



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry
By Chelsea Gazillo, American Farmland Trust, New England Policy Manager
April 1, 2021

RE: LD 820 – Resolve, To Convene a Working Group to Develop Plans to Protect Maine’s
Agricultural Lands When Siting Solar

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, my name is Chelsea Gazillo, and I am American Farmland Trust’s New England Policy Manager. I appreciate this opportunity to testify on behalf of American Farmland Trust in **neither support nor opposition** to LD 820 – Resolve, To Convene a Working Group to Develop Plans to Protect Maine’s Agriculture Lands When Siting Solar.

AFT supports accelerated solar development to reach Maine’s alternative energy goals while simultaneously promoting farmland conservation. We know that with proper solar siting guidelines, our agricultural lands can play a meaningful role in hosting solar energy while maintaining active and productive farmlands. When planned properly, clean renewable energy can co-exist with Maine’s agricultural sector, not displace it.

Competition between two beneficial land uses, agriculture, and solar development, delays the siting of needed renewable energy resources and threatens prime farmland and food systems when we take an either/or perspective. Without land use protections built into state permitting and approval processes, rapid solar development is likely to occur. Agricultural land generally provides easy conditions for construction and operation of a solar array: flat, sunny, large parcels. We know that the first step in identifying how to protect farmland while continuing to reach our alternative energy goals is proper planning, starting with convening a robust stakeholder process.

As the State of Maine explores strategies to increase climate change mitigation efforts, stakeholder engagement and the development of a comprehensive system for smart solar siting on farmland is key. Over the past two years – American Farmland Trust has put together a plethora of materials to aid state governments in assessing the best practices for smart solar siting. We hope that as Maine starts this stakeholder process, you will turn to us as a resource for advice on best practices for solar siting on farmland. I have attached further resources to this testimony.

Thank you for the opportunity to support testimony on LD 820.

[Smart Solar Siting in New England](#) and [Solar Siting Policy Strategies for Farmland Protection](#) were both compiled in partnership with AFT, Conservation Law Foundation, Acadia Center, Vermont Law School Farm Energy Initiative, and Vote Solar.

American Farmland Trust is an agricultural non-profit organization with a mission to save the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. AFT is the only national agricultural organization that approaches its work in this comprehensive, holistic manner. We recognize the connection between the land, forward-looking farming practices, and the farmers who do the work.

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