

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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March 13, 2008

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 Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Agriculture, it our pleasure to provide the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry an annual report on the Board's progress and activities for the past year. The Board of Agriculture, as you know, was established to provide input from Maine's agricultural community into the research and extension programs of the University of Maine including the programs in 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 Experiment Station and College. The College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture also informs the Board and requests input on its agricultural teaching programs.

We are in a dynamic period for University programs with both opportunities and challenges for agriculture, and this year the Board has strived to remain fully informed and well positioned to provide input as the University addresses budget challenges and responds to new opportunities for research and development for Maine agriculture.

The Board met at the State House in March 2007 to provide an opportunity for legislative members to attend the meeting or join us for lunch. The meeting was well attended by both legislators and House and Senate staff, which provided an excellent opportunity to discuss bills, introduced in the first regular session of the 123rd Maine Legislature and explain their relevance to agriculture. The feedback on the meeting was very positive, so we plan to have the Spring 2008 meeting at the State House again.

The focus of the March meeting was a discussion of agricultural R&D, which included policy issues at the state level, legislative bills and their relevance to R&D, federal R&D initiatives for agriculture, and the Cluster concept for economic development. Invited participants included Representative Emily Cain; Karen Mills, Chair of the Governor's Council on Jobs, Innovation and the Economy; Betsy Biemann, President of the Maine Technology Institute; Dr. Michael Eckardt, UMaine Vice President for Research; and Jake Ward, UMaine Assistant Vice President for Research, Economic Development and Governmental Relations.

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At the November meeting, Dr. Michael Eckardt provided an update on research and development at the University of Maine and opportunities for the University and the agricultural industry to compete for new R&D bond monies. The Board also was presented information on provisions of the federal Farm Bill of importance to Maine. Expected new federal funding for research on specialty crops in the Farm Bill will benefit Maine agriculture.

At both the March and November meetings the Board was presented detailed updates on College of Natural Sciences, Forestry and Agriculture and University of Maine Cooperative Extension research and extension programs and on the impacts of FY08 and FY09 University budget reductions. As in FY08, pending retirements and resignations for FY09 will present challenges for maintaining faculty positions critical to Maine's agricultural sectors given expected budget reductions.

The Board recognizes that agriculture in Maine will be facing many challenges in the future and we will all need to work together to ensure all of our resources are being utilized to meet those challenges. We welcome your active participation with the Board in helping to direct the future role of agriculture in the University.

Sincerely,


Donald Flannery, Chair
Board of Agriculture


David Bell, Vice Chair
Board of Agriculture

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