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**Introducing LD 820, “Resolve, To Convene a Working Group To Develop Plans To Protect Maine's Agricultural Lands When Siting Solar Arrays”**

**Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

**April 1, 2021**

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Ned Claxton and I represent Senate District 20, which includes Auburn, Minot, Mechanic Falls, Poland, and New Gloucester. I’m here today to introduce LD 820, “Resolve, To Convene a Working Group To Develop Plans To Protect Maine's Agricultural Lands When Siting Solar Arrays”

A constituent and farm owner approached me several months ago with the observation that Maine was losing some of its best agricultural land as solar arrays were being put up. He noted that the best farmland was higher and dryer than the bottom land and often was located on the hills and ridges. Unfortunately, that often means near a road – the most accessible siting for building a solar array. He hoped we could do something to protect the land that is better for crops and animals and try to steer solar arrays to less desirable land.

After some research, I found the Maine Farmland Trust and an article on Farmland and commercial solar development. That led me to a to a Solar Siting Guidelines link. There I found some commonsense suggestions and wondered if any of them should be put into the statutes in some way. The farm owner certainly has the right to do with his land what he wants and to benefit from leasing to a solar energy company. But what if there were tax or other incentives to place the arrays on land that was not ‘Prime Farmland’ or ‘Land of Statewide Importance’, to encourage dual usage, or to use previously developed land?

My Resolve directs the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to convene a group of stakeholders this year to consider options for protecting prime farmland, encouraging solar siting on marginal land and preserving a farmer’s options to use the land to his advantage. The group would file a report, including any suggestions for legislation in January 2022.

Thank you for your attention. As a non-expert in this field, I will likely only be able to answer questions about the intent and the proposed process, but I welcome all questions.

Thank you.