



# MAINE FARMLAND TRUST

**Testimony of Abby Farnham, Assistant Director of Policy & Research, Maine Farmland Trust,  
to the 132<sup>nd</sup> Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary  
February 19, 2026**

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Abby Farnham and I am the Assistant Director of Policy & Research at Maine Farmland Trust (MFT). I am providing testimony on behalf of MFT in support of LD 785 – *An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act*.

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.

Equitable access to land and the ability to produce food as well as fair distribution of and access to resources are key to the future of farming in Maine. MFT supports LD 785 because recognizing the inherent rights of the Wabanaki Nations to self-govern is a matter of fairness and equity for Wabanaki communities and is essential for restoring the Tribes' rights and abilities to access and steward land, regulate natural resources and land use on Tribal lands, and provide for the needs of their communities. MFT also supports this bill based on our understanding that the Wabanaki Nations' ability to thrive economically will have positive impacts that extend to rural communities across Maine, including farming communities.

A 2022 report prepared by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development makes clear that the restrictions imposed by the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) have inhibited the Wabanaki Nations from achieving greater economic growth and being the driver of economic development for their communities and surrounding regions, as has been experienced by the other 570 federal tribes over the past 40 years which have had full access to federal policies of self-determination.<sup>1</sup> This report estimates that restoring self-governance capabilities for the Wabanaki Nations would result in the direct and indirect addition of more than 2,700 new jobs and an estimated \$330 million each year to Maine's GDP – with the benefits of this growth

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<sup>1</sup> Kalt, J. P., Medford, A. B., and Taylor, J. B., Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University, *Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine*, p. 54 (Dec 2022), available at: <https://ash.harvard.edu/publications/economic-and-social-impacts-restrictions-applicability-federal-indian-policies>.

concentrated in rural portions of the state including Aroostook, Penobscot, and Washington counties.<sup>2</sup>

LD 785 would implement changes to MICSAs that were recommended by a bipartisan task force, and in doing so, ensure that the Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Penobscot Nation, the Mi'kmaq Nation, and the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians enjoy the same rights and authority as other federally-recognized Indian Tribes across the country. These recommendations include restoring the Tribes' rights to regulate hunting, fishing, natural resources, and land use on Tribal lands and waters, as allowed by federal law, as well as removing some of the barriers that the Tribes have faced in acquiring land, including trust land. Economic activity on Wabanaki trust land has primarily consisted of natural resource management, including through several Wabanaki-run agricultural operations.<sup>3</sup> A 2022 report by the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations also describes how for many Indigenous communities in Maine, the benefits of local food production lie in Wabanaki peoples' ability to maintain ancient land-based knowledge and practices, restore ancestral relationships with the land, and support community members who struggle with food insecurity and food-related illnesses.<sup>4</sup>

LD 785 would advance fairness and equity for the Wabanaki Nations and strengthen Wabanaki land access and stewardship opportunities, opening up potential for the tribes in Maine to sustain and grow agricultural operations and continue contributing to Maine's broader agricultural community and economy. This bill would also help to honor and uplift the abilities of the Wabanaki Nations to provide for the food security and cultural needs of their communities while strengthening the economic resilience of rural Maine.

For all of these reasons, we urge you to support LD 785 and restore the sovereign rights of the Wabanaki Nations to self-govern.

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<sup>2</sup> Kalt, J. P., Medford, A. B., and Taylor, J. B., Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University, *Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine*, p. 40-41 (Dec 2022), available at: <https://ash.harvard.edu/publications/economic-and-social-impacts-restrictions-applicability-federal-indian-policies>.

<sup>3</sup> Myall, J., Maine Equal Justice, *Sovereignty Starts Here: Land, Economy, and Tribal Rights in Maine*, p. 18 (Oct 2025), available at: <https://www.mecep.org/maines-economy/sovereignty-starts-here/>.

<sup>4</sup> Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations, *Land Access for Indigenous and African American Farmers in Maine*, p. 10 (Feb 2022), available at: [www.pcritp.me/resources](http://www.pcritp.me/resources).