

An Act to Establish Maine Healthy Soils Program 130th Legislature – 1st Regular Session

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Re: LD 437 – An Act to Establish Maine Healthy Soils Program

Farms play an integral role in our society - the production of food – the sustenance of life and maintenance of health. Soil is the engine and it is time that we elevate our soils to a level that will bring the needed focus to ensure we continue to build and enhance our soils as a tool mitigate challenges brought on by climate shifts and to maximize the production capacity of farms.

Across the country states recognize the need to focus on soil health. In 2019 four states passed soil health legislation, nine had legislation pending and another five were drafting legislation. These states, as does Maine, recognize the importance of soil health and are putting funding in place to enhance, leverage and develop programs that will ensure our soils are positioned to mitigate issues such as drought and enhance food production.

Through the leadership of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry I believe Maine will be able to garner federal funding and develop programs in collaboration with the University that will ultimately assist farms in implementing enduring programs. This legislation is not saying that our farms do not continually work on their soils; it is recognizing that the work that is being done and the programs that farms across the state implement should be recognized for the value they bring. It recognizes the need to fund soil health and the development as it is a key tool in addressing climate shifts and helping create a resilient food system.

Healthy Soils Program can provide incentives; such as loans, grants, research, technical assistance, and educational material on healthy soils practices for farmers. Thus, helping them increase their drought tolerance, soil fertility and farm productivity. They can augment NRCS programming and work with farms to leverage federal programming. Nutrient rich soil can help improve yields, thus supporting farmers economically.

There are people that may feel that this does not belong in statute or that it might be stepping stone to over regulation. But, I feel this is a mechanism to create focus, I mean real focus, on building the soils and creating enduring programs that continually assess and act to enhance our soils so that climate shift impacts can in some instances be minimized and farms can work toward greater profitability.

I am a believer that no bill is written perfectly out of the shoot, and I feel this bill has a solid base from which to work. I think through work sessions we can craft a bill that will work for Maine farms and position us to enhance and create programming to invest in this very important asset for all of Maine.

Respectfully submitted

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