



**Testimony of Ellen Stern Griswold, Policy and Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust,  
before the 130<sup>th</sup> Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary**

May 4, 2021

Good morning Senator Carney, Representative Harnett, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Ellen Griswold, and I am testifying today on behalf of Maine Farmland Trust (MFT) in support of LD 1626 – *An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act*.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect nearly 300 farms and keep over 60,000 acres of farmland in farming, while supporting over 800 farm families with a range of services. Our four main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Farm Viability in the form of business planning and technical assistance to help farmers become and remain economically viable, and Public Outreach and Policy to grow the future of farming in Maine. We also operate a nutrition incentive program that provides additional money to low-income shoppers to buy more locally-grown fruits and vegetables, thereby building sales for Maine farmers and keeping more dollars in Maine's food economy.

In September of 2019, MFT adopted a new five-year strategic plan to guide the organization in meeting the needs of Maine's farms, communities, and environment, while building upon the strong foundation we have developed over the last twenty plus years. One of the four pillars of that strategic plan is focused on equity and inclusion because we know that in order to create lasting and positive change within Maine's food and farm systems, MFT needs to better understand the ways in which our work interfaces with issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

A critical first step in the process of creating meaningful action and change has been to invest in the education of our staff and board, and to build relationships with partners to help guide our evolution. MFT hopes to then apply these educational experiences to adjust our programming, governance, operations, and public messaging in ways that result in greater diversity, equity and inclusion. As part of that education process, members of our staff and board are participating in the First Light's Learning Journey – a year-long program that aims to build trust and relationship between conservation organizations and Maine Wabanaki Tribes in order to expand Indigenous Peoples' access to land. Through First Light we are learning alongside over 100 other representatives from Maine's land trust and conservation organizations about the Indian Claims Settlement Act and the harmful consequences that have resulted from its implementation for Indigenous communities in Maine.

MFT supports LD 1626 because it would enact the 22 changes to the Settlement Act that were recommended by a bipartisan task force, and in doing so, ensure that the Passamaquoddy Tribe, the Penobscot Nation, and the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians enjoy the same rights,

privileges, powers and immunities as other federally-recognized Indian Tribes across the country. These recommendations include removing some of the barriers that the Tribes have faced in purchasing land and restoring the Tribes' rights to regulate hunting, fishing, natural resources, and land use on Tribal lands and waters, as allowed by federal law.

As a farmland conservation and food systems organization, MFT understands the critical importance of access to land and the ability to manage natural resources and land use for both economic viability and environmental stewardship. This year, we have had the privilege of learning from Micmac Farms – the farm operated by the Aroostook Band of Micmacs – as we worked together on advocacy efforts to increase state support to build the health of agricultural soils – an important strategy for both addressing climate change and ensuring clean water. Through this experience, we learned about the different farming practices Micmac Farms uses to build the health of their soil, as well as how the farm was started to provide fresh and wholesome food to their community in an effort to address existing health disparities. The farm is not only a model of climate smart agriculture, but it is also an important source of healthy food for the greater rural community, with the farm participating in a nutrition incentive program to double the value of SNAP benefits and WIC vouchers spent on local food. This experience also taught us how communities throughout the state would greatly benefit from restoring the Wabanaki Tribes' ability to manage tribal lands, waters, and resources.

For all of these reasons, MFT hopes that you will support LD 1626, implement the recommendations of the task force, and restore the sovereign rights of the Wabanaki Tribes.