



Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

Common Ground Country Fair

March 4, 2021

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Heather Spalding and I'm deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association. MOFGA supports LD 437 - *An Act To Establish The Maine Healthy Soils Program*. We want to thank Senate Stacy Brenner and co-sponsors for bringing forward this important legislation. Because healthy soil is the foundation of organic agriculture, this is MOFGA's top policy initiative for the legislative session. As members of the ACF, you are well aware of the importance of soil health to farmers. But, for the benefit of others who are learning about the values of soil's organic matter, biodiversity, structure, moisture and nutrients, I'll state the organic mantra:

Feed The Soil, Not The Plant

We know that farmers across the management spectrum share our commitment to protecting soil health and we are very happy that this incentives-based non-regulatory program will be available to all Maine farmers, providing much needed technical support, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and access to funding to implement practices suited to their specific soil types and sectors.

MOFGA is a statewide organization that has experienced significant growth over the past couple of decades. By the year 2030, we aim to increase the number of certified organic growers from 550 to 750 and the amount of organically managed land from 7% to 10% of the state's agricultural land. We want this evolution to happen through incentives that inspire land managers to improve the health of their soil so that they can increase yields, decrease expenditures, become more resilient to unpredictable and dramatic swings in weather patterns, and help meet Governor Mills' ambitious greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals.

Agriculture accounts for about 10% of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States and, according to Maine's Department of Environmental Protection, our state's agricultural sector emits approximately 2% of total state emissions across all reported sectors. Agriculture is part of the climate change problem. But agriculture also can and should be a big part of the solution because of the ability to sequester carbon in the soil and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

While many soil health resources are available in public, private and non-profit sectors, they are disparate and difficult for farmers to navigate. Maine's Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry is the perfect place to set up a one-stop shop for clear guidance on available healthy soils resources at the local, state and federal level. Farmers' schedules are demanding and inextricably tied to the seasons and weather patterns. Farmers need all the support they can get and this program will be a farm viability solution to many established challenges in our agricultural sector – including the perennial cuts to budgets of Cooperative Extension and the University of Maine's School of Food and Agriculture.

The fund associated with the Maine Healthy Soils Program would be established at no cost to the Maine taxpayer, and would create an opportunity to expand and reward the good soil protection work carried out by farmers. It would honor and elevate the critical importance of Maine's agricultural sector. Congress is working to develop marker bills for the next Farm Bill, and important legislation to address climate change. Representative Pingree's Agriculture Resilience Act along with Senator Booker's Climate Stewardship Act provide incentives for healthy soils practices along with healthy

soils research funding. It's important to note that the legislation calls for establishing state healthy soils programs in order to receive grant funding through this legislation. Many states across the country already have established such programs. I've attached a recent map showing where those laws exist and where others are under consideration. Let's be sure that Maine is well-positioned to receive those funds through the Maine Healthy Soils Program.

This program would be so helpful to MOFGA's expanding farming community. I've attached a farmer sign-on letter that includes many of our certified growers in addition to other farmers supporting this legislation. Farmers continue to add their names to this letter and we will provide an update for the work session on this bill.

MOFGA is excited about the expanded support that this program would provide for our impact planning. To promote the benefits of healthy soils practices, MOFGA program staff members and farmers collaborate with Maine's Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, the University of Maine, Cooperative Extension, many USDA programs including Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Farm Service Agency, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, and the Conservation Reserve Program. We also partner with many educational, non-profit organizations in Maine and across the country.

In order to meet our stated goals of increasing organic production in Maine, we offer an introductory farm apprenticeship program, beginning farmer training through our two-year Journey person program, and a Farm Resilience Program for farmers in years 5-10 of their business when they're statistically the most likely to experience business failure. MOFGA Certification Services (MCS) is our USDA accredited organic certification program. MCS also administers MOFGA's Certified Clean Cannabis program for medicinal and adult cannabis use in Maine. MCS certifies more than 70,000 acres of farmland in Maine, representing more than \$60 million in organic farm product sales. MOFGA-certified operations are run by Maine businesspeople for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While we envision a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum.

Having an established program at the DACF to keep track of and elevate all of the critical resources on climate change will be a huge help to all who are working to protect our soil health and the future of Maine agriculture.

