

WINNEGANCE OYSTER FARM

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Dear Marine Resource Committee,

I am the owner of Winnegance Oyster Farm, which encompasses four LPAs on the New Meadows River. I make my living entirely through farming these 1600 square feet.

I am writing to express my opposition to LD 106. The bill as written will both penalize small operators working on LPAs (by requiring direct owner oversight of farm operations) and will increase the financial barriers to applying for a lease. These changes will squeeze small and family farms from both sides in a regulatory environment that already favors large operations with outside funding.

If the LPA changes proposed in this bill had been in effect in 2016, I would not be farming today. That summer during the height of the growing (and biofouling) season, I suffered an injury that sidelined me for six weeks. If not for my LPA assistants manning the farm in my absence, I would have lost the bulk of my oysters- my livelihood.

I understand that there are bad actors holding many LPAs as an end-around to the lease process, but there must be a fairer mechanism to prevent this than limiting hiring options for small farmers working within the spirit and intent of the law. I believe the changes to LPA rules in LD 106 will suppress job creation (by reducing incentive to hire), will force farmers to work through injury, and will prioritize larger leases and less efficient farm designs that further strain relations with other users. Perhaps limiting the right to sell/profit from the crops on an LPA to the license holder would more directly dissuade businesses from amassing many LPAs in other people's names.

I strongly believe there is virtue to the LPA program, not just a stepping stone to large and long term leases, but an end unto itself. The quick turn-around of LPA permitting fuels innovation and experimentation by allowing farmers to be nimble with changes in species and gear. The small size of an LPA forces farmers to make efficient use of space. LPAs provide accessibility to the aquaculture industry to Mainers of different income levels and backgrounds, and allow us to make a living on a small and sustainable farms.

I firmly believe the state needs to refocus aquaculture policy to actively support small independent farms, or else we risk the takeover of industrial agribusiness (and landscape effects, damage to recreation and tourism, conflict with traditional fisheries, and low pay that comes with it). I believe LD 106 is a step in the wrong direction.

Jordan Kramer