



**Testimony of Sharon Treat, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
In Support 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”

Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

April 1, 2021

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neill and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Sharon Treat and I live in Hallowell. I am Senior Attorney for the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), on whose behalf I am testifying today in support of LD 870.

IATP is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota with offices in Hallowell, Maine and other locations. IATP works closely with farmers and seeks to promote local, sustainable and environmentally beneficial agriculture and trade policies. We seek to advance more democratic and just policies in all of our work.¹

This is important legislation, and a matter of justice. A week ago, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture held its first-ever hearing to review the state of Black farmers in the U.S.² The hearing detailed a long history of racism in U.S. laws, policies and practices negatively affecting Black farmers that continue to this day: 99 percent of the funding for farmers in the first two rounds of COVID financial relief in 2020 went to White farmers, and 1 percent went to socially disadvantaged farmers; only 0.1 percent went to Black farmers.³

Of the 3.4 million farmers in the United States today, only 45,000 — 1.3 percent — are Black, down from 1 million a century ago, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. African American farmers also lost over 90% of the land they had at the turn of 19th century through a combination of legalized thievery and systematic discrimination, including at the USDA itself.⁴ And “legalized thievery” well describes the loss of Indigenous lands including agricultural land.

This legislation will help document the situation here in Maine, including access to land and financing, and identify what policies are needed to ensure equity in the administration of agricultural programs in the state, and in accessing technical, financial and other assistance. We urge the committee to vote “ought to pass” on this bill. Thank you.

¹ IATP also has offices in Washington, D.C. and Berlin, Germany (IATP Europe). For over 30 years, IATP has provided research, analysis and advocacy on a wide range of agriculture-related issues including farm to school; climate; agroecology; soil health

and water quality and access; farmworker health and economic security; and trade and market policies. For more information, see www.iatp.org.

² A recording of the hearing is on the committee website:

<https://agriculture.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=2141>. Written testimony and supporting documents here: <https://docs.house.gov/Committee/Calendar/ByEvent.aspx?EventID=111400>

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/03/25/vilsack-interview-usda-rescue-plan/>

⁴ Waymon R. Hinson & Edward Robinson: "We Didn't Get Nothing:" The Plight of Black Farmers. *Journal of African American Studies*, May 2008, PP:283–302 <https://sites.evergreen.edu/townhalls/wp-content/uploads/sites/28/2015/02/History-of-Black-Farmers.pdf >