



Maine Dairy Industry Association

Testimony of Tade Sullivan
Executive Director
Maine Dairy Industry Association

Thank you for allowing us to provide comments regarding the committee's consideration of LD 856, which is in part based on the recommendations of the Agricultural Solar Stakeholders Group.

The Maine Dairy Industry Association (MDIA), which represents all of Maine's dairy farms, believes that any legislation should strike a balance between the need to support renewable energy sources and supporting the long-term viability of dairy operations in our state.

As the committee is aware, Maine dairy farmers have felt the pressure of many years of depressed pricing, and of the inflationary economy. When solar companies wish to site projects on farmland historically rented to local farmers, it is hard for farmers to compete with well-financed energy projects. Let me be clear -- dairy farmers want to see solar projects be successful -- but not to the detriment of our farms. We believe that these projects can work with our farming operations, but only if care is taken to plan for their mutual success.

MDIA applauds the work of the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry and Governor Mills' Energy Office in convening an agricultural stakeholders group. In particular, we would like to underscore our support of three key recommendations made by the group.

We support funding and piloting dual-use siting of solar projects. By conducting a pilot program, the state can learn valuable lessons from real-work application of these techniques in siting solar arrays. A pilot program would allow farmers and renewable energy producers to fine-tune techniques to make sure mutual needs are achieved.

We believe that providing tax considerations must be made for any solar projects that are sited on farmland. Profit and loss margins are razor-thin on the typical farm in Maine, as the committee is aware. We believe that if we are to be successful in utilizing techniques that promote the dual-use of farmland, farmers and should not be penalized. A loss or reduction of farmland exemptions from taxation will discourage farmers from these projects, however, we do not believe that these protections should be extended to non-farmers.

We urge lawmakers to require siting authorities to consider by rule by scoring the impact of a potential project on farmland. It is important that siting authorities be required to consider the impact on farmland when approving solar projects, rather than simply the short-term economic gain that may be realized.

Thank you for allow us the opportunity to provide our feedback on solar siting on Maine farmland. Should you have any questions, I would be happy to provide further comments to the committee.

Tade Sullivan
Maine Dairy Industry Association
LD 856

the testimony provided is with regard to