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FARMERS AND GROUPS URGE SUPPORT FOR LD 1911

Maine State House, Augusta, ME—Impacted farmers and a coalition of groups held a press conference outside the State House in Augusta today to urge passage of Maine LD 1911, An Act To Prohibit the Contamination of Clean Soils with So-called Forever Chemicals sponsored by Rep. Bill Pluecker of Warren. The bill will ban the application or sales of sludge that contain PFAS. PFAS have recently emerged as a source of contamination in Maine agriculture and are linked to numerous adverse health effects.

“Wednesday is usually the busiest day of the week on our farm,” said Nell Finnigan of Ironwood Farm in Albion during the press conference. “We should be harvesting greens, and packing storage crops alongside our beloved staff, filling our cooler with food for local grocery stores. But there is no food heading out today from our farm because on January 25, we received news that our two farm wells tested high for PFAS chemicals. Our fields were never spread, but the fields to the south of our farm received repeated applications of biosolids in the 1990s and, in turn, contaminated our well water. We’ve pulled all our products from the market and shut down production while we work with DACF to determine the damage this well water may have done to our farmland.”

Adrienne Lee of New Beat Farm in Knox, another farm impacted by PFAS contamination, said, “The reason we’re standing here today is not just to share our sob story but to push the legislature to act to stop this continual spreading of sludge so that there aren’t more farmers standing in our shoes or more rural Mainers finding out that their health and their families’ health have been compromised by PFAs contamination in their wells. The effects of this are not only felt by this group of farmers but trickle down to the thousands of customers we serve in this state.”

“Maine really cannot afford to lose farmland to contamination,” said Amy Fisher, president and CEO of Maine Farmland Trust, “nor can we allow contamination to make it harder for farmers to grow our food. Agriculture is key to Maine’s economy. It contributes over $3.6 billion in economic impact and supports over 27,000 jobs statewide. We must make sure Maine farmers have the land that they need to continue to feed Maine’s economy and our communities+ for generations to come.”

“PFAS contamination is a threat to the health of the people on these farms, this is a threat to the businesses they have built and it’s a threat to our food safety,” said Sarah Alexander, executive director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association. “In order to address this issue fully, we have to shut off the PFAS tap now. We must prevent additional contamination and the impacts to farmers feeding our local communities by passing LD 1911.”

Several advocacy groups addressed misinformation being shared about the bill. “This bill simply bans all land application of wastewater sludge and sludge-derived compost,” said Sharon Treat, senior attorney
at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. “It will not affect the practice of manure-spreading. It will not affect food and other composting that has nothing to do with wastewater sludge. The ban is not retroactive, so it will have no effect on past practices; but it will help protect landowners, including farmers, going forward.”

“The possible increased costs for wastewater treatment facilities will be far less than what it would cost to clean up contaminated farmland, not to mention healthcare costs and loss of livelihood for impacted communities,” said Sarah Woodbury, director of advocacy at Defend Our Health. “How is it fair for the entire cost of this to fall on our farmers?”

“The out-of-state corporation that produces the sludge products that are spread on our farmers’ fields wants to keep spreading the contamination,” said Rep. Bill Pluecker. “They think that their bottom-line profits are more important than the health of our children, food, soil, water, and deer.”

“I’m stubborn,” said Brendan Holmes of Misty Brook Farm in Albion, another farm that has had to halt sales due to PFAS-contaminated feed. “I won’t give up, and my farm will not fold. But I need your help. I need this bill to pass so we quit the insanity of poisoning the best agricultural land in the state of Maine.”

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**Defend Our Health** is a nonprofit public health organization working to create a world where all people are thriving, with equal access to safe food and drinking water, healthy homes, and products that are toxic-free and climate-friendly.

The **Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy** (IATP) is a national nonprofit that works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure just, fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems.

**Maine Farmland Trust** is a member-powered organization that protects farmland, supports farmers, and advances the future of farming in Maine. Since its founding in 1999, MFT has helped to keep over 60,000 acres of Maine’s precious farmland in farming, and has supported over 1,000 farmers with the critical services they need to get on the land and grow thriving businesses. More at mainefarmlandtrust.org

The **Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association** (MOFGA) is 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. Through education, training and advocacy MOFGA is creating a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us.