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BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

Annual Report to Maine State Legislature

February 2, 2016

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

Dear Senator Edgecomb, Representative Hickman, and Distinguished Committee Members:

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 this annual report on the Board of Agriculture's progress and activities for the past year. The Board was established by the Legislature in 1997 to provide input and guidance from Maine's agricultural community into the agricultural research and Extension programs at the University of Maine. The Board's primary interaction is with the Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station (MAFES) in the College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension. In the last year the Board has also directly communicated on a regular basis with the Chancellor of the University Maine System (UMS) and the President of the University.

In the last couple of years the focus of the Board has been the faculty capacity of MAFES and Cooperative Extension as UMS addresses its structural budget gap issues. Since research, Extension and teaching are human capital intensive, the largest portion of the university budget relates to faculty capacity. Significant budget cuts result in the loss of faculty. As we outlined in last year's report, the Board is trying to avert significant faculty capacity losses related to agriculture and food research, and Extension (faculty losses in the late 1990's led to the Board's formation by the Legislature). As a result of budget reductions over the last three to four decades, in most cases food and agriculture-related capacity across disciplines have only one faculty member, hence a loss of a position directly impacts an agricultural sector.

In 2015 the Board continued efforts begun in 2014, communicating directly with University of Maine President Hunter and her management team, in addition to Dr. Edward Ashworth, Director of MAFES, and Extension Director John Rebar. The Board also has maintained regular contact with the UMS Chancellor, James Page.

MARCH 2015 MEETING

The March meeting was held in the State House complex to provide the opportunity for Board members to interact with key legislative committees. Dr. Carol Kim, UMaine VP for Research provided a brief update including how the Maine Economic Improvement Fund (MEIF) helps to support the land and sea grant mission of the University providing some overall context on University research investments.

MAFES and College Update

Dr. Edward Ashworth presented an update on the FY16 budget planning process and the funding streams to the Experiment Stations and the College of Natural Sciences Forestry and Agriculture. The funding sources include federal formula funds, UMS funding from the state, MEIF funding, research grants, and tuition and fees. It was noted that tuition and fees have been held constant for students the last 4 years. The college budget cut for FY16 was expected to be \$781.5k. Dr. Ashworth planned to meet the cut by eliminating 6 faculty and support positions.

Dr. Ashworth reported there were 19 retirements or other vacancies. Three were related to agriculture: a food Chemist, an animal scientist, and a food science technician. Despite these losses, Dr. Ashworth announced planned new hires, including agricultural hires likely within animal disease, vector biology, animal nutrition, and coast ecological modeling (aquaculture related).

NFSA faculty continues to be successful in obtaining research grants with \$19.5M in grants over 7 months. The number of accepted student applications to the College is up 20%. The College has also developed an interactive web-based map showing the statewide reach of University of Maine research programs.

It was reported developers from Old Town and Orono had an interest in developing the Smith Farm on Stillwater Ave. The Experiment Station declined as this parcel has very good soils and is important to both sustainable agricultural research at Rogers Farm and the Witter Farm operations.

Witter Center

Dr. Fred Servello is leading a group of faculty, staff and administrators reviewing the operations of the Witter Center Farm. The Witter Center has dairy, horse and sheep at the farm and conducts grain and vegetable research at the Rogers Farm facility. The goal is to align the animal herd sizes to current teaching and research needs with to reduce farm financial risk and better utilize high value land for crop research. This is the first step in developing a modernization plan for the Witter Center.

Cooperative Extension

Director Rebar reported on FY16 budget planning. The FY16 University budget cuts are expected to be about 1/3 as large as the prior year or \$210k vs. \$735k. Federal funding and county funding will be basically flat. Faculty reductions will not be in core agricultural areas. Director Rebar intends to fill an agronomy faculty position in Aroostook County as a joint appointment with the University of Maine Presque Isle and a program administrator for Maine food systems. Dr. David Lambert will be a part time professional during the summer filling some of the plant pathologist duties for retiring Dr. Bruce Watt. Filling the plant pathology position will be a future priority.

Director Rebar outlined more than a dozen key producer educational programs around the state that had been held through the winter and early spring. Extension has also been focused on the avian influenza problem in the Midwest and west. Director Rebar also reported that planning for the Diagnostic Lab is in full gear.

Current climate change predictions show Maine will have ample water for agriculture in 2095 compared to other parts of the country, an opportunity for Maine agriculture.

University of Maine System Future

Chancellor Page gave a brief update on future directions of the University of Maine System and efforts to address structural budget gaps. The Chancellor stated there will be significant changes at the system level. His goal is One University across the state with campuses that have unique strengths and offerings. Program structure is being reviewed to identify each campus's competitive advantage. The goal is to identify signature and emerging programs. In an effort to reduce administrative costs there will be one administrative structure. Campus "silos" will be eliminated without hurting service to students and Maine citizens.