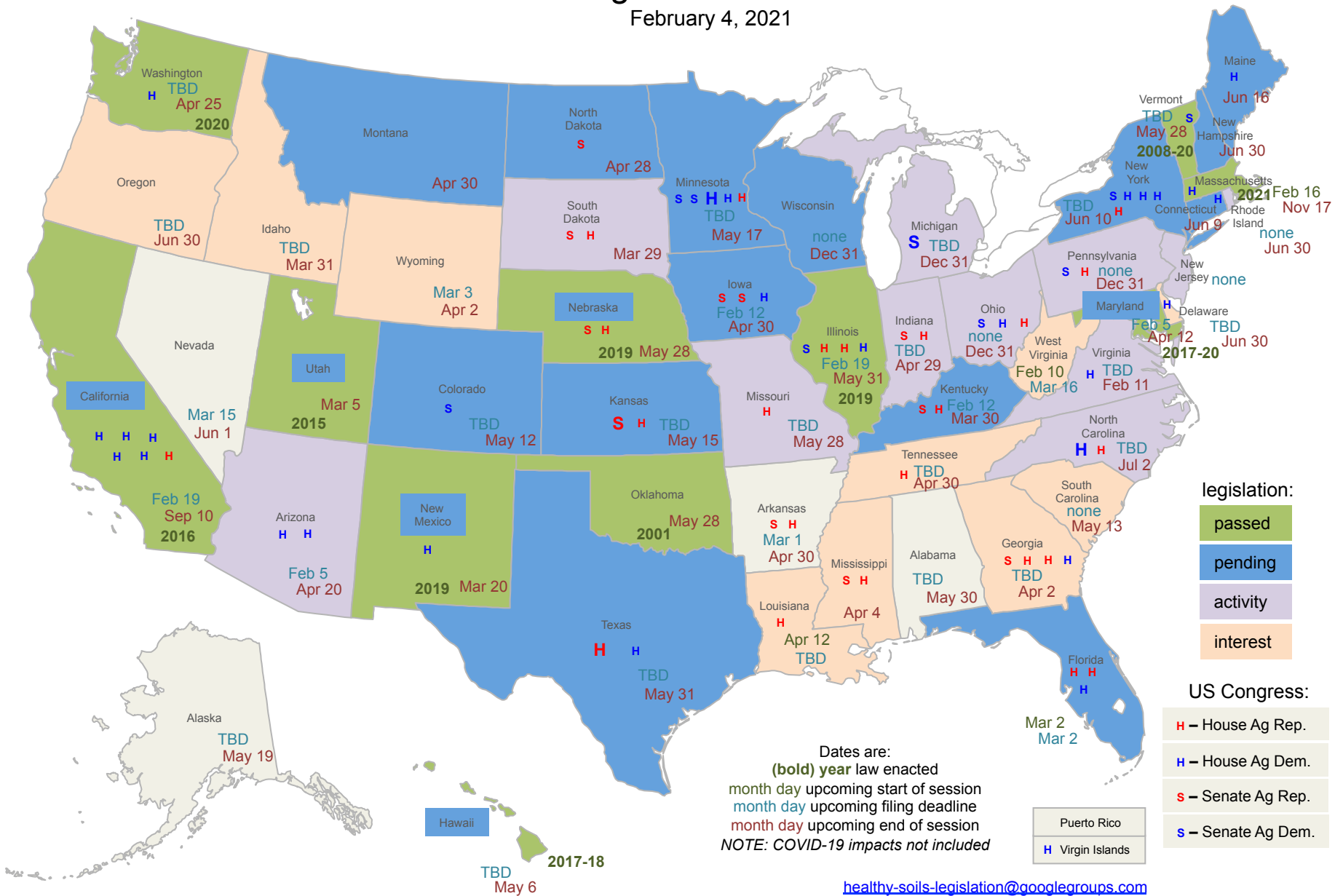
Thank you for your consideration. We are very excited about this bill and we hope you will support it.

About MOFGA

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) started in 1971 and is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. We're a broad-based community that educates about and advocates for organic agriculture, illuminating its interdependence with a healthy environment, local food production, and thriving communities. We have a staff of just under 50 employees, a membership of more than 10,000, and an amazing community of about 2500 volunteers, many of whom we rely on to host our annual Common Ground Country Fair.

Healthy Soils legislative status

February 4, 2021



An Open Letter From Maine Farmers To

President of the Maine Senate Troy Jackson
Speaker of the Maine House of Representatives Ryan Fecteau
Chair of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee Senator Jim Dill
Chair of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee Representative Maggie O'Neil
and Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee: Senator Russell Black; Senator Chloe Maxmin; Representative Sue Bernard; Representative Jeffrey Gifford; Representative Randy Hall; Representative Scott Landry; Representative David McCrea; Representative Laurie Osher; Representative Bill Pluecker; Representative Thomas Skolfield; and Representative Joseph Underwood

as of March 4, 2021

Dear President of the Senate Troy Jackson, Speaker of the House Ryan Fecteau, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

We, the farmers signed below, write in support of L.D. 437 “An Act to Establish the Maine Healthy Soils Program,” which would create a program within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to promote and expand the use of healthy soils practices among farmers. This program would help farmers get the resources and knowledge they need to build healthy soils, at no additional cost to the taxpayer. As farmers relying on productive and healthy soils for our livelihoods, we strongly support the passage of L.D. 437 as a means to protect both agriculture in Maine and Maine’s environment.

