



Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
in support of
LD 384, An Act Addressing Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

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Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pleucker and Members of the Committee:

My name is Amy Winston. I live in Edgecomb. I am submitting this testimony in support of the sponsor's amendment to LD 384, *An Act Addressing Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry*, as Senior Policy Director, on behalf of Coastal Enterprises, Inc.

Coastal Enterprises, Inc., or CEI, is a non-profit, mission driven community development financial institution (CDFI) based in Brunswick. CEI works to build a just, vibrant, and climate-resilient future for people and communities in Maine and rural regions by integrating finance, business expertise and policy solutions in ways that make the economy work more equitably. CEI supports Maine's agricultural community as central to Maine's culture and economy. Since its founding in 1977, CEI has invested \$32,682,424 in Maine's agriculture and food economy. Our focus on natural resource-based businesses and commitment to value chain development in Maine's heritage industries has only grown over the last 4 decades. Since FY 2018, CEI has provided \$17,513,606 in financing to food and agriculture related enterprises.

CEI recognizes the dairy industry as the backbone of Maine's agricultural economy. Dairy farms rely on many ancillary farm services to function; and, in addition, maintain large acres of farmland in working production. These farms have defined Maine's rural landscapes for generations, and dairy families are deeply invested in their rural communities. For these reasons, CEI has identified dairy farms as a priority for its agriculture and food system strategy. As an institution that provides financing to farm businesses, we know that access to flexible operating capital is key for an industry at the mercy of federally mandated milk prices that do not often reflect the true cost of production here in Maine.

We have learned how crucial the Maine Milk Commission policy has been to these businesses and surrounding communities. While no panacea for the myriad challenges facing Maine's dairy industry, this one-time allocation to the Dairy Stabilization Program is critical in bridging the gap between the commercial wholesale prices dairy farmers receive for their product and the actual costs of production. While the industry is experiencing acute crisis, this policy is critical to mitigating the current crisis by preventing the further disappearance of these important businesses.

To buttress this industry, CEI supports the proposed allocation to the Maine Milk Commission Maine to provide one-time payments to milk producers who produced milk (and reported production information to the Maine Milk Commission) in 2022 and are currently participating in the Tier program. We encourage the committee to support Maine dairy farmers and rural communities and vote in support of this bill. Thank you for considering this testimony.