

4 March 2021

130th Maine Legislature's Joint Standing Committee of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry  
L.D. 437: An Act to Establish the Maine Healthy Soils Program

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and members of the Joint Standing Committee of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry,

In case we haven't yet met, my name is Jenni Tilton-Flood. I am a mum, a dairy farmer, a Maine girl, and like this world, I am a work in progress. I am one of 21 family members and 3 generations caring for land and animals at our family farm, Flood Brothers, LLC, in Clinton, Maine. We're proud to be part of the reason that our town is known as Maine's Dairy Capital. Along with 30 coworkers we care for 3100 cows and steward thousands of acres of rented and owned land, and together we make sure that 17,000 gallons of fresh, Maine milk is on its way to our neighbours' tables every day and on this day I am here to urge you to support LD 437.

We've been farming this land for hundreds of years, and its rhythms have been almost embedded in our DNA and as the climate changes the beat of the seasons does too. The whens and hows of preparing the soil and sowing seeds becomes less predictable. We find ourselves needing to find alternatives and new ways of doing things more often than we ever have before, all the while trying to ensure that the most sustainable practices that we've always had in place fit into these changes, as well being able to afford and invest in new practices without risking our financial stability and the welfare of our cows in pursuit of healthy soils. We know that we are part of the solution to the problems that climate change brings with it, but if we are not here and we are not well supported by expertise, resources, and peers of diverse approaches and experience then the problems will go unsolved.

The Maine Healthy Soils Program is a solid foundation to helping Maine's farmers meet the challenges that Climate Change and our ever changing world and economy presents by delivering and providing resources and expertise from multiple areas, not the least of which is the networking of farmers themselves and the various agencies and institutions of our government to crowd source answers, create new ideas, implement change and solutions, and be dedicated to the idea that the care taking of our soils is paramount to the resiliency and success of our food systems and communities . By erecting a framework of communication, pooling of knowledge, and creating a repository of findings and possible paths to experimentation, grants, funding, etc...the Program provides the connectivity of collaboration that farmers like myself and my peers need and require to meet the challenges of Climate Change head on.

The changing of time and the changing of climate is non negotiable. What is negotiable is how well we navigate it all and LD 437, The Maine Healthy Soils Program, bridges the experience of our past and our science and farmers with the promise and ingenuity of the future. Being different, being bold, and being a change-not just for the sake of change, but in the creation of a framework that is based on tradition and structurally designed to adapt to a future unknown, is what makes the Maine Healthy Soils Program such a good thing for Maine, its people and its land.

Truth be told, the best impact of the Maine Healthy Soils Program would be the relationship counseling that Maine's agriculturalists need so badly. At one point everyone was in a deep and meaningful relationship with Agriculture. Our neighbours were farmers, our family were farmers and our communities were primarily agriculturally based. As time has marched on the miles between our farms and our farmers has grown. And our time is even more limited, just like those whose commutes have increased and their work weeks lengthened. As the times have changed, so have our days and our lives. Time has also changed the number of us engaged in agriculture-we are now fewer and so much farther between. We have all struggled

to maintain connections and communication, not just now but for so many years -finding ways to connect has become more and more difficult the fewer we in Ag are. While the agencies and arms of government and education have done a remarkable and wonderful job of keeping our ever decreasing numbers informed and connected, the Maine Healthy Soils Program makes the exchange of ideas and expertise a priority and focus, something that has waned as our agricultural community has become smaller even though it is a necessity as we continue to grow that community and if we want to support and bolster our farmers. For me, this network of research, findings, experience, and expertise is the most important piece- the piece that is so difficult to get back once it is lost, and having our Maine government recognize that and put forward this idea, though LD 437, to equip us all with strength and resources as we march headlong into the future is one of the best ways Maine government can serve the people of Maine.

Respectfully,

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