

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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January 22, 2010

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 is 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. The Board's primary interaction is with the College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture, including the associated Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station, and University of Maine Cooperative Extension. The College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture also informs the Board and requests input on its agricultural teaching programs.

The Board met three times in 2009 and used those opportunities to meet with University administrators, selected research and extension faculty, legislators, and Governor Baldacci on University agricultural programs and current challenges for Maine agriculture. There are some notable positives to report for 2009 including the centennial celebration of 100 years of research and public outreach at Highmoor Farm, two new federally-funded four-year research and extension initiatives in agriculture developed by the faculty of the College and Cooperative Extension, near record levels of extramural grants and contracts at the University and College, and Cooperative Extension's rapid response to a number of challenges for farmers that emerged suddenly this summer. On the downside, as is the case for Maine state agencies, the College and Cooperative Extension are working to absorb significant budget reductions by eliminating positions, reducing operational funding, and looking for new efficiencies including cooperative efforts. The Board has completed a survey of state agricultural organizations this year to provide input as the University addresses budget challenges and responds to new opportunities for research and development for Maine agriculture.

The Board met on the University campus in January 30, 2009 to receive updates on College and Cooperative Extension programs and activities. Michael Eckardt, Vice President for Research, also provided the Board with an update on R&D at the University and led a discussion of opportunities for R&D bond development for agriculture. There was also a review of new UDSA research funding initiatives and the opportunities for UMaine proposal development.

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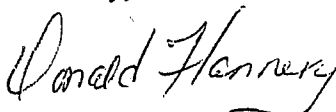
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The Board met at the State House on April 1, 2009 to provide an opportunity for legislative members and Governor Baldacci to attend the meeting or join us for lunch. The Board had a productive discussion of agricultural issues with Senators Justin Alford, Bill Diamond, John Nutting, and Elizabeth Schneider, Representatives Emily Cain, Wendy Pieh, Nancy Smith, and Patricia Sutherland, and Governor Baldacci. The Board also received an update on the work of the University of Maine System Task Force Committee by David Flanagan, the committee chair, and other members. The Board appreciated Mr. Flanagan's willingness to discuss the committee's preliminary observations, answer questions, and seek the Board's input.

The Board met on November 13, 2009 on the University campus. The Board welcomed the addition of a representative of the aquaculture industry per a recent legislative change on membership. Board members received an informative tour of the University of Maine Animal Health Laboratory, which was led by Dr. Anne Lichtenwalner, Extension Veterinarian and Assistant Professor of Animal and Veterinarian Sciences. Board members were impressed by the importance of this laboratory and its unique expertise and equipment for many of Maine's agricultural sectors (egg industry, aquaculture, livestock, small animals), the high level of industry and public demand for this laboratory's services relative to its limited capacity, and the high demand for its unique research facilities. The Board heard presentations on two new University research and extension initiatives funded in 2009: 1) Enhancing farmer's capacity to produce high quality organic bread wheat - \$1.32 million USDA grant and 2) Systems approach to improving the sustainability of wild blueberry production - \$1.02 million USDA grant. Cooperative Extension provided an update on their rapid response to late blight, Eastern Equine Encephalitis, and farmer stress/suicide in 2009. The Board also received updates on budget planning by the College and Cooperative Extension and began discussion of the results of the Board's completed survey of agricultural organizations on research and extension needs.

The Board would be glad to provide more detailed information and would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to report on Board activities.

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