



March 5, 2026

RE: Support of LD 299 – An Act to Support Investment in Agriculture

Good afternoon, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. I'm Shelley Megquier, President of the Agricultural Council of Maine ("AGCOM"), a nonprofit association that brings together the major sectors of Maine's agricultural economy. I'm here today to support LD 299 on behalf of AGCOM.

AGCOM provides a space for the major sectors that comprise Maine's agricultural economy to come together regularly. The council meets monthly to provide a forum for ongoing communication and coordination between and amongst these sectors and provides leadership and advocacy on the most pressing agricultural issues of today.

AGCOM strives for consensus-based decision-making. Our organization represents nearly the full array of Maine's diverse agricultural sectors. Each sector brings to the table its own unique perspective, issues, and opportunities. When these diverse perspectives all find common cause and AGCOM takes a stand, you can be sure that issue is of vital importance to Maine agriculture. LD 299 is one of those instances.

First, we would like to highlight how imperative it is for producers of all types that the Maine Agriculture, Food, and Forest Products Investment Fund (AFFPIF) be capitalized. The Maine AFFPIF was established by the 130th Legislature with bipartisan support to facilitate strategic investments in the state's agricultural, food and forest products processing and manufacturing industries, but the Fund has yet to be provided with the financial resources necessary to carry out its purpose and meaningfully move the needle on increasing in-state agricultural infrastructure and processing capacity. LD 299 takes an approach for that will not increase taxes for Maine residents, an issue that is important to many AGCOM members. Nor does this proposal take revenue away from another sector, any specific public interest, nor from municipalities. Instead, LD 299 directs half of the revenue collected through the Real Estate Transfer Tax Program that currently goes back to the General Fund and instead directs that funding to AFFPIF. AGCOM members really liked this approach and unanimously chose to support this bill, which is why I'm here testifying today.

This funding would be a critical, ongoing investment in Maine agriculture and forestry sector – though it's important to note that we do not anticipate it would fully meet the immense need for infrastructure and processing investment. We see this ongoing funding as being **complementary to a much-needed, one-time influx in the funding through an Agriculture and Forestry Bond (LD 2094)**, which is currently

being considered by Appropriations. As many are aware, looking closely at applications to the Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program (AIIP) from 2022 can demonstrate the profound need for this type of capital. AIIP used a one-time allocation to make 64 awards ranging between \$41,000 – \$500,000, injecting a total of \$19.3 million in capital into Maine’s agricultural community. This investment was transformative for those farms and food businesses. While 64 farms and businesses received awards, in total, 850 farms and businesses requested \$180 million. That leaves 786 Maine farms that did not receive \$160.7 million in grants. This figure is a call to action. **In a changing world, with a changing climate, and mounting pressure from cheap imported foods, the State of Maine must make a major investment in its food future.**

AGCOM asks for this Committee to vote in support of this bill to provide significant and sustained funding to support farm and food infrastructure. An ongoing investment at this level will transform Maine agriculture into a thriving community that will feed Mainers and support the Maine economy for generations to come.

Thank you for your time. I’d be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Council of Maine

Shelley Megquier, President
Policy and Research Director, Maine
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Sam Ricker, Vice President
President, Maine State Pomological
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Vice President, Maine Beef Producers
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Member Organizations:

Maine Aquaculture Association

Maine Association of Conservation Districts

Maine Beef Producers Association

Maine Christmas Tree Association

Maine Dairy Industry Association

Maine Farm Bureau

Maine Farmland Trust

Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

Maine Ornamental Horticultural Council

Maine State Beekeepers Association

Maine State Pomological Society

Maine Vegetable and Small Fruit Growers Association

Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine