

Nell Finnigan
Albion
LD 2013

My name is Nell Finnigan, my husband and I own and operate Ironwood Farm in Albion. We are one of the nine farms who's gone public about their PFAS contamination issues and I am in favor for LD 2013. We grow certified organic produce year-round, adjacent to farmland that was repeatedly spread with biosolids in the 1990s, and in turn contaminated both our farm wells—the highest being our irrigation well testing at 9000ppt. We are two young farmers, myself a native Mainer, who bought a run down, forgotten farmstead and through sheer force of will have turned it into a profitable farm business. I will spare you the tragedy this is for my family, for we are surely full of these chemicals, but everything we've worked in the last ten years hangs in the balance and I need the state's help getting to the other side of this mess.

As a business, we are currently in the midst of determining the damage such highly contaminated water has done to our crop land via irrigation. In the absence of any vegetable threshold guidance from the state, we pulled our products from the market. We shut our business down while we tested all of our greens, and storage crops, horrified at the news that we may have unknowingly been sending adulterated produce into our beloved community. At that time, there was no safety net, no income replacement fund on which to draw while we entered this heinously drawn-out process. Just our integrity, that's all my business had to lean on when we pulled our crops from the market. That was 7 weeks ago. We are still waiting: waiting to hear what the indemnity program will offer, waiting on test results, waiting to find what land we have to plant this season. I need a 12 month indemnity program while I investigate this issue on my farm. And after that, when we determine the extent of our contamination, I'm going to need funding to help my business to pivot to adjust to this new reality. Or I'm going to need help relocating to a new farm property. My husband and I are not giving up on farming in Maine but this is a huge blow. Decisions made by the state of Maine polluted my well, and potentially my farmland, and the state needs to help us get to the other side.

I'm not a politician, I'm a vegetable farmer. I'm frustrated by the conversations around this legislation as a potentially partisan issue. The impact of this bill touches each and every one of you. The State of Maine is at the forefront of investigating PFAS contamination in its farmland and food supply, but to continue further without a robust aid package to bolster farms through this discovery process is unconscionable and inefficient. There are farmers who won't want to look for this contamination on their land. Who can blame them? But the cat is out of the bag. We have to look. Our consumers will demand it. Those of us who sell directly to consumers or small grocers already feel the pressure, and farmers who sell into larger markets will soon. This is an issue of food safety, of public health, of farm security. Do not be fooled into thinking this is simply an aid package for a few affected farmers. This package has the funding to allow this state to rapidly, and justly investigate this issue in our food supply—putting this nasty chapter behind us and restoring Maine's agricultural products to the esteem they so deserve.

With a proper support system in place, I know that the integrity of Maine's farmers will be our biggest asset in the journey to purge our food supply and farmland of these toxic chemicals—but we must be there to catch them, and help them in their journey back to producing food they can be proud of, food Maine can be proud of.