



Maine Dairy Industry Association

Neither For, Nor Against

LD 129 Resolve , To Protect Consumers of Public Drinking Water by Establishing Maximum Contaminant Levels for Certain Substances and Contaminants

LD 164 An Act to Establish Maximum Contaminant Levels under the State's Drinking Water Rules for Certain Perflouroalkyl and Polyflouroalkyl

February 9, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Julie-Marie Bickford, Executive Director of the Maine Dairy Industry Association – the trade group that represents all of the Maine cow dairy farms who are shipping milk for drinking or food production. Most of our farm families also grow the hay, corn, alfalfa, and other cover crops that are used to feed their animals on the over 700,000 acres of fields and forests directly under their stewardship. In addition, many other farms focus solely on producing feed for cattle and other ruminants, raise beef cattle or dairy beef (which is a way of referring to male cattle, since only female cows can give milk), or breed and raise replacement dairy cows.

A cow needs a great deal of energy in order to make an average of over 8 gallons of milk per day. That energy comes from the food that she eats. Cows also require the equivalent of a bathtub full of water each day to produce milk. So Maine farmers need to depend on sourcing food and water for their animals from fields and water sources that are free from contaminants.

The category of chemicals known collectively as PFAS was not created by farmers, and the resulting contamination that has been discovered in Maine is neither the fault of Maine dairy farmers, nor of Maine agriculture in general. In fact – due to the ubiquitous use of these chemicals, their appearance is not limited to the state of Maine. We just happen to be the one of the first in the US to deal with its appearance as a contaminant in agriculture.

In the early 1980s, Maine dairy farmers were asked to help alleviate the build-up of sludge in Maine landfills from sewer and water district. Dairy farmers have a history of taking the manure waste produced by their animals and applying it back on their fields as both a waste disposal mechanism and a natural fertilizer enhancement to the soil. So farmers agreed to spread the sludge waste material. After many years, the land base available for spreading such material had shrunk due to increased development or sprawl, and most farmers had all they could handle just to properly apply their animals' nutrients back on their land. None of us knew what chemicals were contained within the sludge that originated from off the farm.

Move ahead 30+ years and Maine dairy farmers had built a strong reputation across the Northeast region for raising healthy, robust dairy cattle and producing high quality, nutritious milk and dairy products. Milk is one of the most highly regulated food products because of its excellent ability to help things grow. Think healthy bones, teeth, muscles. But regulation is strict because if not properly sanitized, handled and stored, milk is also the perfect breeding ground for bacteria. The federal Pasteurized Milk Ordinance that sets the requirements for handling and testing of dairy is almost 450 pages long. Dairy farmers and processors take food safety extremely seriously,

I provide you this backdrop of information because in most cases, the source of water that is fed to dairy cattle is the same one providing drinking water to the family who own and operate the farm. Dairy farms are homes to the animals, but also to the people so it is a high priority to ensure that all are safe, well cared for, and healthy.

The appearance of PFAS chemicals on Maine farmland has caused a loss of income and other dramatic financial costs, health concerns for humans and animals alike, disruptions in the ability to provide enough food for the animals, and in the most extreme cases, complete removal of the animals from the food production chains for both dairy and beef. The problems are the unintended consequences of not knowing the detrimental impacts of these chemicals on living systems. But the “appearance” of these chemicals on our farmland has been the result of continually developing scientific research and understanding about the best practices in dealing with spreading of manure and other waste material, as well as developments in understanding the category of PFAS chemicals and their impacts.

We are testifying neither for nor against because farmers rely on science for farm management, animal care & nutrition, crop production, and – of course – the healthy and safety of the people who both create and consumer the food from the farm. The discovery of PFAS chemicals has introduced a new level of uncertainty that impacts every aspect of life on the farm. Farmers are grasping for guidance and stability as well as assistance in dealing with this issue and a solid reliance on scientific research and analysis is the closest thing to continuity that we have.

We are very impressed with the thorough and methodical process that has been used by Maine’s CDC, DEP, and DACF professionals in working with our dairy farmers thus far. We have appreciated that the standards as well as the process for identifying, testing, and setting limits on these chemicals have been based on well thought out calculations that have respected the dynamics of our Maine-specific contamination. We hope that this amenable and collaborative approach to seeking solutions will continue.

MDIA strongly believes that any future standards or limits must be based on the best science available and calculated to reflect Maine’s unique geology and the agronomy and animal care practices, as well as food safety requirements. Clean drinking water is a necessity for human existence, but the specific standards for soils, milk, crops, and animals are very tightly correlated to the drinking water standard.

If the science shows that a change in our standards is required, then we support that effort. But we would not support any effort that would adopt new numbers that would be based on actions taken elsewhere that were set by different or undetermined criteria other than a similar type of scientific process that has been used by Maine officials thus far.

Thank you for your time today and I would be glad to provide additional information or answer any questions.

Julie-Marie R. Bickford
Executive Director
Maine Dairy Industry Association