



AGricultural Council Of Maine

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In Opposition to

LD 1022 An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Workers Employees Under the Wage & Hour Laws

April 7, 2021

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

The Agricultural Council of Maine - established in 1990 – is the central forum for communication among agricultural groups in Maine. Our mission is to share information and provide leadership and advocacy on agricultural issues that impact all sectors of Maine agriculture. Membership in AGCOM is open to producer groups and statewide non-profits that service agriculture. In addition, businesses and smaller agricultural groups can become non-voting associate members. Non-voting ex-officio members include the University of Maine, Cooperative Extension, federal and state agricultural agencies, and representatives from Maine’s congressional offices.

At our March 23, 2021 meeting, AgCOM members voted to oppose LD 1022.

The primary reasons were because of the financial burden it would place on Maine farms, most of whom are struggling to achieve financial sustainability. Currently, a shortage of farm labor is one of the major challenges Maine farms are facing. The employees who seek out farm work know that the hours are long – especially during certain times of the year – and often choose such work because of the ability to work more than 40 or 50 hours a week during those times. By placing the requirement to pay overtime on ag workers, farmers will have no choice but to hire more employees to work those same hours – reducing the total take-home pay for all employees.

The bill would also eliminate the ability of farms to pay piece-work, a system that encourages employees to work smarter, not harder, and gives employees more direct control over their earnings.

Most farms operate on razor-thin margins that prioritize employee wages over income for the owner/operator. If farms are mandated to pay overtime in addition to the 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 your better understanding, I have also submitted AgCOM’s “Needs of Maine Agriculture” document that was the result of a multi-year process to identify and summarize the ongoing necessities for make farming financially sustainable in Maine.

AgCOM strongly urges an Ought-Not-to-Pass vote on LD 1022. Thank you.