



JANET T. MILLS  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY  
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER  
22 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

AMANDA E. BEAL  
COMMISSIONER

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

In Support of LD 856

*LD 856, An Act To Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands Conservation*

March 1, 2022

Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Nancy McBrady, and I am the Director of the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources within the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. I am speaking in support of LD 856, *An Act To Balance Renewable Energy Development with Natural and Working Lands Conservation*.

DACF supports renewable energy development in Maine and understands that solar is a key component of reducing our reliance on fossil fuels. We also support opportunities for farmers to address their own energy needs with renewable sources, and to enhance the economic viability of their operations with thoughtful siting of renewable energy infrastructure. To that end, DACF helped steward an Agricultural Solar Siting Stakeholder Group that was convened during 2021 and resulted in a report that made several recommendations regarding solar-ag policy development. LD 856 is a direct outgrowth of that stakeholder process.

DACF supports this legislation's creation of a database that tracks energy projects in Maine. Robust data collection and transparent distribution of information regarding permitted and constructed renewable energy projects are critical. Information regarding such projects is currently hard to find and often incomplete. Access to this data will allow a solid understanding of existing (or soon to be developed) solar sites and locations in the state, enabling the calculation of impacted lands, acreage, soil type(s), and other important trends. It will also allow stakeholders to ascertain whether there appears to be overdevelopment occurring in certain areas and to consider strategies to avoid that.

DACF further supports creating a pilot program plan that will explore the potential for dual-use solar projects in Maine. A pilot program is needed to conduct critical research on compatible crops and livestock in Maine to determine viability for farmers interested in pursuing solar energy generation on their land while continuing to farm actively. We need to assess the

HARLOW BUILDING  
18 ELKINS LANE  
AUGUSTA, MAINE



PHONE: (207) 287-3200  
FAX: (207) 287-2400  
WEB: [WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF](http://WWW.MAINE.GOV/DACF)

economic benefits of dual-use development on various types of farms producing a multitude of crops, as well as crop productivity in fruit and vegetable operations, the quality and quantity of forage in livestock systems, and the efficacy of energy generation. The results of a well-developed pilot program will be instrumental in demonstrating whether dual-use solar development is viable in Maine and could further additional future policy developments supporting dual-use growth.

The Department also supports having agricultural representatives engage with the Governor's Energy Office's ongoing Distributed Generation Stakeholder Group. That group is working to issue recommendations that support the continued development of renewable energy in Maine through cost-effective distributed generation. Therefore, it is critical for that stakeholder group to determine how to incorporate agricultural site characteristics – and natural resource characteristics – into future state long-term contracts or compensation mechanisms (such as adders, which would provide financial incentives for developers to design on-farm arrays for dual-use or co-location projects). DACF and GEO are committed to working together to ensure that agricultural representatives are actively included in the stakeholder group's discussions.

Last, in order for DACF to successfully support, engage, and advance solar policy that supports agriculture in Maine, we must have a new, full-time staff member join our team. We currently lack the expertise and headcount necessary to dedicate to this complex, technical, and critical policy arena. We appreciate the sponsor's willingness to add this permanent, funded position to this bill, as DACF won't successfully meet the bill's charge without this new staff person.

Thank you. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have now or at the work session.