



# *Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association*

## *Common Ground Country Fair*

April 1, 2021

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Heather Spalding and I'm deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). I am submitting comments in support of the concept of LD 870 – *Resolve, Directing the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Maine Tribal Populations To Study the Impact of Policies Regarding Agriculture, Access to Land, Access to Grants and Access to Financing on African-American and Indigenous Farmers in the State.*

MOFGA is committed to creating a food system that is just and equitable for all. Modern agriculture is built on unceded traditional indigenous lands through human exploitation and co-opted knowledge. As a white-led organization, we must be explicit and transparent about how we are working towards our commitments to social justice. We believe in economic, environmental and social justice for all people involved in Maine's food system, including those most impacted by historic and present-day systemic oppression including white supremacy, colonization and extractive capitalism. We must listen, learn and support the resilient and strong communities that we believe the organic movement must represent.

We know from the \$1 billion settlement of the class action lawsuit against the US Department of Agriculture, *Pigford v. Glickman* in 1999, that racial discrimination against African-American farmers has been rampant. Payments were made to more than 13,300 farmers under the settlement's decree. A second appropriation of \$1.2 billion was appropriated for additional claims relating to that case. As our society works to address systemic racism, we must examine what may linger out of plain sight here in Maine. We know that multigenerational human rights atrocities have been committed against the Wabanaki people in Maine and we must all work to educate ourselves about it and consider how discrimination has impacted Wabanaki food and farming traditions.

We know that you share MOFGA's commitment to creating a food and agriculture that is equitable for all Mainers and we hope you will support this legislation securing \$20,000.00 to support the study. Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation. I urge you to support LD 870.

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### *About MOFGA*

*The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) started in 1971 and is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. We're a broad-based community that educates about and advocates for organic agriculture, illuminating its interdependence with a healthy environment, local food production, and thriving communities. We have a staff of just under 50 employees, a membership of more than 10,000, and an amazing community of about 2500 volunteers, many of whom we rely on to host our annual Common Ground Country Fair.*

*Since our beginning we have advocated for policies that reduce all farmers' and homeowners' reliance on pesticides, and all citizens' exposures to pesticides in their diets and in the air and drinking water. We believe that the dramatic increases since the 1950s in childhood and adult cancer rates, as well as immune system and reproductive abnormalities, are directly related to the toxins that increasingly contaminate our environment and threaten the very existence of the pollinators on which our food systems rely.*

*MOFGA is a statewide organization that has experienced significant growth over the past couple of decades. By the year 2030, we aim to increase the number of certified organic growers from 550 to 750 and the amount of organically managed land from 7% to 10% of the state's agricultural land. We offer an introductory farm apprenticeship program, beginning farmer training through our two-year Journey person program, and a Farm Resilience Program for farmers in years 5-10 of their business when they're statistically the most likely to experience business failure. MOFGA Certification Services (MCS) is our USDA accredited organic certification program. MCS also administers MOFGA's Certified Clean Cannabis program for medicinal and adult cannabis use in Maine. MCS certifies more than 70,000 acres of farmland in Maine, representing more than \$60 million in organic farm product sales. MOFGA-certified operations are run by Maine businesspeople for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While we envision a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum. We are members of the Agricultural Council of Maine and, while we don't always agree on all policy measures, we recognize and wholeheartedly agree that farmers must be financially successful if we expect to have a healthy Maine agriculture.*

*MOFGA looks forward to a day when highly toxic will not be regulated because they will cease to exist in agriculture, land management and building contexts. There are organic, mechanical, and biologic alternatives to most of the practices offered by industrial agribusiness.*