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Testimony introducing LD 558, “Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry To Study Alternative Cropping Systems for Farmers Affected by Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Contamination”

Presented by Representative Bill Pluecker, House District 95. Presented to the Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry Committee, Thursday, March 25th, 2021.

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and other distinguished members of the Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry Committee. I am Representative Bill Pluecker and I represent House District 95 which is Appleton, Hope, part of the town of Union, and Warren. Thank you for the opportunity to present LD 558, a resolution directing the DACF to study alternative cropping systems for farmers affected by PFAS contamination.

The issue of PFAS contamination is a major concern in our agricultural community as we see acreage of contaminated farmland increasing. Some of the farms that have been affected have already closed. If we do not take action to address this issue, we will see our farming community shrink as access to land will be constrained and we have to move off our contaminated fields.

Together - the Department, industry, and as a policy committee – we need to prepare ourselves for the work that is coming. The scope of this plan has yet to be determined. Today, I am presenting a strategy to promote real alternatives in how we grow food and plants. We need to determine how we can utilize our land in a way that still returns an income from our land despite contamination.

A policy of attempting to remediate the land and water will quickly become prohibitively expensive. We need to study how to keep the land productive for the farmers who own it, and weaken the farming community by losing key players. We need to work on the fundamental resiliency and flexibility of Maine’s farmers by

District 95: Appleton, Hope, (part) Union & Warren

creating a program that will allow them to continue to build their business under the most difficult of circumstances, as are likely to occur when contamination is found.

This bill will authorize a study to be carried out by the University of Maine and the Department to look into alternative agricultural entrepreneurship opportunities for affected farmers. The different opportunities to be studied may range from vegetable to livestock production. They could also study PFAS uptake rates from corn to zucchinis, and feasible income alternatives from solar generation to nursery stock.

When we will have a strong program within the Department that is ready to house the farmers under worst case scenarios, farmers will have the confidence to know that they can test their fields and that they will have alternatives to maintain their operation. We do not want to leave our farming community caught between a rock and a hard place when it comes time to test for contamination – believing they will lose their family’s way of life. We need to offer a program that is ready to answer their questions and give them the support in their recovery that they will need.

I appreciate the cooperation offered by the Department on this bill, and I hope the committee is ready to work with them, as I am, to define the study and work of this bill in a way that answers their most pressing questions.

Thank you for your time and attention.