

April 14, 2015

Senator Edgecomb, Representative Hickman and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee:

My name is Jon Olson. I am the Executive Secretary of Maine Farm Bureau, the state's largest general farm organization.

Maine Farm Bureau favors LD 1040 – An Act To Restore Farmlands and Improve Watersheds.

Maine agriculture is a bright star for our state. Farming in Maine has grown, and Maine continues to lead the New England states with 8,174 farms; the value of Maine's crops and livestock grew 24% over the past 5 years. Maine's agricultural enterprises provide more than \$764 million through the sale of farm products and contribute more than \$2 billion annually to the State's economy and Maine agricultural products are increasingly available locally in farmers' markets, schools and institutions.

Maine agriculture will have a bright future. We have a constant supply of rain water and available and affordable land. Unfortunately, Maine has lost more farmland to abandonment than to development. Farmers are now reclaiming that former farmland and turning it into productive land once again. Many farmers have turned to the NRCS for financial cost share. Some farmers, however, are unable to meet the financial match for these cost share programs. The enactment of the bill will help resolve this problem by providing funds of up to 50% of the restoration project or \$20,000, whatever is less, for these restoration projects.

When I travel around the state, I'm always impressed with farmers reclaiming old pastures, restoring old farm fields and clearing land of trees and rocks for new agricultural fields. Often this is a several year project cutting the trees the first year, removing tree stumps and rocks and preparing the soil for on the second year to have productive farmland or pastures on the third year. It makes me proud of what our farmers can do.

This bill will help with that effort. We urge its enactment.

Thank you for your attention to the above. I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.