



**Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry  
in support of LD 2212, *An Act to Strengthen Maine's Agriculture, Food and Forest Economy by Funding  
the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment***

2/28/2024

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and ACF Committee members:

My name is Amy Winston and I live in Edgecomb. I am testifying on behalf of [Coastal Enterprises, Inc. \(CEI\)](#) in support of LD 2212. Founded in 1977, CEI is a non-profit, mission-driven community development corporation (CDC) and community development financial institution (CDFI) based in Brunswick. CEI's mission is to build a just, vibrant, and climate resilient future for people and communities in Maine and rural regions. We do this by integrating finance, business expertise, and policy solutions in ways that make the economy work more equitably. Since its inception, CEI has invested \$43.6 million in agriculture and food related businesses and \$9 million in forestry businesses.

Our 46-year commitment to supporting job-creating natural resource-based businesses and local supply chain development has only grown in the last decade. Since 2014, CEI has invested \$32 million in agriculture and food related businesses and \$3 million in the forest products sector. We know that these investments are not enough. We continually seek new investment partners and sources of patient, affordable, and flexible financing – the type of capital that is scarce in private markets yet critical to the development, retention, and expansion of sustainable food and forest products businesses.

Natural resource-based businesses are foundational to Maine's economy, culture, and identity. Small and medium sized enterprises in these sectors are an economic backbone – the lifeblood and livelihood of many communities. Such enterprises need capital and assistance to survive and extreme weather, changing seasons, global market concentration and local development pressures compound the challenges these businesses face. It is state policy to foster business growth, talent, and innovation in Maine's agricultural, food and forest products industries. This bill supports Maine's ten-year economic development plan objectives, four-year climate action plan, and statewide initiative to end hunger. Additionally, this program aligns with Maine's role in regional food system planning, to get more Maine grown food into local, state and regional retail stores and institutions.<sup>1</sup>

LD 2212 provides \$10 million in one-time funding for the [Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund](#), which was established to provide access to capital and technical services that do not currently exist on a statewide level in Maine.<sup>2</sup> This fund creates a sustainable funding mechanism to support ongoing investment in these industries and to redress financial inequities for historically disadvantaged businesses in these sectors through interagency coordination and public-private partnerships with service providers that have industry-specific expertise. These service providers are

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<sup>1</sup>[Maine Economic Development Strategy, 2020-2029: A Focus on Talent and Innovation](#); [Maine Won't Wait: A Four Year Plan for Climate Action \(2020\)](#); [Everyone at the Table: Maine's Plan to End Hunger by 2030 \(PDF\)](#); Food Solutions New England's [A New England Food Vision](#) and the New England Food System Planners Partnership [New England Feeding New England: Cultivating A Reliable Food Supply](#) (aka 30% by 2030).

<sup>2</sup> In 2021, [LD 1565](#) provided the language in [LD 1733 \(Public Law 2021/Ch 483, Part KK\)](#), which established but did not fund the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund. In 2023, [LD 1670](#) appropriated \$500,000 for the Fund.



effective conduits for delivering capital and services to businesses in low-income communities and communities of color.

There is potential for growth in Maine’s agriculture, seafood and food and beverage processing cluster; urgent need for infrastructure investment; and high demand for technical services and equity-like capital.<sup>3</sup> The DACF has confirmed that this fund fulfills a need that is not being met and creates a unique financing opportunity to support iconic businesses and benefit rural communities. The 2022 federally-funded Governor’s Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan [Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Program](#), the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) received 850 funding requests from qualifying businesses, worth \$180 million and subsequently awarded \$19.3 million allocated for this purpose to a mix of 64 farm and food processing businesses statewide. The need for infrastructure investments has only been compounded by the [2023 growing season](#) and damage sustained to infrastructure in [recent storms](#).

Modeled on successful programs in [Vermont](#) and [Massachusetts](#), the MAFFPIF expands on existing industry efforts here in Maine – e.g., [FocusMaine](#), [Maine Center for Entrepreneurs’ Top Gun](#) and [Food Accelerators](#), [CEI’s Tastemakers](#) and [Catalyst Fund](#) initiatives – that propel innovation, business growth and job creation in early-stage and start-up food processing and manufacturing businesses, which employ local people and source from Maine growers/producers, multiplying each investment. All of Maine benefits when businesses in these sectors are successful.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of this bill. We look forward to working collaboratively with the Departments of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and Economic and Community Development, the Fund Advisory Board, and other stakeholders to help finally launch this Fund and we encourage the committee to vote **Ought-to-Pass on LD 2212**.

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<sup>3</sup>[Growing Maine’s Food Industry, Growing Maine | Harvard Kennedy School](#) Harvard (2015); Maine Departments of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and Economic and Community Development, Heritage Industry Infrastructure Survey: Results & Analysis – Agriculture & Forestry (2021)