

Jo Myers
Waldoboro

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and members of the Committee. My name is Jo Ann Myers. I have farmed in Waldoboro for 22 years, farming certified organic for fruits, vegetables and seedlings and farming conventional for our livestock. My comments are my own and do not represent any organic or livestock organizations.

I am writing in support of LD 437, An Act to Establish the Maine Healthy Soils Program. As proposed, LD 437 is a sound proposal:

1. there is no fiscal note attached to this bill. The program would be funded by the Maine Healthy Soils Fund from grants, foundations and other sources. While I would hope for state support at some point, non-governmental funding sources will assure the program starts with external organizations demonstrating their commitment to the principles and goals of the program.
2. The program is consistent with the goals of Governor Mills Climate Council
3. The program does not call for regulation to establish a certified/verified program. By working from principles and guidelines, rather than a program governed by regulation, there is potential for several good outcomes
 - >farmers can participate at their own pace and level which should encourage more farmer participation
 - >adding another regulated system such as certified organic or American Humane, can confuse consumers and undermines the value of independently verified/certified systems. Farmers participating in the Healthy Soils Program and retailers selling Health Soils Program produce and meat have and opportunity to explain to their customers what the program means
4. The program will pull together a number of initiatives within state government which will create efficiencies and coordination within government
5. The program provides for farmer to farmer peer support and education. This reduces overall program costs as well and could establish continual farmer cooperation on other issues
6. Maine would be joining other states across the U.S. in establishing health soils programs. This provides for mutual support, exchange of "what works" and coordination in pulling together science based information on the importance of healthy soils which ultimately reduce the use of synthetic pesticides and works toward climate change mitigation
7. Representative Pingree is sponsoring agriculture resiliency legislation which links participation to healthy soils programs at the state level. LD 437 will position Maine to participate in this program.

I urge your support of this important bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.