



Testimony of Shelley Megquier, Policy and Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust, before the 132nd Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development

March 11, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Shelley Megquier and I am testifying today on behalf of Maine Farmland Trust (MFT) in support of the LD 603—*An Act to Ensure That the Exemption of Certain Agricultural Buildings from the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code Includes Maple Sugarhouses*.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Our goals are to keep agricultural lands working and help farmers and their communities thrive. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect farmland in every county in Maine, amounting to nearly 57,000 acres across 345 farms. Our Farm Network includes more than 550 farms that have participated in MFT's programming either through an agricultural easement or through one of our programs. Our main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Stewardship, Farm Business Planning, PFAS Support, Climate Resilience, and Policy and Research.

Maine's has just over 7000 farm businesses that are an essential part of the state's economy, environment, and culture. Some benefits of farms are obvious—the diversity of foods and other products they produce, as well as the scenic beauty they provide. Yet other benefits are less obvious, such as how farms serve as rural economic development engines, strengthen our resilience to climate change, bolster food security, and create access to a variety of recreational pursuits. According to the Maine Maple Producers Association, there are 450 maple producers licensed to sell maple products in Maine and the industry contributes more than \$55.6 million for the Maine economy and supporting more than 833 full-time and part-time jobs that generate more than \$26.9 million in wages.¹ Today, Maine farmers, including our maple producers, are contending with significant economic and environmental challenges. One of those challenges can be the overlapping regulatory frameworks that farm businesses need to adhere to. With this in mind, MFT supports flexible and responsive permitting requirements for agricultural structures.

LD 603 seeks to update the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code (MUBEC) to explicitly include the processing or storing of maple sap or syrup among the uses of a structure that qualify it for exemption under MUBEC. This change recognizes the value of the maple sugar industry to Maine agriculture and will enable more municipalities that have adopted MUBEC to develop flexible and responsive permitting processes for agricultural structures that support the resilience of local farms and their communities.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to support LD 603 today.

¹ <https://mainemapleproducers.com/about/>