BOARD DISCUSSION AND ACTIONS, POST MARCH 2015 MEETING

The BOA Working Group formed in 2014 to address Board concerns with UMaine faculty capacity ensured that a half dozen agricultural representatives testified on both the UMS budget, which included a modest cost of living increase, and the Maine Economic Improvement Fund (MEIF) budget and increased investment before the Legislature's Appropriations Committee.

The Board acknowledged that while not central to the Board's mission, academic programs related to agriculture and food are important to the success of Maine agriculture, the pre-vet program being a good example. Joint research appointments are also dependent on strong academic programs. Board members questioned whether the Board should put some attention to academic programs beyond periodic reports from the College.

The Working Group met with President Hunter and her management team as well as Chancellor Page early in the fall to review the filling of key positions and to receive a briefing of new MEIF investments. The efforts to retain and fill key faculty positions and needs were presented to the Board at the October meeting.

OCTOBER 2015 MEETING

President Hunter Presentation

University of Maine President, Dr. Susan Hunter briefed the Board at its October meeting on the role of the University in the One University Initiative and other campus activities. As the Land Grant University celebrated its 150th anniversary, 50 new faculty members were hired which is an opportunity to position UMaine for the future. Over the last 5 years out-of-state students have increased from 17 to 28 percent realizing more out of state tuition dollars. The University of Maine is the only research university in Maine with over \$100 million in projects.

Discussions with Chancellor Page have focused on the unique land- and sea-grant missions, outreach and impact across the state and community engagement, and how the land/sea-grant experience enhances the student experience. President Hunter pointed out that all facets of the University are important – from the athletic programs to the Fogler Library, the largest research library in Maine.

The One University initiative envisions an integrated university system across the state with seven mission-differentiated campuses. The core objective is to provide access to system-wide resources and obtain efficiencies. President Hunter acknowledged that currently UMS is not financially sustainable and the effort is to form leaner administrative, procurement, technology, and human resource functions across the system without negatively affecting students. Faculty groups will

provide greater collaboration which will enhance the student experience across campuses. A greater focus on internships will help Maine's future workforce and keep students in Maine.

University of Maine Research Capacity Update

Jake Ward, VP for Innovation & Economic Development reported that at that point research expenditures across Maine were approximately \$60M with approximately \$25M in agriculture and forestry. 500 research projects were proposed with 300 funded to date.

Critical Food and Agriculture Faculty Position Updates

Dr. Edward Ashworth, Dean and Director of the College of Natural Sciences, Forestry and Agriculture and John Rebar, Director of Cooperative Extension gave an update on faculty capacity.

Faculty retirements and career change decisions continually impact faculty capacity. Recent vacancies occurring in the College include a food scientist, molecular geneticist, and a farm manager. Searches are currently being conducted for animal disease and animal nutrition faculty. The food scientist position will be filled and an applied plant pathology position will be filled with new MEIF funding.

In Extension a livestock-poultry vacancy occurred as a result of a promotion and a plant pathologist at the diagnostic lab retired. The intention is to fill a statewide livestock position and the plant pathology position with existing resources (assuming capacity in the FY 17 budget) and a new food scientist position with new MEIF funding. It is planned the food scientist position will be a joint appointment. An agricultural agent position is being filled for Oxford and Cumberland counties.

(Note that positions discussed were based on very preliminary FY17 budget information available at meeting time.)

Board members pointed to the need for pathology help for Christmas trees and general technology transfer for Christmas tree producers. The importance of the pathology position at the diagnostic lab was underscored by Board members as often it is difficult to distinguish plant diseases. The importance of food safety and support for value added food processing was also discussed, a Board priority since the late 1990's and an area of current high demand. Board members mentioned the importance of reaching out well beyond New England for animal science faculty.

Agricultural Extension Faculty Transition Planning

Director Rebar reported on Extension's plan to address program transitions when long-term Extension faculty retire that are the primary educational resource to an agricultural sector. This is a priority capacity area that the Board identified in 2014, as in most cases there is not junior faculty that can take over unique Extension programs. The concern is a generation of institutional knowledge will be largely lost if there is not overlap with new faculty, as well as the potential for an 18 month gap in capacity if the hiring process does not begin until after faculty leave.

The plan is if a faculty member filling a unique role in supporting Maine agriculture announces publically that they will retire within three years, a search for that position will be initiated with the goal of having the new person work with the existing faculty member for 2 years to transition the program. Federal funds would pay for the new faculty member for the first 2 years, and then the position would go on the existing position's salary. This transition plan has been approved by the Chancellor, University President, and Provost.

