



MAINE FARMLAND TRUST

**Testimony of Ellen Stern Griswold, Policy and Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust,
before the 130th Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and
Forestry**

March 15, 2022

Good morning, Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Ellen Stern Griswold, and I am testifying today on behalf of Maine Farmland Trust (MFT) in support of LD 2013 – *An Act Relating to Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Contamination in the State*.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect nearly 300 farms and keep over 60,000 acres of farmland in farming, while supporting over 800 farm families with a range of services. Our four main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Farm Viability in the form of business planning and technical assistance to help farmers become and remain economically viable, and Public Outreach and Policy to grow the future of farming in Maine.

As many of us are now aware, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a group of chemicals which are extremely persistent in the environment and in the human body. PFAS have been produced and used in a variety of products and industries since the 1950s, ranging from food packaging to firefighting foam. Studies suggest that these chemicals are associated with increased health risks such as increases in the risk of kidney and testicular cancer, increases in cholesterol levels, increases in the risk of high blood pressure or pre-eclampsia in pregnant women, and decreases in how well the body responds to vaccinations.¹

The presence and persistence of PFAS contamination in soil, water, and crops is an emerging national issue, and the unfolding information about PFAS in Maine is alarming, especially for farmers whose health and livelihoods are at risk. The application of PFAS-contaminated sludge or residuals decades ago by farmers who were unaware of the presence and health risks of PFAS can still impact PFAS levels in the soil and water today. Sludge application has led to the contamination of at least nine family farms and hundreds of residential wells, and this number is likely to increase as the state ramps up testing on over 700 sites across Maine.

MFT has been working to support several of these farms as they address the PFAS contamination on their land, and MFT staff have witnessed firsthand the significant impacts these farm businesses and families have experienced from the contamination. These impacts include losing the financial value of products that can no longer be sold; making the investments to change farm management practices; having to purchase supplemental feed

¹ Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, *PFOS, PFOA and other PFAS Questions and Answers* (July 7, 2021).

from other sources; and even having to purchase or lease additional land to use for their farming operations. These farmers have also had their wells contaminated, and live with ongoing concerns about the health effects of the PFAS contamination for themselves and their families. Finally, these farmers worry about the value of their land – their largest investment – and what their options might be if they are no longer able to farm there.

The future of farming in Maine depends on how we meet the challenges of PFAS contamination on our farms and our farmland. State agencies have been working tirelessly to address the PFAS issue from a variety of different angles. But our farmers need an unprecedented level of support to address the health and financial impacts of PFAS contamination, and Maine will need robust investments in research and remediation so that we have the farmland we need for a strong and vibrant agriculture sector in the future. MFT supports LD 2013 because it would establish a fund and associated advisory committee to invest \$100 million in farmer support needs such as income replacement and mortgage payments; health monitoring; new infrastructure, business models, and farm management practices; relocation services and the state purchase of significantly contaminated farms; and research that is necessary to support the development of Maine agriculture in this new context, including research on remediation methods. Investing \$100 million in these initiatives will be critical for effectively and efficiently supporting the agriculture sector in Maine through this challenging time.

MFT does believe that certain changes should be made to the language of LD 2013 to ensure that the bill has the greatest impact possible. These proposed changes include requiring the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, in consultation with the Advisory Committee, to produce a plan for the administration of the fund that would establish funding priorities and oversight. As part of that plan, MFT strongly urges that priority be given to such categories as farmer income replacement; assistance for new infrastructure, management and business models; the state purchase of significantly contaminated farms; and health monitoring for farmers, as well as other impacted communities over time. MFT also recommends that funding be used to support the establishment of food safety criteria, without which many farmers are put in the difficult position of having to determine themselves whether to pull products from the market. Finally, MFT would urge the Committee to include the Director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention in the Advisory Committee, given the focus on health monitoring, as well as include members of the Legislature or provide another mechanism for ensuring legislative oversight over the distribution of funds.

Agriculture is a key component of Maine's economy, contributing over \$3.6 billion in economic impact and supporting over 27,000 jobs statewide.² But only with effective and comprehensive support will farmers be able to continue to feed Maine's economy and people for generations to come. For all of these reasons, MFT hopes that you will support LD 2013 and include some of the language changes proposed in my testimony. I appreciate the opportunity to testify, and I would be happy to answer any questions that you have.

² Farm Credit East, "Northeast Economic Engine: Agriculture, Forest Products and Commercial Fishing," (2020), , available at: <https://www.farmcrediteast.com/knowledge-exchange/Reports/2020%20Northeast%20Economic%20Engine>.