

3/3/21

To: Agriculture and Forestry Committee

From: Mary Rebecca Ferguson

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

I am writing as a climate activist and a service worker in the restaurant industry to urge you to vote “ought to pass” on LD 437.

I believe this bill is an important step to creating long-term, sustainable infrastructure to address climate change and protect soil for generations to come. The Healthy Soils Program will educate Maine farmers on healthy soil management practices and provide tools and funding to help farms implement the practices at no additional cost to the taxpayer. Farming is an important aspect of Maine’s economy and heritage. It is crucial that farmers have the knowledge and support to properly care for soil as they face the unpredictable challenges climate change presents to farming. Already we are seeing increased extreme weather events such as high precipitation, excessive drought, and unpredictable frost cycles. The Healthy Soils Program can help mitigate these challenges and develop solutions to prevent soil degradation. Healthy soil plays an important role in combating climate change as well by drawing greenhouse gases from the air.

In recent years, the demand for locally grown farm fresh produce has grown. I work in a small restaurant called Forage Market that sources vegetables, meat and other ingredients from nearby farms. Sourcing locally is important to me because it is better for the environment, supports small farms, and provides good healthy food for me and my family. Many other restaurants and families in Maine are following this trend and trying to eat and shop for locally grown produce. This has greatly increased the demand for local farms and created many new opportunities to grow the farming industry. Additionally, the number of young farmers has grown in the past few years. It is important to support this growth and provide the necessary infrastructure for young farmers and farms to expand in a healthy, sustainable way. This both starts and ends with healthy soil.

I strongly support LD 437 because of the role it can play in guiding farmers, mitigating climate change, and supporting the growing demand for local Maine produce and hope you will as well.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Ferguson