

7 February 2024

131st Maine Legislature's Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

LD2188: Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 26: Producer Margins, a Major Substantive Rule of the Maine Milk Commission

Chair Ingwersen, Chair Pluecker and esteemed members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee:

My name is Lilla Tilton-Flood and I am submitting this testimony supporting *LD 2188: Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 26: Producer Margins, a Major Substantive Rule of the Maine Milk Commission* as a soon to be graduated DVM who will be returning to Maine to join a veterinary practice serving Maine farmers and their food production animals. I was born and raised on a family dairy farm in Maine's Dairy Capital of Clinton. I attended the University of Maine at Orono where I had intended to enter the human medical field but in the midst of my studies I realized I wanted to follow the footsteps of my parents, aunt and uncle and grandparents and be a part of agriculture. My aunt is our herd vet and she has been a powerful influence on my life and helped me define my career and future goals to be become a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine. As an undergraduate at UMO I was a D1 student athlete, representing the Black Bears as a member of the field hockey team. I also worked at Witter Farm, often times milking cows before practice and our program in the Dairy Challenge. Growing up I thought what I wanted for my future was far away from our dairy farm, our little town, and our corner of the world and what I realized was that Maine and Maine agriculture was my true home and future. I will complete my graduate education at Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine this May when I receive my Doctorate and will soon after return to a Maine to work in a veterinary practice where I will serve patients and clients of a wide variety but will focus on large animals and food production animals. A role that is desperately needed here in Maine. And as important as I am to the health and sustainability of Maine's dairy industry, the well being our our dairy industry is crucial for my future. This interdependency is a lot like the relationship between the State of Maine's Tier Program and Maine's Dairy Farmers. The future of Maine's food system, economy, working lands and healthy communities depends incredibly upon the sustainability of our dairy farms and dairy community which in turn is dependent upon the Tier Program. The

investment the people of Maine have made in the Stabilization/Tier program is a helluva bargain, despite its rising price tag because it is not just preserving what we have (local, sustainable, delicious, and nutritious milk and dairy foods, well stewarded lands and animals, jobs, tax income, and the engine of our local and state economies) but it is crucial to our future. A future that is dependent upon the role that Maine's animal agriculture plays in battling climate crisis, ensuring and bolstering our local food system, and attracting Maine kids like me to grow up and dream big about living and working in Maine. Without this program and without it adopting and acknowledging the changes and increases in CoP our dairy farms, and their related and dependent stakeholder industries, would be unable to provide a pathway to the future that allows Maine kids like me to dream of being a lifelong Mainer, right here in the 207.

So when you are looking at this legislation, and you are hearing from farmers and veterinarians, and equipment dealers, and lenders, and grain companies, and cooperatives, and all these people who have made their lives all about dairy farming and feeding Maine and you start to worry about the cost and about what is it all worth I really hope you think about someone like me. Someone who was born and raised here and realized that this is where she wanted to be. Not just in Maine, but part of Maine's dairy community and that the whole reason I am choosing to come back is because there is a dairy farm family in this state that reaches almost all the corners of it and has the support of the State, the Legislature, and the people of Maine through this program. I came back because I have a future here and I want to be a part of Maine's future and without this program and the adoption of the Cost of Production levels I worry that for me and my generation and those younger that future may not be available.

Thank you for your time and in case you are wondering, I am counting down the days until I can say that my home and my career is in Maine and on Maine farms.

Sincerely,
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