



To: Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

From: Elise Hartill, Ezra Sassaman, Nell Houde, Winston Antoine: Maine Youth for Climate Justice

Date: March 15, 2023

Re: Testimony in favor of LD 901: Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Project to Support Farm Apprenticeships in Maine

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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and the honorable members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, our names are Elise, Ezra, Nell, and Winston. We are writing as representatives for Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ), a coalition of over 460 youth from across the state who are fighting for bold climate action and a just transition to a livable future in Maine. We are writing in favor of LD 901.

We understand food sovereignty and continuous access to locally produced food to be an important part of climate justice.

In Maine, many indicators for the future of farming are pointing in the wrong direction. According to 2017 Census of Agriculture data, the average age of Maine farmers that year was 57.8 years old, around 32% were over 65, and only around 9% were under 35.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the number of farms and area of farmland has been steadily dropping. In Maine, the number of farms fell 7% between 2012 and 2017 while the amount of farmland in the state shrank by 10% during that same period.

Maine has a distinct interest in helping farmers convey important agricultural knowledge to future generations. At it currently stands, many farm apprentices are paid a weekly stipend of only around \$200 per week, a reflection of the thin or sometimes nonexistent profit margins in agricultural work.

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<sup>1</sup> USDA, [2017 Census of Agriculture State Profile: Maine](#), Accessed March 14, 2023.

*Winston:* I have personally been in positions where I have worked on farms and have not been paid well. Farm work is something I am highly interested in but am still very new to doing. With the increasing shortage of farmers and the increasing age of Maine farmers, I see this as something that is very important.

To solve this problem, LD 901 proposes the creation of a pilot program with \$5,000 grants to allow farms to pay their apprentices a living wage. These grants will be targeted towards farms that engaged in sustainable practices such as crop rotation, increasing biodiversity, and rotational grazing, as well as committed to selling produce in their local communities.

LD 901 will help economically-strapped farmers properly train and pass on skills and knowledge to the next generation. With funds available for this type of work, it will incentivize younger generations to learn and become the future farmers of the state. Having funds specifically meant for this will ameliorate the issue of the brain and youth drain that have been happening in Maine for years.

For the above reasons, our coalition, Maine Youth for Climate Justice, urges you to vote ought-to-pass on LD 901. Thank you.