

Good morning,

My name is Eric Saucier and I am writing today representing Central Maine Dairy Equipment's support for LD 384. CMDE is a small central Maine company that supports dairy farms across the state of Maine. Our work ranges from refrigeration, electrical installation and repair, milking parlor installation and maintenance, barn equipment and anything else we can do to help keep the farm operating from a mechanical point of view.

We currently employ 7 team members that come from various walks of life. Our dairy technicians come from construction, electrical, HVAC, and dairy farming backgrounds. Dairy farming is constantly evolving and to keep technicians up to speed, constant education is a must. Every time we set out for more training, we are adding value to the employees, the business, the dairy farmers and the economy in general.

A perfect example of this is the introduction to robotic milking in the state. In October of 2020, we installed the first two milking robots in Maine. None of us had ever worked on a voluntary milking system and although we still have a lot to learn, we are developing the infrastructure needed for widespread robotic milking in the state. We often meet with farms to talk about their future with this new technology. Although most are excited about technology, the conversations often turn to market uncertainty and rising costs. In our current situation inputs are going up faster than we have ever seen. Dairy milking equipment and cleaning products are not exempt from this. In 2022 alone, we saw cleaning and cow health products rise by over 23%. These products are needed to not only maintain a healthy herd of animals, but also to deliver a quality product to the end user. Ideally, when a dairy spends more, they have also improved their operation and product. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The added expense gives them the ability to continue as usual, using the money set aside for facility investment to run the day-to-day business. A fair number of dairy operations talk about waiting to see what is going to happen before committing to upgrades. This has created a trickle-down effect to supporting companies like ours.

Let me use our small company to quickly illustrate the trickledown effect. As I said earlier, Central Maine Dairy employs 7 skilled employees. These are well-paid positions with most employees requiring company service vehicles due to the nature of our work. Between wages, vehicle and equipment acquisition, operating costs, continued education, fuel, parts, insurances, and maintaining assets, the vast majority of our income gets injected directly back into the local Maine economy one way or another. We work hard at keeping our money local as we don't see the long-term benefits of sending our money to a cheaper, online vendor. Most dairy farmers we deal with feel the same way. Keeping business local provides value to them and the community around them.

Although dairy farms aren't our only customers there is no denying they are our core customers and without them, there would not be a Central Maine Dairy Equipment as we know it today. The vast majority of farmers don't want to just survive, they want to thrive. They need a business that will attract the next generation to keep aspiring to feed our state. A thriving environment attracts talented people into our lane and makes agriculture more attractive in a world full of work opportunities.

I appreciate the opportunity to show our support for LD-384 appropriately. I know we can all agree on the positive impact dairy farmers have on the local economy and local community.

Thank you.