

Good Morning Sen. Dill and members of the Joint Committee of Ag and Forestry.
Thank you: Sen. Brenner, Sen. Maxim, Rep. Osher, and Rep. Pluecker

Comments on LD437- An Act To Establish the Maine Healthy Soils Program

I am speaking on behalf of the Maine Sustainable Agriculture Society. Healthy Soils, Farms and Communities has been at the heart of **what** we do as an organization and **how** we do it as Farmer Members for almost 30 years. I am a rotational grazer of sheep and also a member of the NRCS State Technical Committee. Thank you very much for your collective work on this Bill to date.

As it stands, the Bill has a great title, but we are not sure it does enough to actually connect the dots to strategic climate mitigation action plans to draw down carbon dioxide and increase production capacity for practicing Maine farmers. The bill needs incentives and rewards (established and itemized), not implied.

Focus needs to be on creating reward systems for Farmers and Land owners (including forestry) based on actual carbon sequester service provided by their investment and sweat equity. This could be tied to production and tracked by Resource based income as reported on Schedule F.

DEFINITIONS-

4. **Clarify wording:** “Greenhouse gas emissions benefits” sounds like an oxymoron. Could be “Greenhouse gas Drawdown.”

5. Best Practices:

ADD: D. Leverage uses of Biogenic Methane to minimize purchased inputs to improve carbon sequestration through photosynthesis.

PROGRAM-

2. Responsibilities:

A: Sounds like establishing income streams for Non-Profit organizations, not farmers as practitioners implementing Healthy Soils strategies. There’s plenty of information available already through ATTRA, NRCS etc. and on the internet.

D: Should be equitably distributed to ALL farmers, where distribution of benefits could be tied to production capacity and soil health delivery. FOR INSTANCE, **establish** a minimal subsidy per breeding animal unit wintered as it determines manure stockpiled and distributed as a critical soil health input. This is a strategy that has been successfully employed in the UK to affirm their Animal Agricultural industries as a central component and rural economic generator for all other local industries, including Tourism.

E: Wording is wishy washy. Needs teeth. Should be determined in advance.

ADD: F. Restore the former Nutrient Management Program (reimagined) as it pertains to the intent of this Act and is proportional to services rendered. Would include direct service of Carbon soils measurement tracking and Organic Matter. I would like to see this grow into a funding stream to **MATCH** NRCS awards directly to the farmers for learning and doing the work to implement appropriate investment in their soil, water and air resource. (For anyone who does not know, NRCS awards are paid out to Technical Service Providers and only cover a portion of the cost of the practice. The balance is a farmer out of pocket expense.) This is the kind of program that has been utilized in California to keep good farmer/stewards on working lands.

MAINE HEALTHY SOILS FUND-

Establish an income tax form checkoff program (like the Chickadee Checkoff) so all Maine residents can opt in to voluntary donation, knowing their funding will go **DIRECTLY** to farmers as stewards doing the work to create “Greenhouse gas Drawdown.” This could be called the “Soil Bank.”

ALSO: Please consider eliminating state income tax on resource based income as reported on Schedule F. Agriculture is zero basis manufacturing, where the farmer must invest in creating healthy soils through both land purchase or lease AND sweat equity in a perfectly competitive marketplace that does not always recover production cost through product sales sufficient to justify the opportunity cost of maintaining said land in agricultural production. Such a program could be tied to both NRCS award status or other healthy soils strategies implemented. This would be a direct benefit to reward farmers as practitioners for their service to the soil and working land preservation. Improving Farm Profitability is the Highest priority of the AgCom Strategic Plan.

Stewards of Ag or Forestry Lands spreading glyphosate could be eliminated from this privilege.

Finally, this Bill is an opportunity to consider as part of the program, an AG Plastics aggregation and disposal program to remove plastic dumps on farms where they are counterintuitive to “Soil Health,” and they are gross. If there were such a program, where farmers took batched plastics to centralized locations, this would be an opportunity to provide the education services and peer to peer learning detailed in this act, in a way that also benefitted the farmer for their time and trucking, and offer other face to face networking opportunities where we live in the age of Zoom, FaceBook and YouTube.

We are hoping some of these ideas and details will be included and worked out in future work sessions. This Bill deserves more Farmer input.

Thank you for hearing me out, and I am happy to entertain any questions.

Respectfully Submitted
Nanne Kennedy
March 4th, 2021

Nanne Kennedy
The Maine Sustainable Agriculture Society

Thank you. This is revised after getting comments and edits from the board.