

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

March 4, 2021

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

I am Gail VanWart of Peaked Mountain Farm and Native Pollinator Sanctuary, a Maine Farmland Trust Forever Farm, located in Dedham, Hancock County, Maine and wish to inform you of my support of LD 437 - An Act To Establish the Maine Healthy Soils Program.

Peaked Mountain Farm's story precedes the story of my stewardship, which began in 2002, by 134 years. To put that into perspective, when my great grandfather purchased the property in 1868, 153 years ago, it was the same year General Ulysses S. Grant was elected president, three years after the end of the Civil War. It is both a great honor and responsibility for my husband and I to be its fourth-generation stewards, overseeing the native wild blueberries that grow upon it, a crop that has a history which predates all of the above by well over 10,000 years. Our crop also provides the general public with awareness about the impact healthy pollinator habitat has on crops, such as Maine's famous wild blueberries featuring the culture of organic farming, environmental conservation and unique history of the agricultural traditions of the small native blueberry that is Maine's state's official food.

During our nineteen years of farm stewardship, my concerns have been first and foremost focused on the environmental sustainability and integrity we will be passing on to future generations. I noticed early on, as springs grow longer and wetter, that non-native pollinators were not efficient and available in today's changing climate when we needed them for crop pollination, but the native pollinators that had evolved for thousands of years with the native blueberries were. Thus, our farm is known for its promotion of wild native pollination of our organic wild blueberry crop; being the first native pollinator sanctuary in the state of Maine. Implementation of native wild bee pollinator *only* pollination of our farm's crop of wild blueberries has resulted in an 80% reduction of fossil fuels needed in our crop production.

Pollination time for wild blueberry crops, which is now averaging a week less than it was in 1990, is only one concern climate change has presented us and other growers with around the state. Hotter summers and longer falls have impacted both plant and soil health. I often see second blooms and shorter harvest time. Extreme temperature variations cause soils to be too wet or too dry, lack of efficient water supplies, and pollution from fossil fuels all contribute to fewer successes in the crop field. I've noted three major areas need to be addressed to resolve these issues: 1.) reduce emissions, less burning and more pruning; 2.) carbon neutrality, implement funding incentives and certifications for approved machinery and reducing use of fossil fuels; and 3.) proper irrigation, that is both sustainable and efficient.

A Maine Healthy Soils Program is extremely important to a sustainable Maine. Addressing the issues of healthy soils and climate change is a huge undertaking for one farm to take on alone. A collective effort statewide, that combines resources, both financially and informative, to help ease the burdens of introducing emission reduction, carbon neutrality, and efficient water supplies to Maine farms will create opportunity and support sustainability that will lift up Maine agriculture statewide, providing a huge benefit to our entire population.

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