



JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



MELANIE LOYZIM
COMMISSIONER

March 2, 2021

Senator Jim Dill, Chair
Representative Maggie O'Neil, Chair
Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
Cross Building, Room 214
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: LD 437 - An Act To Establish the Maine Healthy Soils Program

Dear Senator Dill and Representative O'Neil:

I am writing to express support for LD 437, An Act To Establish the Maine Healthy Soils Program. DEP plays a lead role and coordinates with other State agencies including the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) to carry out the State of Maine Nonpoint Source (NPS) Pollution Program (38 M.R.S. §410). The program promotes Best Management Practices and carries out programs to protect and restore Maine's water resources from NPS pollution from developed areas, roads, agriculture and other land uses. Statewide efforts are guided by [Maine's NPS Management Program Plan \(2020-2024\)](#). A key objective in the current five-year plan is to "increase field crop agriculture's use of soil health practices to reduce soil erosion, improve water quality and offset carbon emissions." DEP and DACF are collaborating on this objective.

In addition to the benefits listed above, soil health practices that increase soil organic matter also increase soil water-holding capacity and provide some resiliency during drought conditions. Furthermore, increasing soil organic matter supports the Maine Climate Action Plan's strategy of promoting natural climate solutions and increasing carbon sequestration on working lands.

Given its priority, DEP's NPS program has already been working with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) through our Section 319 grants program to provide assistance to Aroostook County growers to improve soil health, reduce soil loss and improve and protect water quality. Early adopters have attested to the improvement in the quality of their potatoes, which is increasing interest in practices that improve soil health.

There is growing recognition at the national and statewide level about the effectiveness of these practices, and LD 437 would help further elevate the importance of this issue. We look forward to working with DACF, SWCDs, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, farmers and other partners to prompt widespread adoption of soil health practices.

Sincerely,

Brian Kavanah
Director, Bureau of Water Quality

AUGUSTA
17 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0017
(207) 287-7688 FAX: (207) 287-7826

BANGOR
106 HOGAN ROAD, SUITE 6
BANGOR, MAINE 04401
(207) 941-4570 FAX: (207) 941-4584

PORTLAND
312 CANCO ROAD
PORTLAND, MAINE 04103
(207) 822-6300 FAX: (207) 822-6303

PRESQUE ISLE
1235 CENTRAL DRIVE, SKYWAY PARK
PRESQUE ISLE, MAINE 04769
(207) 764-0477 FAX: (207) 760-3143