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**Board of Agriculture
Annual Report to
Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

January 31, 2012

Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
c/o Legislative Information
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Senator Sherman, Representative Edgecomb and Distinguished Committee Members:

The Board of Agriculture (Board) met March and November of 2011. Across the year we focused on the critical role of the University of Maine in support of agriculture research and development (Extension). The Board had the opportunity to meet with the chancellor of the University of Maine System, the new president of the University of Maine, and legislators to discuss opportunities and challenges facing agricultural research and extension in Maine.

The March meeting was held in the governor's cabinet room of the State House. University of Maine System Chancellor Richard Pattenaude and the Board discussed the state budget, research and development bills, and changes within the University of Maine System. The chancellor told the Board that the only bond bill the University System will support is the Animal and Plant Diagnostic Lab Facility at the Orono campus. The chancellor also briefed the Board on the system's multi-year plan; *New Challenges, New Directions*, which focuses on financial stability for the system. Board members discussed with the chancellor how the university meets the critical research and development (Cooperative Extension) needs of Maine's diverse agricultural sector.

Jake Ward, Assistant Vice President for Research, Economic Development and Government Relations at the University of Maine reviewed the research and development (R&D) continuum with the Board members. The Board talked about the partnership between UMaine R&D and Maine agriculture and key infrastructure needs for the future. Ward reported that in the recent past, grants and contract activity was up however, the loss of federal earmarks and stimulus-funded research projects means that UMaine will lose research funding in the near term.

The Board agreed at the March meeting to refocus on support for agriculture and natural resources R&D. Board members had multiple productive discussions with legislators at the meeting.

In November, the Board met at the University of Maine. Board members Senator Sherman and Representative Edgecomb briefed the Board on the sentiment toward bond investments at the Legislature. The Board unanimously agreed to write a letter to Governor LePage supporting the UMaine Animal and Plant Diagnostic Lab Facility bond initiative.

The Board received a briefing from Dr. William Wolters, Acting Research Leader, New England Plant, Soil, and Water Lab (NEPSWL), on the current status and staffing at the lab. Since the Board met in March, USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) management encouraged the

majority of agricultural research scientists and technicians to leave the Orono research facility based on management's interpretation of the federal FY 2011 budget. This action gutted the agricultural research capacity at the Orono facility, the only agriculture-focused ARS facility in New England. The NEPSWL scientists supported agricultural research in Maine and New England and had partnerships with UMaine faculty. The Board is concerned that these changes greatly diminish the agriculture research capacity in Maine and New England and decided to make the concerns known to the Maine Congressional delegation and the USDA.

The University of Maine's new president, Paul Ferguson, attended the November meeting and lunch. Board members outlined the importance of UMaine's agricultural research and extension. President Ferguson expressed a strong commitment to the ideals of the land grant institution and to research and extension programs. He stated that the bond issues are critical to updating current buildings and research labs to create world-class facilities. Ferguson suggested that the Board could assist by supporting these needs. During the discussion Board members expressed concerns with shrinking faculty numbers and position vacancies. The Board would prefer to see key open positions refilled and current capacity maintained or expanded.

Michael Eckardt, Vice President for Research, also briefed the Board on trends in UMaine R&D. The Board also received updates from the College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture, the Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station, and University of Maine Cooperative Extension on future budgets. There is a great deal of uncertainty and fiscal pressure related to state and federal budgets that are likely to result in more reductions in positions supporting agricultural research and extension.

The College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture is making progress towards establishing the School of Food and Agriculture, which would include the departments of Animal & Veterinary Sciences; Food Sciences & Human Nutrition; and Plant, Soil & Environmental Sciences. The college continues to improve infrastructure and equipment at the research farms with energy-efficiency upgrades, renovations, and major equipment replacements. Experiment Station directors are discussing future needs for research on adapting agriculture to climate change. Extension will be focusing resources on selected core areas and limiting resources in other program areas. Board members were pleased to hear that agriculture is a core area for UMaine Cooperative Extension. The Board unanimously voted to support the formation of the School of Food and Agriculture.

The Board agreed that we need to redouble the effort to grow Maine's agricultural sector by identifying critical research and extension needs by sector. In this way we can clearly articulate the importance of the needs to the University, the University of Maine System, and the Legislature.

Please contact me if the Committee has any questions.

Regards,



David Bell
Chair

CC: Board of Agriculture