

Testimony in Support of LD 2013 –
An Act Relating to Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Contamination in the State

March 15, 2022

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and Members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee, I am Ben Whalen, Co-Owner of Bumbleroot Organic Farm in Windham and board member of the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). I’m providing testimony in support of LD 2013, which would make important investments in protecting Maine farms and Maine people.

As young farmers, my wife, business partners, and I bought our farm in Windham seven years ago. When considering the purchase of our property, we poured over soil maps, focusing on soil type designations and how well water drained through the fields. At that time, we had no idea that we should be looking at sludge maps or be concerned about a Tier 1 site across the street that might be leaching cancer-causing chemicals into the water that we use to irrigate and wash our crops. We are currently waiting on test results of our water and we’re hopeful that our worry surrounding PFAS contamination on our farm is for not.

“Forever chemicals” are a widespread environmental hazard and pose a serious threat to the health of Maine people and natural resource-based businesses like mine. Although PFAS has only recently become part of the public discourse, its presence in our environment and on Maine farms is decades in the making, without the knowledge of impacted farmers who dedicate their lives to stewarding the land and producing healthy food for our communities.

LD 2013 would help Maine address the heart-breaking reality Maine farmers are facing – the loss of their livelihoods because of land and livestock affected by PFAS-contaminated biosolids that were authorized for application to their land by the State of Maine. This bill would create a source of funding for farmers who have been impacted by PFAS contamination by providing short-term income replacement, buyouts for those farmers whose land has been irreparably harmed by PFAS, long-term medical monitoring, and environmental testing and monitoring.

Research shows PFAS is cumulative; it builds up over time and does not break down in the environment, so the timing of when the state acts to mitigate the problem matters. We need to address PFAS contamination and assist farmers immediately to avoid further exposure and detrimental impacts to farmers, which will take the form of financial losses and medical and emotional harm.

I appreciate the work that has been done by Maine lawmakers in the past two years to elevate the State’s attention to the PFAS problem. This bill complements those efforts by establishing a Fund to Address PFAS Contamination, and an Advisory Committee that will provide recommendations to the Department on how best to administer those funds.

Farms are a vital part of Maine’s economy. The viability of these businesses, the well-being of the people who care for the land, and the greater health of our communities requires that the State of Maine act now.

Please vote to pass LD 2013 to help further address the serious problem of PFAS contaminated land across our state. Thank you for your time.

Ben Whalen
Windham
LD 2013

Testimony in Support of LD 2013 –
An Act Relating to Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Contamination in the State
March 15, 2022

Senator Dill, Representative O’Neil, and Members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee, I am Ben Whalen, Co-Owner of Bumbleroot Organic Farm in Windham and board member of the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). I’m providing testimony in support of LD 2013, which would make important investments in protecting Maine farms and Maine people.

As young farmers, my wife, business partners, and I bought our farm in Windham seven years ago. When considering the purchase of our property, we poured over soil maps, focusing on soil type designations and how well water drained through the fields. At that time, we had no idea that we should be looking at sludge maps or be concerned about a Tier 1 site across the street that might be leaching cancer-causing chemicals into the water that we use to irrigate and wash our crops. We are currently waiting on test results of our water and we’re hopeful that our worry surrounding PFAS contamination on our farm is for not.

“Forever chemicals” are a widespread environmental hazard and pose a serious threat to the health of Maine people and natural resource-based businesses like mine. Although PFAS has only recently become part of the public discourse, its presence in our environment and on Maine farms is decades in the making, without the knowledge of impacted farmers who dedicate their lives to stewarding the land and producing healthy food for our communities.

LD 2013 would help Maine address the heart-breaking reality Maine farmers are facing – the loss of their livelihoods because of land and livestock affected by PFAS-contaminated biosolids that were authorized for application to their land by the State of Maine. This bill would create a source of funding for farmers who have been impacted by PFAS contamination by providing short-term income replacement, buyouts for those farmers whose land has been irreparably harmed by PFAS, long-term medical monitoring, and environmental testing and monitoring.

Research shows PFAS is cumulative; it builds up over time and does not break down in the environment, so the timing of when the state acts to mitigate the problem matters. We need to address PFAS contamination and assist farmers immediately to avoid further exposure and detrimental impacts to farmers, which will take the form of financial losses and medical and emotional harm.

I appreciate the work that has been done by Maine lawmakers in the past two years to elevate the State’s attention to the PFAS problem. This bill complements those efforts by establishing a Fund to Address PFAS Contamination, and an Advisory Committee that will provide recommendations to the Department on how best to administer those funds.

Farms are a vital part of Maine’s economy. The viability of these businesses, the well-being of the people who care for the land, and the greater health of our communities requires that the State of Maine act now.

Please vote to pass LD 2013 to help further address the serious problem of PFAS contaminated land across our state. Thank you for your time.