

**Testimony of Nate Drummond to the 130th Legislature's Joint Standing
Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

March 4, 2021

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, I am submitting testimony today in support of LD 437, "An Act to Establish the Maine Healthy Soils Program."

My wife Gabrielle and I own and operate Six River Farm, an organic vegetable farm in Bowdoinham, Maine. Over our fourteen years of farming we have grown from a small two-person operation to one of the largest organic farms in the state with a work force of over thirty people. Over that period, while navigating the myriad challenges that face farmers and small businesses in Maine we have come to identify climate change as the single most pressing challenge to both the current and future viability of our farm. In the short term, the increased frequency and severity of storms, cold snaps, droughts and other weather events threaten significant crop losses and infrastructure damage. In the medium to long term, our farm located on alluvial fields along the shore of Merrymeeting Bay is poorly positioned to survive. In response, on our farm we have sought out strategies across our operation to maximize resiliency, both in terms of production and marketing to better position our business to deal with climatic variability. These include maintaining a highly diversified crop and marketing mix, investments in irrigation and hoopouses to provide crop protection, and cover cropping strategies aimed at building soil organic matter.

I believe the establishment of the Maine Healthy Soils Program within the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry is a small but important first step in creating the institutional infrastructure within DACF to prioritize soil health and farm resiliency within its programmatic goals. To start it will provide a singular place for much needed knowledge exchange between farmers, crop advisers, NRCS and cooperative extension personnel, and supporting agricultural non-profits, whereby current practices aimed at increasing soil health and being employed successfully (or unsuccessfully!) on different Maine farms can be shared and explored amongst farmers and others in the agricultural community.

I hope also that in the near future the Maine Healthy Soils Program can provide the foundation for a larger pivot in the approach of DACF in the direction of working with Maine farms to rapidly make the necessary agronomic, technological and marketing changes that will be necessary for most Maine farms to survive the decades ahead. Simply put, Maine farms in next ten, twenty, thirty years will need to undergo tremendous transformations to both survive the challenges (weather, increases in pest movement, increases in carbon costs, more weather) that climate change will produce and take advantage of new associated opportunities. We are

moving into an era when consumer's will be increasingly willing to pay a premium for farm products grown with climate friendly practices and carbon sequestration may provide farms with new revenue opportunities. A Maine Healthy Soils program seems like a requisite first step towards a DACF that can be positioned to help farms in making these transitions.

Sincerely,