

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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January 30, 2007

Senator John Nutting
Representative Wendy Pieh
Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
115 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0115

Dear Senator Nutting, Representative Pieh, and members of the Committee,

As Chairmen of the University of Maine Board of Agriculture, it is our pleasure to report on our continued progress during the past year. The Board, as you know, was established in 1998 to provide input from Maine's agricultural community into the agricultural activities of the University of Maine, including the College of Natural Sciences, Forestry and Agriculture, the Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, and the research farms operated by the University.

Just like every part of the University, and the agricultural sector, this was a year where we made changes while looking to the future. Highlights of specific improvements made possible in large part because of the support of the Maine legislature, the agricultural community and the citizen's of Maine are listed below.

First, major improvements in the J. F. Witter Teaching and Research Center, the University of Maine's livestock research facility, were made thanks to the Legislature's and the citizens of Maine support of a State bond. This has allowed the University to continue to offer a range of research and educational programs for students that are focused on livestock production, an option that would not have continued without the upgrades and improvements to several livestock barns and related facilities.

At Blueberry Hill Farm, the University's wild blueberry research facility, the main building was replaced with a new 4,000 square-foot facility, housing two field research laboratories, meeting spaces and offices. A 2,400 square-foot garage/carpenter shop was added as well. Funding for the buildings came from \$600,000 in a jobs bond approved by Maine voters in the summer of 2003 and two federal grants totaling another \$330,000, with the remainder of the funds provided by Wild Blueberry growers and processors. Other improvements at Blueberry Hill Farm included the installation of back-up generators.

We continued to make improvements to other University facilities as well with improvements including a new equipment storage shed roof at Aroostook Farm and equipment upgrades at Highmoor Farm.

On the personnel side, agriculture and forestry interests were actively involved in the search for a new Dean of the College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture. Edward Ashworth, formerly of the Horticulture Department at Purdue University, joined us as Dean and Director in

September 2006. He brings a wide-ranging interest in natural resource issues and an interest in the links between education, research, and the general public.

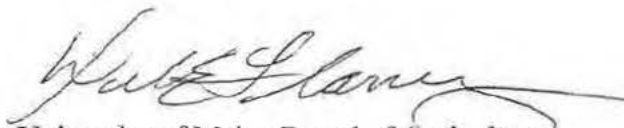
During the fall, Lavon Bartel announced her upcoming retirement as Dean and Director of Cooperative Extension. Lavon has been a strong advocate for agriculture over the past decade. She'll be retiring at the end of January 2007, and a search is underway for her successor.

Finally, the Board of Agriculture and the University looked to the future. At a well-attended meeting in October, President Robert Kennedy, Vice-President for Research Michael Eckardt and Provost Edna Szymanski joined the Board of Agriculture for a wide-ranging discussion of research needs and priorities. Through that discussion, the Board endorsed a package of bonds that would make significant advancements in the University's capacity to do research to support Maine's natural resource sector.

We know that the Legislature will be considering a wide range of bond proposals dealing with research and development in the months ahead. A continued commitment to Research and Development (Extension) is necessary to both maintain the competitive strengths and to capitalize on future opportunities of Maine agriculture and related value added processing businesses. We strongly believe that investment in the University and its research facilities is a critical component of continued evolution of a strong and sustainable natural resource economy in the years ahead.

We look forward to talking with you about these issues in the months ahead.

Sincerely,



Russell Libby, outgoing Chairman, University of Maine Board of Agriculture

Donald Flannery, incoming Chairman, University of Maine Board of Agriculture

C: Robert A. Kennedy, President
University of Maine System Board of Trustees