



Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

Common Ground Country Fair

May 7, 2021

Good afternoon 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'm speaking today in support of LD 1600 - *An Act To Investigate Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substance Contamination of Land and Groundwater*.

MOFGA is creating a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us. Through education, training and advocacy, MOFGA is helping farmers thrive, making more local, organic food available and building sustainable communities. MOFGA started in 1971 and is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. As we celebrate our 50th anniversary, we're building our advocacy capacity and we really appreciate the opportunity to work with you and other legislative committees to achieve our policy goals.

MOFGA has members thousands of homes across the state – in rural, suburban and urban areas. Healthy soil, water and air are top priorities for our members. All of them are vulnerable to the impact of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and we're growing more concerned about the specific threat of PFAS-contaminated drinking groundwater and soil. PFAS threatens the health of Maine people as well as Maine's rural economy. Maine needs funding to support ongoing and expanded research about the extent of the problem.

The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and the Department of Environmental Protection are working incredibly hard to determine the extent of the PFAS problems facing Maine and it seems that we're just scratching the surface. We need much more testing so we can take steps to protect ourselves. Testing is expensive and the cost burden should not fall on public citizens whose environments have been poisoned through no fault of their own. Rather, the cost of testing should be the responsibility of the chemical manufacturers and the companies that knowingly sell contaminated sludge.

Generating testing funds through fees on sludge seems appropriate – akin to the registration fees required for selling pesticides in Maine. Those fees amass more than enough funding to run Maine's Board of Pesticides Control and, in fact, they generate a surplus each year. I understand from the Maine Water Environment Association that fees on sludges derived from public water and wastewater systems could amount to \$1 million for testing.

We do feel that a critical and urgent action should be turning off the PFAS tap to ensure that the class of forever chemicals stops adding to the many contaminants of municipal sludge. In fact PFAS is just one of many taps needing to be turned off but we appreciate that there is great focus on this particular class. Organic certification prohibits the use of biosolids as soil amendments due to its many toxic contaminants. If municipal sludge were not so badly contaminated with chemicals, many of which come from every day household products, there would be many more options for safe recycling of biosolids to build healthy, carbon sequestering soils.

MOFGA's staff members are fielding calls from concerned members (farmers, gardeners and consumers) who worry that they may become victims of the PFAS legacy – whether by proximity to land treated long ago with contaminated sludge, well water contamination, or day to day exposure through consumer products including food. We're working hard to provide helpful information but it's

a huge challenge. [We have created a resource page on our website geared toward farmers but useful for everyone.](#) There is a lot of fear and uncertainty in the farming community, and, like so many public employees, researchers, and concerned organizations, MOFGA is trying to provide additional social, emotional and technical support to farmers and citizens who may be facing the issues of PFAS contamination.

A senior official at the Centers for Disease Control said that PFAS presents “one of the most seminal public health challenges for the next decades.” PFAS health risks include problems with neurological development, lowered fertility in men and women, liver disorders, endocrine system disruption, birth defects, testicular and prostate cancer. More recently, and understandably, there has been increasing concern about the impact that PFAS chemicals have on the efficacy of vaccinations.

PFAS contamination in Maine certainly has established itself as a seminal public health challenge with hundreds of wells contaminated and some farms so contaminated that they go out of business. We appreciate the ongoing discussions about PFAS in various joint standing committees in this Legislature. Earlier in this legislative session, MOFGA has provided testimony in support of strengthening PFAS contamination levels in drinking water, research on crops that could help with mitigation of PFAS soil contamination, changing the statute of limitations from the point of PFAS application to the point of discovery of contamination, reporting of PFAS intentionally added to consumer products, reporting contamination of waterways from PFAS firefighting foam, and banning aerial spraying of pesticides until Maine’s Board of Pesticides Control can ensure us that PFAS is not present in the chemicals being sprayed.

Discussions relating to the aerial spray ban are particularly disconcerting in that they show how PFAS is revealing itself in unexpected places as it leaches into products from plastic containers with flourinated linings. These containers are used not just for toxic products like pesticides, they’re used for basic necessities of life – food and personal care products that wash down the drain and can end up in sludge spread of farmland.

We hope that you will support LD 1600 and all of the PFAS-focused bills for which we have provided testimony during this legislative session. Thank you very much for your consideration.

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’re a statewide organization that has experienced significant growth over the past couple of decades. We have 11,000 members, we certify 562 organic farms and processing facilities representing \$90 million in sales, and we are working hard to provide training and create opportunities for Maine’s next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions 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.