University of Maine System Supporting Maine's Food Based Economy

Chancellor Page is committed to supporting the growth of Maine's food based economy. Director Rebar gave a very positive presentation on the opportunities to the UMS Trustees on the how Maine Food and Agriculture is growing and how it can have a bigger impact on the Maine economy in the future provided growth is realized. An abbreviated version was presented to the Board.

The growth in the public's interest of locally produced food and agricultural products was reviewed such as the growth in farmer's markets, community supported agriculture buying, and micro-breweries. There is an opportunity to expand the impact of the Maine Agricultural Center (MAC) created 15 years ago to provide a focus for the College and Extension to support the breadth of Maine agriculture. Broadening the focus to agriculture and food and opening MAC membership to all faculties across all campuses would get to part of the Board's vision dating from the late 1990s when it was formed to tap into and provide collaboration statewide to more efficiently use the resources and capacities of other University campuses.

Overall, there is still untapped opportunity for producers of Maine food and expertise within the University System to work together to move this economic sector forward, such as expanding food production for markets beyond Maine's borders.

College of Natural Sciences Forestry and Agriculture (NSFA) Update

Dr. Edward Ashworth gave a brief update on the college, which is doing very well. NSFA has the largest undergraduate enrollment, the highest amount of grants funded, and many transitions in staff and faculty.

In the current school year there was an 8% increase in first year students and a 19% increase in transfer students. Overall student enrollment is the same as in previous year. As of October 2015 the college's research grants total \$29.4 million, 58% of UMaine grant dollars including \$2 million in industry support, and \$2 million scholarship bequests. Seven animal pre-veterinary students were admitted to veterinary school, their hands on experience giving them an edge. 2015 was a good year with a lot to be proud of.

Maine Agriculture and Forest Experiment Station (MAFES)

Dr. Fred Servello reported it has been a busy year across the farms; a good reflection on the grant money coming in. Some representative examples include: (1) plant pathology was ramped up at Aroostook Farm; (2) staff with Blueberry Hill Farm serviced on farm research projects across all growing areas, (3) many new research projects were conducted at Rogers Farm, (4) and the Roger Clapp Greenhouse supported all the research farms, teaching needs, and student projects. Investments in the farms included two new tractors, one at Highmoor and the other at Rogers; two new trucks, one at Aroostook and one at Witter. Modernization plans are in the works for all farms to move out of catch up mode and into planning for the future.

Cooperative Extension Update

Director John Rebar summarized UMS' commitment to buying more locally produced food. The ten-year food service contract expires soon and procurement is determined to include locally produced food. Any facility or farm within 175 miles of any UMS facility can sell to any campus or facility in the system as local. (Note that the Chancellor and his staff out reached to the Board in the summer to

get input on how to facilitate procurement of more Maine food in the systems new food service contract).

Director Rebar also reported the Diagnostic lab planning process is underway; funding is being prioritized by needs and what can be afforded. Ground breaking is planned for the spring of 2016 with the facility opening in late spring/summer of 2017.

Board of Agriculture Summary

In 2015, the Board continued to be extremely active in supporting critical agricultural research and Extension capacity at the University of Maine both with University leadership and the Legislature. Board members supported University System budget initiatives and Maine Economic Improvement Fund (MEIF) at the Maine State Legislature. As the University of Maine System addresses its budget challenges and restructures for the 21st century, Board leadership continues to work closely with Chancellor Page and University of Maine President Hunter and key University leaders on her staff to ensure right sizing of agriculture and food, research and Extension for the future.

The Board is pleased that University leadership supports efforts to maintain critical faculty capacity identified by the Board in 2014 and is working toward filling critical faculty capacity needs identified at that time. We support the Chancellor's efforts to address budget gaps through system efficiencies and "back office" functions that will not directly impact students. Cooperative Extension's plan to address faculty retirement transition challenges was a significant step forward in 2015.

The Board fully understands that UMS and the University still has considerable work to do position itself for the 21st century. There are many opportunities for Maine agriculture and value added food production in the coming decades. Realizing the opportunities will mean substantial change and adaptation within Maine's Food Economy. The same level of change will also need to continue within the University's related academic, research, and public service (including Extension) mission areas. Such change requires consistent support, both financially and institutionally. Therefore, as operational efficiencies are realized at the University, support for the growth of Maine's food economy will require additional investments. The Board will continue to work with University leadership and the Legislature to realize Maine's food sector economic opportunities.

We look forward to discussing the opportunities and challenges with the Committee at its convenience.

Regards,



David K. Bell
Chair



Donald Marean
Vice Chair

Cc: Board of Agriculture Members