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TO: Senator Jim Dill
Representative Maggie O'Neil
Joint Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
RE: LD 437 Healthy Soils
DATE: March 4, 2021

Dear Chairpersons Dill and O'Neil,
Members of the Joint Committee on ACF,

While you may know me as a Sierra Club Maine advocate, I am writing you today to support LD 437 An Act To Establish Maine's Healthy Soils Program as a small diversified farmer. I have been practicing many of the healthy soils protocols including rotational grazing of my flock of dual breed sheep, frost seeding of legume and pasture grasses (no till) and cover cropping. I have also put on contour my vegetable production area to reduce run-off and retain soil moisture. I have had success with improving the grazing area of the farm over the past 15 years of production. And my vegetable stand is relatively successful as we grow a wide variety of produce.

I have been able to learn much from MOFGA and other resources and have taken advantage of support from the Knox/Lincoln County Cooperative Extension. I've also done extensive reading on the subject, in particular as to how farming can also be a boon to the biodiversity of my property. However, I strongly support developing this program because support from the Department of Agriculture will make transitioning to sustainable agriculture much more readily accessible to all farmers. It will support efforts like mine as we move into increasingly more difficult growing climates. The past five years our island has experienced significant "flash drought" conditions- such as no rain from mid March to August. I believe a healthy soils program would help me uncover methods to increase soil moisture potential and improve prospects for the continued productivity of the farm.

Healthy soil is a legacy we can leave to the next generation- overworked soil, loss of topsoil due to tilling etc are costing not only the farmers, but quality of produce. Erosion of topsoil will have a long term negative impact on the ability of Mainers to provide for future generations as well as causing significant downstream impacts with chemical and soil runoff. We now have a growing number of young farmers here and a reduction in the loss of farms. With support from the Department of Agriculture Conservation and Forestry to educate all farmers about the benefits of a Healthy Soils Program we can develop an even more robust growth in our burgeoning sustainable agriculture and associated industries, such as Maine Cheese makers, Maine Grains,

and other value added producers. The Committee may be aware of the Slow Money Maine initiatives which have funded many early agricultural and food based efforts. Tide Mill Farms has a chicken processing abattoir that is supporting five other producers and are fully sold out each production cycle- bringing well needed sources of support for those farm families downeast. While these efforts have occurred without a program such as LD 437 proposes, State support would unlock private funding to further increase available capital advancing such an important effort in our agricultural sector.

I urge to vote ought to pass LD 437

Respectfully submitted,

Becky Layton Bartovics