



MOFGA Testimony In Support Of
LD 606 - *An Act Regarding Development of a Program to Assist Farmers Affected by Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Contamination*

March 15, 2023

Good morning Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Heather Spalding and I am deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA).

A broad-based community, MOFGA is creating a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us. Through education, training and advocacy, we are helping farmers thrive, making more local, organic food available and building sustainable communities.

MOFGA certifies 535 organic farms and processing operations representing roughly \$90 million in sales and we are working hard to create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent.

I am speaking generally in support of the proposed amendment to LD 606 - *An Act Regarding Development of a Program to Assist Farmers Affected by Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances Contamination*. The bill would amend the Fund To Address PFAS Contamination to develop a program of experimental research stations in collaboration with the University of Maine using land or crops affected by PFAS and paying farmers for the use of their land, infrastructure, equipment and expertise in conducting research authorized under the Fund.

While we recognize and appreciate the urgent need to provide direct financial support to farmers struggling with PFAS contamination, MOFGA wishes to honor the ongoing work of the PFAS Fund Advisory Committee and its research sub-committee, which is helping to develop the plan on how to spend the \$60 million in relief funding for farmers. One of my colleagues, Caleb Goossen, PhD serves on the research sub-committee and is actively engaged in assessing research projects that will be of greatest help to farmers. One possibility is whether to think of some of the farm purchase funding potential in conjunction with the research funding potential, and establish farm-based research stations. There are many details to consider, not the least of which are options of leasing in the short- or long-term, or possible transfer of ownership in the long-term. The arrangement may have implications for securing grants or future research opportunities. Farmers wishes must be honored and scientific method must be followed. A lot of questions need to be sorted through. We also want to proceed with caution when suggesting that land contamination could be addressed with any certainty. The science is not there yet and we have to be careful of giving unrealistic expectations about the viability and safety of future



farming on contaminated farmland. We can remain hopeful but we need to be clear about what mitigation opportunities actually are available to us.

We do not wish to get out ahead of the ongoing committee work but we are happy to underscore the ongoing need for funding for PFAS research, the importance of practical research on farmland that is contaminated, and the opportunity to assist farmers who are struggling financially due to contamination of their land, crops and/or livestock, and their own bodies.

We would also like to note that, while the University of Maine is deeply engaged in research discussions, it would be prudent not to limit research collaboration to that single entity. It is very likely that other research institutions would qualify for important projects in the future.

We will continue to engage deeply in the research discussions and will be happy to attend a work session on this bill if it is needed.

Thank you and I'd be happy to answer questions if you have any.

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) started in 1971 and is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. We're a broad-based community that educates about and advocates for organic agriculture, illuminating its interdependence with a healthy environment, local food production, and thriving communities. We have 15,000 members, we certify more than 500 organic farms and processing facilities representing \$90 million in sales, and we are working hard to provide training and create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum.