



March 4, 2021 - REVISED VERSION

Senator James Dill

Representative Margaret O'Neil

130th Legislature's Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

In support of LD 437 – “An Act to Establish the Maine Healthy Soils Program”

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Melissa Law. I am a co-owner of Bumbleroot Organic Farm, a certified organic vegetable and flower farm located in Windham, Maine. I currently serve as the Representative of Agriculture on the Maine Climate Council and participate on the Council's Natural and Working Lands Working Group. I am here to speak in support of LD 437 – “An Act to Establish the Maine Healthy Soils Program”.

As a vegetable farmer, the future of my business depends upon the health of our soils. Healthy soils lead to high productivity and strong crop yields, which in turn bring profitability and financial security for my family and the people we employ. Building the health of our soils - rather than depleting them - is critical to the growth and sustainability of our farm operation. As our practices improve, our business grows and new jobs are created. Beyond the viability of our small business, the food we produce feeds over a thousand families each year through our farm market, CSA, and partnerships with local restaurants. The health of our soils translates directly to the health of our customers, and in turn, our communities.

My work on the Maine Climate Council has helped me understand the importance of Maine's natural resource industries to Maine's economy. Agriculture has always been a vital part of Maine's identity and it will continue to play a critical role in our state. The path to Governor Mill's goal of carbon neutrality by 2045 relies as much on carbon sequestration in Maine's forests and soils as it does on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. We need to draw down the carbon in the atmosphere, and soil health practices can do that. Maine's Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry has a responsibility to lead the way and provide the resources farmers and landowners need to implement healthy soils best practices - that is what this bill is designed to do.

In the six years we've been in business, my farm has experienced hail storms, drought, and extreme winds that have damaged our crops and led to erosion on our sloped fields. As we look to the future, we realize that these threats will become more frequent,



unpredictable, and severe, so we are constantly trying to improve our practices in order to mitigate the worst of what is to come. We've received immeasurable support and technical assistance from our local University of Maine Cooperative Extension agent and other service providers as we adopt new methods and try out new tools and technology aimed at boosting soil health and carbon sequestration. These resources should be aggregated and easily accessible to everyone, and the Maine Healthy Soils Program will help ensure that they are.

In addition to the instability created by climate disasters like the 2020 wildfires in California and the snow storm in Texas last month, COVID-19 has exposed the weaknesses in our global supply chains and underscored the importance of strengthening our local food system. In the past year, as grocery shelves emptied out, Mainers turned to local farms and food producers - or to their own little plot of land - for sustenance. The Maine Healthy Soils Program will provide resources to educate Maine farmers and gardeners about how to improve the health of their soils, so that they can grow the healthiest food possible and create a more resilient Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Melissa Law".

Melissa Law
Owner, Bumbleroot Organic Farm
Member, Maine Climate Council