



Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

Common Ground Country Fair

March 8, 2021

Good morning Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. My name is Heather Spalding and I'm deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA).

I am submitting comments in support of LD 489 – a *Resolution, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Establish a Right to a Healthy Environment*. MOFGA wishes to thank Senator Maxmin and the co-sponsors of the legislation who are showing bipartisan support this critical initiative. Pennsylvania and Montana have passed similar versions of this amendment, and other states are considering it as well.

This bill aligns with MOFGA's mission, which advocates for organic agriculture, illuminating its interdependence with a healthy environment, local food production, and thriving communities. We are helping people in Maine and beyond gain access to healthy, locally produced food, and an overall reduction of toxic chemicals in our food, air and water.

We have been busy in the Legislature this year advocating for programs that rebuild the health of our soils. We're seeking an end to spraying synthetic carcinogenic, neurotoxic, endocrine disrupting agrichemicals on our land. We're seeking justice for poor, rural, underrepresented and underserved communities that bear the brunt of industrial pollution. We want to show solidarity for the Wabanaki people who have inhabited the region in harmony with nature for almost 15,000 years.

Most of the bills that MOFGA is working on in this legislative session seek solutions to environmental and human health problems caused by practices that once seemed like good ideas. The ends of the practices once justified the means. Now our water, air, soil and bodies are contaminated, our wild ecosystems are collapsing, and we're facing the next mass extinction. We have to shift from relative risk decision making to a precautionary approach.

Monsanto's herbicide glyphosate (commonly known as Roundup) was brought to market as an efficiency tool for corn and soy production. Now Monsanto's owner, the chemical giant Bayer, is embroiled in more than \$12 billion in lawsuit settlements from plaintiffs who contracted non-Hodgkin's lymphoma from glyphosate exposure. And the Environmental Protection Agency reported in December that 93% of plant and animal species on the Endangered Species List are threatened by glyphosate.

Another chemical company, Dupont, introduced fluorinated chemicals in production of countless convenient home products back in the 1950s, and now rural communities in Maine are struggling with staggering levels of per- and polyfluoroalkyl compounds (PFAS) contamination in their water and soil. Just this morning we learned of a class action lawsuit likely to be in the tens of millions of dollars due to PFAS contamination of well water in Somerset County.

LD 489 would create a strong legal precedent for any future legislation, establishing that bills could not violate the rights to a healthy environment, and that a Governor or Legislature could not infringe on these rights.

MOFGA fully recognizes that in order to build a more local, more organic Maine agriculture, we need to ensure that Maine farmers and farm businesses can make a comfortable living through sustainable management practices. We maintain that financial sustainability on the farm is inextricably linked to healthy people and healthy ecosystems.

We recognize that many farmers have expressed concern about the breadth of the language in this proposed constitutional amendment. What will this mean for farmers who already have so many soil and water health practices built into their farm management plans, and have to comply with significant regulations? We know this amendment will present many questions for how we can move forward safely and successfully. But we have to act swiftly and reframe our collective approach to creating new products, technologies and industrial and agricultural management practices. This amendment will move us away from the relative risk approach that has polluted our air, water, soil and bodies, toward a precautionary approach that ensures safety before introducing into our environment.

Thank you for your consideration of this important bill. We urge you to pass this and allow the people of Maine to show their support for a healthy Maine future.

About MOFGA

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) started in 1971 and is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. We're a broad-based community that educates about and advocates for organic agriculture, illuminating its interdependence with a healthy environment, local food production, and thriving communities. We have a staff of just under 50 employees, a membership of more than 10,000, and an amazing community of about 2500 volunteers, many of whom we rely on to host our annual Common Ground Country Fair.

Since our beginning we have advocated for policies that reduce all farmers' and homeowners' reliance on pesticides, and all citizens' exposures to pesticides in their diets and in the air and drinking water. We believe that the dramatic increases since the 1950s in childhood and adult cancer rates, as well as immune system and reproductive abnormalities, are directly related to the toxins that increasingly contaminate our environment and threaten the very existence of the pollinators on which our food systems rely.

MOFGA is a statewide organization that has experienced significant growth over the past couple of decades. By the year 2030, we aim to increase the number of certified organic growers from 550 to 750 and the amount of organically managed land from 7% to 10% of the state's agricultural land. We offer an introductory farm apprenticeship program, beginning farmer training through our two-year Journey person program, and a Farm Resilience Program for farmers in years 5-10 of their business when they're statistically the most likely to experience business failure. MOFGA Certification Services (MCS) is our USDA accredited organic certification program. MCS also administers MOFGA's Certified Clean Cannabis program for medicinal and adult cannabis use in Maine. MCS certifies more than 70,000 acres of farmland in Maine, representing more than \$60 million in organic farm product sales. MOFGA-certified operations are run by Maine businesspeople for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While we envision a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum. We are members of the Agricultural Council of Maine and, while we don't always agree on all policy measures, we recognize and wholeheartedly agree that farmers must be financially successful if we expect to have a healthy Maine agriculture.

MOFGA looks forward to a day when highly toxic will not be regulated because they will cease to exist in agriculture, land management and building contexts. There are organic, mechanical, and biologic alternatives to most of the practices offered by industrial agribusiness.