We support L.D. 437 for the following key reasons:

It ensures that the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry connects farmers with key resources so that they are equipped with the tools and knowledge they need to begin voluntarily using healthy soil practices.

It offers a one-stop-shop for all information on: healthy soils management practices; farmers across Maine who are implementing these practices; funding opportunities to help interested farmers implement these practices; and peer-to-peer learning opportunities.

Healthy soils practices are an important climate adaptation strategy, making farmers more resilient to the impacts of climate change. Fostering healthy soils can also capture high rates of carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus, improving soil nutrient density while drawing down greenhouse gases.

Eleven states have already passed healthy soils legislation, and 14 state legislatures currently have healthy soils bills under consideration. This legislation has the potential to reframe the value that our state places on its agricultural soils as a driver of our agricultural economy, an opportunity to mitigate the impacts of climate change, and, ultimately, as a key natural resource.

We urge you to vote ought-to-pass on L.D. 437.

Sincerely,

- Carl Davis, Twin Maples Farm, Acton
- Katherine Richman, Appleton Fruit and Flower, Appleton
- Galen & Bonnie Young, Argyle Acres, Argyle Township
- Monique A. Allen, Rivendell Farm, Augusta
- Maggie Smith, Smith Family Farm, Bar Harbor
- Shana Hanson, 3 Streams Farm, Belfast
- Dan Barnett-Parker, Belfast Bay Wild Blueberries, Belfast
- Jeffrey Benton & Erin Ehlers, Orange Circle Farm, Berwick
- Rebecca Norklun, Good Dirt Garden, Bowdoin
- Charlotte Ferguson, Dandelion Spring Farm, Bowdoinham
- Sean Hagan, Left Field Farm, Bowdoinham
- Phillip Cuddeback, Phils Farm LLC, Bowdoinham
- Nathan Drummond & Gabrielle Gosselin, Six River Farm, Bowdoinham
- Beth Schiller, Dandelion Spring Farm, Bowdoinham
- Caleb & Jim Gerritsen, Wood Prairie Family Farm, Bridgewater
- Jennifer Schroth & Jonathan Ellsworth, Carding Brook Farm, Brooklin
- Molly DellaRoman & Timothy Skillin, 5 Star Nursery and Orchard, Brooklin
- Carol Gregor, Tapley Farms, Brooksville
- Seth Kroeck & Maura Bannon, Crystal Spring Farm, Brunswick
- Renee Lang, Dancing Fox Farm, Brunswick
- Lucretia & Michael Woodruff, Milkweed Farm, Brunswick
- Jean Shaw, Pine Street, Brunswick
- Don Estes, Estes Blueberry Farm, Buxton
- Jonah & Elizabeth Fertig-Burd, Celebration Tree Farm & Wellness Center, Durham
- Carol Power, Power Farm, Falmouth
- Sarah Lutte, Lazy Acres Farm, Farmingdale
- Luke Small, Small Farm, Farmingdale
- Meredith Simonpietri, Forge House Farm, Farmington
- Erica Emery, Rustic Roots Farm, Farmington
- Garen Heller, Garen's Greens LLC, Franklin
- Margaret & Ryan Mitchell, South Paw Farm, Freedom
- Phyllis Gardiner & Logan Johnston, Oaklands Farm, Gardiner
- Katelynn Gentile, The Fiddlehead Homestead, Hancock
- Joseph & Laura Grady, Two Coves Farm, Harpswell
- Denise DeSpirito, Of the spirit herbals, Hope
- Fabien Roy, Roy's Maple Grove Corp., Jackman
- Rosey Guest, Bluebird Hill Farm, Jefferson
- Ryan & Mike Dennett, Crescent Run Farm, Jefferson
- Peter W. Curra, Curra Family Farm Trust, Knox
- Adrienne Lee & Ken Lamson, New Beat Farm, Knox
- Jerilyn Waterhouse, Spotted Acres, Levant
- Sarah Hager, Bounty O' Blooms, Limington
- Jean English, Bayberry Gardens, Lincolnville
- Keena Tracy, Little Ridge Farm LLC, Lisbon Falls
- Aaron Grim & Briis Wile, Cosmic Goat Farm, Litchfield

