

Testimony of Stewart Smith

To the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

In support of L.D 1565: An Act to Strengthen Maine's Agriculture, Food and Forest Economy

May 4, 2021

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I am Stewart Smith. While I am currently retired in York, Maine, I have spent my life in Maine agriculture as a farmer, Commissioner of Agriculture, and Professor of Sustainable Agriculture Policy at the University of Maine. I have seen Maine agriculture evolve from 40,000 smaller farms in the 1940s, to 7,000 farms in the 1980s with most sales from larger farms selling into industrial markets, to 8,000 farms in the 2020s with a resurgent of smaller and mid-scale farms selling into local and regional markets. This market segment has become critical to the vitality of our current Maine agriculture and LD 1565 addresses their needs and opportunities.

LD 1565 is properly targeted. It targets value added businesses in our natural resource industries. It provides support in technical, marketing and organizational structure that is needed by a number of food entrepreneurs.

LD 1565 is properly structured. It is guided by a Board composed of representatives from the targeted sectors. In my roles in the public sector I have found this is an excellent model to bring private experience into government programs.

LD 1565 is properly situated. The Department Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry is the proper lead agency; the Department of Economic and Community Development is a necessary partner.

LD 1565 is consistent with current State economic policy and diversity goals.

For these reasons I believe LD 1565 can make a positive and substantial contribution to Maine's economic and community vitality.