

OFFICE OF POLICY AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

To: Members, Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
From: Karen S. Nadeau, Legislative Analyst
Date: April 6, 2021
Subj: **LD 568** An Act To Establish a Working Farmland Access and Protection Program within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and a Working Farmland Access and Protection Fund within the Land for Maine's Future Program

SUMMARY

- Establishes the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.
- Establishes the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Fund within the Land for Maine's Future program for farmland protection projects.
- Fund is administered by the Land for Maine's Future Board in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

TESTIMONY

Proponents: *Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry; Maine Farmland Trust*
Written only: American Farmland Trust; Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine; Department of Marine Resources

- Bill strengthens the alignment between DACF's farmland conservation goals with LMF program similar to Working Waterfront Access Protection Fund program within DMR.
- Farmland protection projects have consistently been paid for from the LMF fund.
- LMF funded its first farmland protection projects in 1990; LMF has funded a total of 42 farmland protection projects covering nearly 10,000 acres since then.
- Mirrors the Maine Working Waterfront Access Protection Fund which benefitted the process for evaluating working waterfront projects, allowing the department to:
 - Establish a program to provide protection to strategically working farmland properties whose continued availability to commercial agricultural business is essential to the long-term future of the economic sector
 - Establish a review panel to advise the Commissioner of Agriculture in the operation of the program.
 - Establish selection criteria in statute to evaluate applicants for protection of working farmland property.
- Sponsor of LD would like to amend the bill so that the selection criteria for the program would include consideration to support/promote African-American and indigenous farmers.
 - Department indicated that they would work with the sponsor to make sure the suggested language would conform with procurement policies.

Opponents: *None* **NFNA:** *None*

PRELIMINARY FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT: *Not yet received.*