



# *Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association*

## *Common Ground Country Fair*

May 20, 2021

Good morning Senator Lawrence, Representative Berry and members of the Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology. My name is Anna Shapley-Quinn and I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). I am submitting comments on MOFGA's behalf, in support of LD 1708 – *An Act To Create the Pine Tree Power Company, a Nonprofit Utility, To Deliver Lower Rates, Reliability and Local Control for Maine Energy Independence.*

MOFGA is creating a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us. Through education, training and advocacy, we're helping farmers thrive, making more local, organic food available and building sustainable communities. 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. LD 1708 will be very helpful to our farm viability goals. It also will accelerate Maine's efforts to achieve the ambitious goals of the Governor Mills' Four Year Climate Action Plan, [Maine Won't Wait](#).

We appreciate that the Pine Tree Power Company would be a not-for-profit electric utility governed by a Board of Directors democratically elected to meet goals of clean energy independence, lower costs, better reliability, and improved internet access in rural Maine. Community Owned Utilities (COUs) have proven themselves in many places across the country, including 97 towns in Maine already. We understand that, on average, COUs like the proposed Pine Tree Power Company:

- are twice as reliable as investor-owned utilities (IOUs), with fewer and shorter outages;
- are eligible for federal assistance after big storms;
- are able to borrow at more favorable rates (3 percent or less in the case of Pine Tree Power); and
- charge customers 13 percent less than IOUs.

The Pine Tree Power Company projects that it will reduce Maine consumer costs by at least \$9 billion over 30 years.

Like all small businesses, organic farmers use electricity and sometimes a lot of it. Whether for lighting to start seedlings or for milking equipment on a dairy farm or for refrigerating produce, electricity figures prominently on most farm budgets. All farmers want to minimize overhead costs and establishing a COU in Maine could help farmers dramatically reduce their electricity bills.

Maine's investor-owned utilities are known for poor reliability, with the longest and most frequent outages in the country. These outages can have a real impact on farmers. If refrigeration goes down midsummer, a farm's income is on the line. The Pine Tree Power Company would address long-deferred maintenance in our grid system, draw down the number and severity of outages, and provide the service that Maine customers and businesses deserve.

Establishing this COU also would create incentives for more renewable energy facilities, including opportunities for farmers to install renewable energy systems on their land for personal use and potential resale into the grid. While we want to be very careful to protect valuable farmland and healthy soils, we do recognize that there are successful dual-use models for solar power arrays that can

diversify farm business plans. Many MOFGA farmers have integrated renewable energy systems on their properties and many more would do so if offered more affordable opportunities and incentives -- something our investor-owned utilities have failed to do.

Addressing the very real and daunting challenges of climate change is a priority for MOFGA farmers and our broad base of stakeholders. Erratic weather patterns, including extreme droughts and heavy rains, create severe challenges for farmers and gardeners. In order to tackle climate change, we will need to expand electrification and improve the grid that makes power distribution possible. A COU is the only way to fund that transition for Maine. Governed only by its customers and bold climate mission, Pine Tree Power will access capital at half the cost of investor-owned utilities and could double the pace of smart investment to support renewables and beneficial electrification.

Maine's investor-owned utilities' long and frequent outages, coupled with climate change, make our hard work even harder. In growing our crops, my partner Seth and I and our fellow farmers have more to handle each year because of the ways that climate breakdown is affecting our farms, but we still believe that supplying local food is better than relying on food from away. New pests and diseases show up regularly, and we are irrigating constantly because of drought. Weather like wind and hail damage crops in the field and also cause power outages which create obstacles in many parts of the supply chain.

Any time I can spare away from the farm this spring I've been following my children: fishing, checking on birds' nests, catching frogs, salamanders, turtles and crayfish. My children's assumption that these creatures will be part of their world in perpetuity is one that I cannot share at this moment, though I hope to someday, because I see the harmful effects of climate chaos on our farmland, woods and streams here in Monroe. These challenges are not any of our faults--they were set in motion before our lifetimes--but we have inherited them. We get to decide if a world with homegrown vegetables, deer in the woods and trout in the streams is a world worth fighting for, and if so: how are we going to fight? MOFGA and I believe that Pine Tree Power can accomplish economic and environmental goals that would be impossible otherwise.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation to create a new energy economy for Maine.

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#### *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 Journeyperson 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.*