



MOFGA Testimony In Support Of
LD 1285 - *An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program*
April 10, 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 in support of LD 1285 - *An Act to Extend Funding for the Land for Maine's Future Program*, which would secure \$10 million dollars in state funding per year over two budget years. The purposes of the Land For Maine's Future Program (LMF) are: conserving land in its undeveloped state; providing public recreational water access; and protecting working waterfronts and farmland. Reinvesting in LMF will increase public access for all Mainers, build healthier communities, and support local natural resource-based businesses.

LMF is founded on the belief that our future social and economic well-being depends upon maintaining the quality and availability of natural areas for recreation, hunting and fishing, conservation, wildlife habitat, vital ecologic functions and scenic beauty, and that the State has a responsibility and a duty to pursue an aggressive and coordinated policy to assure that this Maine heritage is passed on to future generations. Protecting farmland is an important aspect of LMF. In fact, LMF stipulates that 10% of funds raised must go toward protecting farmland. The LMF visionaries noted that farmland preservation projects would provide critical support for farmer and community efforts to keep land in production rather than being developed into houselots, commercial real estate or industrial sites.

There are 41 farms in the LMF program, representing nearly 10,000 acres of conserved farmland. The most recent agricultural easement placed on a farm happened in 2020 on 129 acres of Old Talbot Farm in Arundel. Several of the LMF farms are MOFGA-certified organic operations.

We are pleased with the commitment to LMF that Governor Mills, the Legislature and the people of Maine have shown for land conservation. But when it comes to Maine farmland, there is a real urgency to go beyond LMF's current 9,884 farmland acres. Farmland is under serious



threat of development and pollution and we must do everything we can to protect it. According to the most recent US Census of Agriculture, Maine lost more than 10% of its farmland (146,491 acres) between 2012 and 2017. Other New England states, have protected more of their farmland than we have in Maine. New Hampshire has purchased agricultural conservation easements totaling 16,647 acres, Massachusetts has purchased 74,775 acres, and Vermont has purchased 168,407 acres. Since 2016 only one Maine farm has been conserved under the LMF program.

Increasing Maine's farm conservation easements will help move Maine toward the climate action plan goal of conserving 30% of Maine land by 2030. Governor Mills also intends to develop our local food systems and increase the amount of food produced and consumed in Maine to 30% by 2030.

At MOFGA we also have ambitious goals for a healthy Maine agriculture. We provide extensive training to set new farmers up for success. By the year 2030, we aim to increase the number of certified organic growers from 550 to 750 and the amount of organically managed land from 7% to 10% of the state's agricultural land. We offer an introductory farm apprenticeship program, beginning farmer training through our two-year Journeyperson program, and a Farm Resilience Program for farmers in years 5-10 of their business. An LMF conserved farm would be a perfect setting for new farmers from MOFGA's training programs, especially in the area of farm viability. One of the nice benefits of LMF funding for farmers is that the program allows 5% of the funds to be granted for business plan development and implementation.

Many of our new farmers are feeling the pressures of diminishing farmland access. Consistently one of the top challenges that our new farmers face is access to farmland due to escalating land prices and development. We're working hard to train the farmers for the future. We need to ensure that there is land for them to farm

MOFGA also recognizes that the health of our agricultural economy is linked to the health of our working waterfronts, our wild lands, state parks and even historic sites. These areas attract two million visitors each year, and provide roughly \$100 million to Maine's economy. Though the parks provide an economic boost for Maine's economy, they have an estimated \$50 million backlog of basic infrastructure maintenance needs. Investing in LMF makes sense for Maine's triple bottom line. Every dollar of LMF funding is matched by other funds, historically attracting more than \$3 in matching funds for every dollar invested by the state. Maine could draw as much as \$40 million per year for LMF through the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Thank you very much and I would be happy to answer questions if you have any.