

Carrick Gambell
Scarborough
LD 579

Legislators,

I submit this testimony in favor of LD 579. Through my professional and personal life, I've observed the immense hurdles young farmers face as they seek to build stable businesses for their families and communities. I work with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, and regularly connect with aspiring farmers, and farmers beginning their professional careers on leased farmland. In Cumberland and York Counties, where I spend most of my time, the land prices at market value are simply out of reach for most of these folks. Southern Maine has a rich agricultural history, and rich soils to feed our state, but without increased protection, I fear that market forces will lead to the commercial and residential development of much of this land. The average age of the Maine farmer is pushing 60, and I personally know many operators in Southern Maine in their 60s and 70s, without clear succession plans. Only about 5% of Maine farmland is permanently conserved, compared to 15-20% in our neighboring New England States. I believe that protecting existing farmland from development, and supporting an affordable pathway to farm leasing and ownership, are critical steps the State must take to ensure a vibrant, resilient agricultural future in Maine. We have no dearth of aspiring farmers, and the potential land-base to be the "bread-basket" of New England. Thanks for taking the time to consider this issue, and for reading my testimony.

Warmly,
Carrick Gambell