



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
22 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

AMANDA E. BEAL
COMMISSIONER

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY**

IN SUPPORT OF LD 568

*An Act to Establish a Working Farmland Access and Protection Program within the
Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources
and
a Working Farmland Access and Protection Fund within the
Land for Maine's Future Program*

March 18, 2021

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Sarah Demers, Director of the Land for Maine's Future Program. I am here testifying on behalf of the Department in support of LD 568. We thank Representative Pluecker for sponsoring this bill.

Just over 30 years ago, the Maine Legislature declared: "that the future social and economic well-being of the citizens of this State depends upon maintaining the quality and availability of natural areas for recreation, hunting and fishing, conservation, wildlife habitat, vital ecologic functions and scenic beauty and that the State, as the public's trustee, has a responsibility and a duty to pursue an aggressive and coordinated policy to assure that this Maine heritage is passed on to future generations." (5 MRS §6200)

LMF legislation established the Land for Maine's Future Fund (5 MRS §62003), the Public Access to Maine Waters Fund (5 MRS §6203-A), and the Maine Working Waterfront Access Protection Fund (§6203-B), which describes the eligible uses of each fund. Farmland protection projects have consistently been paid for from the Land for Maine's Future Fund.

The Land for Maine's Future Program funded its first farmland protection projects in 1990. Since that time, we have funded a total of 42 farmland protection projects covering nearly 10,000 acres. In the intervening 30 years, our farmland protection partners have grown increasingly sophisticated, projects have grown more complex, and, while State's capacity has ebbed and flowed, the goal has remained remarkably consistent: protect the State's most significant farmland soils.

HARLOW BUILDING
18 ELKINS LANE
AUGUSTA, MAINE



PHONE: (207) 287-3200
FAX: (207) 287-2400
WEB: WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF

As we reflect on the accomplishments over the last thirty years and plan for the future, the Administration feels that establishing a dedicated farmland protection fund within the Land for Maine's Future Program, and the coordinating legislation within the Bureau of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, will ensure that the state and its partners will be able to more efficiently meet its farmland conservation, as well as climate-related, goals.

This legislation mirrors that of the Maine Working Waterfront Access Protection Fund, which has greatly benefitted the process for evaluating working waterfront projects, allowing the Department to:

- Establish a program to provide protection to strategically significant working farmland properties whose continued availability to commercial agricultural businesses is essential to the long-term future of the economic sector;
- Establish a review panel to advise the Commissioner in the operation of the program, including evaluating applications and recommending to the department applicants for participation in the program; and,
- Establish selection criteria in statute with which to evaluate applications for protection of working farmlands property.

The Land for Maine's Future Board will:

- Maintain the right to select projects for funding;
- Maintain the right to make grants according to rules adopted by the board; and,
- Maintain the right to authorize awards from the Fund.

In summary, this bill designates the Maine Working Farmland Access and Protection Program within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, by and through its Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources. This bill strengthens the alignment between the Department's farmland conservation goals and the Land for Maine's Future program. This legislation provides a transparent process for ensuring state funds are used to protect the highest priorities presented to the Land for Maine's Future Board.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I am happy to take any questions the Committee might have.