- Laura Neale, Black Kettle Farm, Lyman
- Michael Guillemette, BrookRidge Farm, Lyman
- Rebecca Stanley, Sunset Ridge Farm, Monmouth
- Andrew Smith & Caitlin Frame, The Milkhouse, Monmouth
- Noami Brautigam & James Gagne, Dickey Hill Farm, Monroe
- Seth Yentes & Anna Shapley-Quinn, North Branch Farm, Monroe
- Lisa Kalan & Angela Baglione, Seek-No-Further Farmstead, Monroe
- (Lana) Joy Bueschen, Turning Page Farm, Monson
- Victoria & Andrew Marshall, Dorolenna Farm, Montville
- Douglas Van Horn, Twitchell Hill Blueberries, Montville
- Alain jr Quirion, Quwic Maple Syrup Farm Inc, Moose River
- Jennifer Brown, Willow Moon Ventures LLC, Morrill
- Anna Davis & David Levinson, Beech Hill Farm, Mount Desert
- Erin Parisien, Aroostook Beef Company, New Canada
- Lawrence Peaco, Waterhouse Farm, New Gloucester
- Kelsey Gibbs & Matthew Silverman, Wanderwood, Nobleboro
- Susanne Lee, Copper Woods Farm, North Yarmouth
- Jason Kafka, Checkerberry Farm, Parkman
- Nicolas Lindholm, Blue Hill Berry Co., Penobscot
- Heather & Phil Retberg, Quill's End Farm, Penobscot
- Debra & Glenn Viola, Fortune Smiles Farmstead LLC, Perham
- Tom Roberts, Snakeroot Organic Farm, Pittsfield
- Jackie Gardner, Moonset Farm, Porter
- Justin Miers, Seed to Bowl Farm, Portland
- Emma Lovering, Snowfields Farm, Pownal
- Ellen J Johnson, Lamb Cove Farm, Robbinston
- Karl North, Lamb Chop Ridge, Robbinston
- Jill Agnew, Willow Pond Farm, Sabattus
- Stacy Brenner & John Bliss, Broadturn Farm, Scarborough
- Emily Allis Springer, Meeting House Herb Farm, Scarborough
- Kelsey Herrington, Two Farmers Farm, Scarborough
- Betsy Creisher, Side A Brook Farm, Shapleigh
- Thomas A. Vigue, KiwiHill Farm, Sidney
- Orris Hewett, Hewett Farm & Logging, Skowhegan
- Kelly Payson-Roopchand & Anil Roopchand, Pumpkin Vine Family Farm LLC, Somerville
- Paige Tyson & Spencer Aitel, Two Loons Farm, South China
- Cheryl Wixson & Phillip McFarland, Rabbit Hill, Stonington
- Jennifer Minard & John Roscoe, Wild Tilth Farm, Sullivan
- Christopher Walke, Bumpa Farm and Nursery, Swanville
- Rhiannon Hampson & Gregory Stiner, Grace Pond Farm, Thomaston
- Alexandra Smith, Metaltail Farm, Thorndike
- Ben, Laura & Nick Whatley, Whatley Farm, Topsham
- Katheryn Langelier, Herbal Revolution Farm & Apothecary, Union
- Roberta R Bailey, Seven Tree Farm, Vassalboro
- Jo Ann Myers, Beau Chemin Farm, Waldoboro

- Eli Berry & Sharon Turner, Crystal Lake Farm and Nursery, Washington
- Abby Lydon & Jeff Knox, Dharma Farm, Washington
- Eliah Thanhauser, North Spore, Westbrook
- Suzanne Balbo, Crooked Door Farm, Whitefield
- Bambi Jones & David Moskovitz, Hidden Valley Farm, Whitefield
- Melissa Boynton, Natural Dawnings Herb Gardens, Whitefield
- Ben & Taryn Marcus, Sheepscoot General Store and Farm, Whitefield
- Annie Watson & Mike Moody, Sheepscoot Valley Farm, Whitefield
- Melissa Law, Ben Whalen, Jeff & Abby Fisher, Bumbleroot Organic Farm, Windham
- Laura Casserly, Good Land Farm, Windham
- Nathan & Katherine Clark, Reed Farm, Windsor
- Elizabeth Haines, Fisher Farm, Winterport
- Craig Hickman & Jop Blom, Annabessacook Farm, Winthrop
- Ron DiGravio & Cindy Townsend, Cranberry Rock Farm, Winthrop