

Hallie Arno  
Lincolntonville

1 March 2021

To: Agriculture and Forestry Committee

From: Hallie Arno

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 437, An Act to Establish the Maine Healthy Soils Program

I am writing as a Lincolntonville resident and student at College of the Atlantic to urge you to vote “ought to pass” on LD 437.

Soil is not only the foundation of most of the food we eat, but also an integral part of Maine’s terrestrial ecosystem function and carbon sequestration process. A Healthy Soils Program would benefit farmers, communities, and the environment by providing valuable educational resources and technical support to farms. Establishing this program to assist farmers in developing their soil health is the first step in furthering soil stewardship in Maine and therefore a step towards combatting climate change, limiting pollution runoff, and increasing local food production.

I worked on one of Maine’s many small organic vegetable farms for four years. Soil health was a priority—we saw year after year how crops had higher quality and yield when we amended soil, used cover crop, minimized tilling, and utilized other practices that increased soil health. However, there are always more tasks than time to do them, so soil health became a lower priority to work such as harvesting, washing, and planting. Furthermore, educating new employees about the importance of healthy soil required time and energy from an already busy small staff. The support of a state program would help immensely in this farm and the hundreds of small farms around the state.

Supporting small farmers means supporting access to local, healthy food for Mainers. Though the benefits of this alone should be sufficient to establish a Healthy Soils program, there is the added benefit that healthy soils sequester carbon dioxide and serve as another tool to mitigate climate change. Healthy soils require less fertilizer, meaning that there is less runoff into our lakes, rivers, and streams, which leads to healthier fish populations, increased recreation opportunities, and fewer health human hazards. Since there will be no costs to taxpayers, this bill will only benefit Maine both ecologically and economically. Healthy soils are essential for Maine, and a program to support these efforts is vital to enhance them.

Because of the many benefits of healthy soil to humans and the environment, I hope you will support LD 437. Respectfully,

Hallie Arno