



**Testimony of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association 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***

February 4, 2026

Good afternoon Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. My name is Heather Spalding and I am deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for *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*. MOFGA is a member of Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition, which has prioritized this legislation in the 2026 Common Agenda.

A broad-based community, MOFGA is transforming our food system by supporting farmers, empowering people to feed their communities, and advocating for an organic future. MOFGA certifies 533 organic farms and processing operations representing more than 72,122 acres of production and \$161 million in gross sales. We're working hard to create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people, and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum.

We are very excited about this bill because, in addition to providing critical funding to protect the health of Maine's water resources, it presents a creative opportunity to invest in farmland protection. The bill would tap into an estimated \$10 to \$17 million in bottle deposits that go unclaimed, providing \$2,000,000 annually to the Lake Water Quality Restoration and Protection Fund and \$2,000,000 annually to the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry for deposit and use in accordance with the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program.

Placing conservation easements on farmland will help ensure that land is available for agricultural use by both new and established farmers. We are pleased with Maine's commitment to the Land for Maine's Future Program (LMF) but when it comes to Maine farmland, there is a real urgency to go beyond LMF's current 41 farms representing 9,884 acres. Farmland is under serious threat of development and pollution, and we must do everything we can to protect it. The 2022 Census of Agriculture showed that between 2017 and 2022, Maine lost more than 82,000 acres of farmland to development pressures and escalating land prices. Maine has the lowest amount of protected farmland in any state in New England.

This legislation will help move Maine toward the climate action plan goals of conserving 30% of Maine land by 2030, and increasing the amount of food produced and consumed in Maine to 30% by 2030. We understand that Maine currently relies on producers outside of the state for about 96% of the food we consume though we have the soils, the water, the climate and the know-how to produce a healthy, diverse and delicious diet. Significant investment in Maine farmland protection is essential if we are going to increase our self-reliance in the food and agriculture system. We urge you to support this legislation and we appreciate your consideration.

