



**Testimony of Shelley Megquier, Policy and Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust, before
the 132nd Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing
April 2, 2025**

Greetings Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Shelley Megquier, and I am providing testimony on behalf of Maine Farmland Trust (MFT) in opposition to LD 589 – *An Act To Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Workers Employees Under the Wage and Hour Laws*.

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.

Over the years, MFT has collaborated with farmers, food businesses, and economic development organizations to establish enterprises and deliver a range of programs and services focused on establishing a vibrant and resilient agricultural sector and food system in Maine. We work directly with farmers of all experience levels as they develop markets and grow successful businesses. MFT believes that to revitalize Maine's rural communities, farms must be economically viable and farm workers must be treated fairly. MFT also sees farm workers as a critical part of Maine farms and important contributors to our agricultural economy. Many of the farmers that we work with enjoy close working relationships with their staff, often working together season after season, and a number of employees either end up playing an important role in that farm's succession plan or go on to start their own farm businesses as part of the next generation of farmers.

Unfortunately, Maine farmers face many challenges creating and maintaining viable business. Many farm businesses rely on being able to ask workers to put in more than 40 hours a week during peak times of the year but operate on such thin margins that they would not be able to keep their businesses afloat and to continue to provide much needed jobs to their neighbors if they had to pay overtime wages. We've also heard from farmers about requests from workers to work over 40 hours and suggestions that workers will look elsewhere if they cannot get extra hours.

LD 589 would make agricultural employees and seasonal farm employees subject to laws that place limits on mandatory overtime and require payment an overtime rate. MFT is opposed to this bill due to the likelihood that this bill will hit certain sectors of Maine agriculture the hardest as well as farms of any size and type that are already struggling with farm viability – *which are many*. Farm business owners may opt to choose to hire more staff, if they can find them, to avoid having to pay overtime wages rather than hiring fewer staff with overtime requirements during some weeks. To avoid unintended, damaging impacts to Maine agriculture, MFT opposes this bill.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our concerns on LD 589 as written and would be happy to answer any questions that you have.