



Maine Dairy Industry Association

In Opposition to **LD 151 An Act To Protect Farm Workers by Allowing Them To Organize for the Purpose of Collective Bargaining**

April 7, 2021

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing:

MDIA questions the need for this bill in Maine. The examples expressed as justification for requiring collective bargaining on farms were either outside of the state of Maine, in the historic past, or based on employers who no longer operate in Maine and who served as a cautionary tale for all Maine farmers.

- Lack of available labor (general labor, not even extending to skilled labor) - is currently one of the largest challenges that Maine dairy farms are facing. I know of at least one farm that has sold the cows and shut their doors for good because they have been unable to find suitable labor to operate the farm. Maine farms are already turning their pockets inside out to offer financial incentives to get people to work on the farm.
- Workers on Maine farms are most often viewed and treated as family by the owner/operators of the farms. They are part of a community with a shared employment goal, shared living situations, shared community services – from religious services to grocery stores, and their children and family members attend school and play together, use the same doctors, and enjoy the same recreational activities in our beautiful state.
- Most farms operate on razor-thin margins that prioritize employee wages over income for the owner/operator. If farms are mandated to pay higher amounts through unionization efforts over and above the current competitive wages & benefits that they may offer, it may mean the difference between the farm remaining open or having to close the doors because it is not cost-effective to keep farming.
- For workers who are on Maine farms through H2A or other federal agricultural worker programs, the regulation and oversight of working conditions are stringent and there are many agency interactions with the workers and opportunities to express dissatisfaction with their situation or conditions. Ultimately, if a worker is not happy with their working conditions or compensation and benefits, they can improve that by not returning or renewing their contractual arrangements. Because of the significant shortages of skilled agricultural workers in Maine, farmers are very motivated to keep their workers. The norm in Maine is that the same workers continue their employment in Maine for many years – even decades – because of the positive working relationships between employer and employee.

On behalf of the 196 Maine dairy farms (99% of which are family owned and operated), the 28,000 cows who make over 70 million gallons of milk to feed people in Maine and beyond, and the over 4000 dairy-dependent jobs that have continued without interruption even during the height of the pandemic, MDIA urges you to vote Ought-Not-To-Pass on LD 151.

Thank you for your consideration of the items presented in this testimony.

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Executive Director
Maine Dairy Industry Association