



MOFGA Testimony In Support Of  
LD 834 - *An Act to Ensure Transparency in the Labeling of Meat as Grass-fed*

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.

Because MOFGA supports truth in labeling and a consumer's right to know, we support LD 834 - *An Act to Ensure Transparency in the Labeling of Meat as Grass-fed*. This bill prohibits a person from selling, offering for sale or distributing within the State or selling, offering for sale or serving in any retail food establishment or eating establishment any meat or meat product labeled or advertised as "grass-fed" or by similar designation unless the ruminant animal was grass-fed.

We do not have a lot of information about abuse of the term "grass-fed" when it comes to labeling meat in Maine. However, we know that the term is an important marketing tool for farmers to differentiate livestock management practices and demand a premium on meat and dairy. Many of MOFGA's producers use this term and work hard to defend the integrity of their messaging.

I would like to offer some context for raising organic, grass-fed livestock here. It is challenging to raise livestock entirely on grass in Maine. We believe that livestock should be grazing on pasture as much as they possibly can and we are so grateful to our organic livestock farmers for all they're doing to maintain their herds, build the health of the soil, and provide meat and dairy products for the people of Maine.

Organic dairy cows get the vast majority of their nutrients by grazing on pasture and consuming forage-based feeds. On average, organic dairy cows receive about 20% of their daily dry matter intake from off-farm organic feeds and concentrates. The National Organic Program's Pasture Rule requires that organic dairy cows graze on pasture for the entire grazing



season (a minimum of 120 days), which, of course, varies depending on the location of the farm. New England's weather presents challenges for dairy farmers who want to maximize grazing for their cows. Cold, snowy winters, coupled with the dramatically shifting weather patterns of recent years, including warm, wet springs, and dry, hot summers, have made it especially difficult for Maine's dairy farmers to maintain healthy herds on pasture without supplementing nutrition.

The other piece of the Maine puzzle is the insufficient market for grass-fed milk, in that Organic Valley's needs currently are met by grass-fed farms in VT and so they're not prioritizing a milk run to Maine for grass-fed milk. Most of the Maine herds are Holstein cows, which are not well-suited for grass-fed production. We're providing technical assistance to farms that are minimizing or eliminating grain, but, of course, a successful transition to grass-fed production cannot happen overnight. And yet another challenge in the mix is the hay supply, which has been adversely impacted by drought in recent years. An abrupt shift to exclusively grass-fed dairy cows would exacerbate the hay supply problem. Challenges all around!

Our farmer programs staff is working hard to help farmers get the technical and financial assistance they need to ensure the health of their livestock and their soil so that we can continue to get the best possible local, organic meat and dairy products.

We believe that this legislation is reasonable in that the Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry may waive the determination that meat or a meat product is misbranded if the commissioner finds a waiver is warranted due to inadvertent exposure of the animal to non-forage feedstuffs or because incidental supplementation with non-forage feedstuffs was necessary to ensure the well-being of the animal during adverse environmental or physical conditions.

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

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*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.*