena	tracy	Little Ridge Farm	Lisbon Falls	
47	Tom	Vigue	KiwiHill Farm	Sidney	
48	stephanie	williams	Villageside Farm	Freedom	