



MOFGA Testimony In Support Of
LD 736 - An Act To Enhance the Ecological Reserve System
January 25, 2022

Dear Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil and members of the Joint Standing Committee On Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry,

On behalf of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA), I am submitting comments in support of LD 736 - *An Act To Enhance the Ecological Reserve System*. MOFGA is creating a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us. Through education, training and advocacy, we are helping farmers thrive, making more local, organic food available and building sustainable communities. We envision a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture. This is vision of an agriculture that generates the vast majority of the state's food supply with locally, organically grown produce.

MOFGA recognizes that our community is one small part of nature's complex web and that a sustainable organic farming system in Maine cannot happen without clean air, clean water, healthy soils, biodiversity and vibrant natural ecosystems. Organic farmers try to mirror natural systems by maintaining biodiversity on the farm and conserving natural resources on their land. Farmers build the health of their soils in order to produce vibrant crops with strong yields, and they rely on thriving native habitats nearby to host beneficial pollinators and provide buffers from weather extremes like high winds, floods and droughts. We all benefit from natural lands that are protected and allowed to mature.

The ecological reserve system was created by legislation in 2000 to: enhance our understanding of biological and environmental change on the landscape and serve as long-term ecological research sites; maintain effective representations of all habitat types in Maine and help conserve biodiversity; and protect wildlife habitat for species that may not be protected on lands managed for other means.

MOFGA supports LD 736 because we feel that the original law has arbitrary caps that prevent the state from conserving all habitats in need of protection. Passage of LD 736 is necessary to allow protection of additional ecosystems and wildlife habitat by removing the caps. This legislation will be helpful as we work toward forest-based carbon sequestration, as identified in Maine's climate action plan.

Thank you so much for your consideration and we hope you will support this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Spalding
Deputy Director and Senior Policy Director

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 11,000 members, we certify more than 500 organic farms and processing facilities representing \$90 million in sales, and we are working hard to provide training and create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions 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.