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Board of Agriculture
2024 Annual Report to the Maine Legislature
&
Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System

May 29, 2025

Senator Rachel Talbot Ross, Chair

Representative William Pluecker, Chair

Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

100 State House Station

Augusta, ME 04333

Patricia (Trish) A. Riley, Chair

University of Maine System Board of Trustees

15 Estabrooke Drive, Office 251

Orono, ME 04469

Cc:

Senator Joseph Rafferty & Representative Kelly Murphy, Chairs, Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Dannel Malloy, Chancellor, University of Maine System

Joan Ferrini-Mundy, President, University of Maine

Diane Rowland, Dean, College of Earth, Life, and Health Sciences and Director, Maine Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station

Amanda Ouellette, Library Associate, Law and Legislative Reference Library

Dear Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and distinguished Committee members, and Chair Riley and distinguished Board members,

The Board of Agriculture (BoA) thanks you for your support of its work in 2024. As Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Agriculture, we are pleased to provide the Joint Standing Committee of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry and the Board of Trustees with our 2024 annual report.

The members of the BoA serve to represent their industry groups and Maine agriculture as a whole. They are all professionals in their particular field and understand the critical need for research and outreach in order for the industry to not only survive but thrive. The Board has

developed the following recommendations which seek to improve communication between the Board and UMaine, allowing us adequate opportunity to do the work outlined in the statute, and increase our effectiveness as representatives of the agricultural community.

Budget development

A significant role of the BoA is outlined in the statute. *SS 125 1. Duties ...The director, with the agreement of the board, shall develop a budget for the station. The board and the director shall seek agreement on all issues. In the event that agreement cannot be reached, final authority rests with the director.*

In order to fulfill that statutory requirement, the BoA requires timely information on the University budget and budget process. That information has not been available to the BoA and therefore we are unable to provide input as required by law. We are requesting the assistance of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to enter into conversation with the BoA and the University about our role in budget development that can help us all move forward.

Over the past two years the Board has had several meetings that focused on budget development, budget process and the associated timelines. A Board committee, working with the Deans, established a four meeting per year schedule that was designed to coincide with federal reporting and budget development to achieve that goal. The Board was informed later that four meetings a year could not occur due to staffing shortages. Further, the Board could not have any specific information about the UMaine budget until it is approved by the BOT. It is impossible to have input after the budget is closed.

This issue came to the front after the change in federal administration as Board members received emails (attached) and phone calls from farmers who had heard that there were going to be significant cuts in Cooperative Extension – primarily an agricultural engineer position that has been a priority for years. The farmers believed that members of the Board would have been informed of these cuts and could explain what was happening and why. Members relayed that they were as much in the dark as the producers; leaving everyone frustrated.

The Board was created to amplify the voice of agriculture to UMaine at a time when UMaine was shrinking its agricultural footprint. Individual producers do not have the time to advocate each issue on their own and the Board should be able to fill that role. The Board wants to do that.

We fully appreciate that this is a difficult time for the University and believe that in difficult times it is even more essential to have stakeholder input into difficult budget decisions.

Agriculture member on Board of Trustees

In 1865 the Maine State College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts was established. Forestry, fishing, agriculture were significant parts of the economy. The land grant Board of Trustees (BOT) naturally consisted of people with knowledge of / or expertise in those industries. While times have changed, the need for the land grant university to include people with a working knowledge of agriculture is still important.

- The Board of Agriculture recommends that the University of Maine System should include at least one seat directly related to agriculture. As the Land Grant university for Maine it is critical that agriculture have a voice on the BOT and we suggest that that individual act as a liaison to the Board.

Reports on MAFES and Extension to Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

The BoA statute requires the Board to report to the legislature on *SS125 sec. 6. the status of demonstration projects, research findings, informational activities* of MAFES and Extension. We believe that for the BoA to attempt to develop and present this report would require significant time from University staff and would not fulfill the spirit of the law - which is to provide you, the policy makers, with information that you can use to develop sound agriculture policy. Further, since the University budget is heard in the Education Committee there are few opportunities for ACF to hear directly from the people who are leading the programs that mean so much to your agriculture constituents.

- The Board recommends that the Deans of Extension and the college housing agriculture and Maine Agriculture and Forestry Experiment Stations (MAFES) provide an annual, in-person report to the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

On-site visits to MAFES Facilities

In the past couple of years, the Board has made part of their meeting a tour of facilities. On site information, especially information coming from the folks working in those facilities has been very helpful to Board members as we discuss capital needs from the agricultural side. We are delighted with the new dairy barn for example, as a way to improve the education experience for students and have some of them skill ready to be on a modern working dairy where labor is so needed.

- The Board recommends that the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry either on its own or join Board as we tour various facilities of MAFES, classrooms, greenhouses, etc.

The Board welcomes the opportunity to discuss these recommendations with the BOT and/or Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry at their convenience.

Summary of 2024 meetings

The Board met 5 times in 2024: budget meeting on February 2; meeting with Governor Mills on March 20; agricultural needs meeting on April 26; Budget Summit called by University of Maine (UMaine) President Ferrini-Mundy on August 23; meeting with UMaine System Chancellor Dannel Malloy and UMaine President Ferrini-Mundy on October 4. A sixth Officer's meeting was scheduled for December but was cancelled due to lack of staffing.

The February 2, meeting was held on campus at the UMaine. Thirteen Board members attended, along with five UMaine administrators and three guests. UMaine administrators presented on ongoing programs and projects that affect agriculture including the modernization of Witter Farm, the Alford Pathways, and the Maine Jobs Recovery and Plan. The Board's Chair introduced a vision for restructuring the Board's committees to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Board. This restructuring included the creation of the Executive Committee and the consolidation of the Committee of Governance, and Structure and Charge Committee into a single *ad hoc* committee, and the renaming and restructuring of the Advisory to the Director Committee (now "Advisory Committee"). The objective of the restructuring was to create work plans within committees that would then guide the actions of the Board. Particularly, the annual reports to the Board of Trustees can focus on key priorities. Board members were asked to identify major issues in their industries. Discussion resulted in identification of four areas to push for investment: 1) workforce development, 2) infrastructure to serve agriculture through College of Earth, Life and Health Sciences (ELH) and the Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station (MAFES), 3) incorporation of stories about how current research is happening on a shoestring budget, and 4) how UMaine can impact agricultural industry. Discussion then shifted to focus on UMaine's

challenges with low enrollment, short budgets, and loss of ELH communications positions. Through academic course mapping ELH can assess the need to fill gaps with adjuncts and do what is needed to maintain and move programs into the future. The college drives one-third of the research at the University. UMaine is placing more needs on research grants, a national trend; we are moving to all graduate support coming from grants. UMaine has worked with the Board of Trustees to balance the budget over three years. There was some loss in enrollment due to the free community college. UMaine is not firing but may not be filling positions, doing a deep dive into programs (except for pre-vet, agriculture enrollments are low), some programs may go from undergraduate to graduate, and proposals are encouraged to include support for grad students. A percentage of the grant goes to indirect costs, this year was about \$22 million from \$200 million in grants. About 90% of these grad students get jobs in Maine upon graduation. In closing, the Board was reminded that emails are not appropriate for making decisions at the Committee or Board level. The Board chair reported that a rewrite to the Board's statute failed to pass in a legislative committee, and UMaine was asked to provide reports ahead of Board meetings for a question-and-answer session moving forward.

At the March 20 meeting, sixteen Board members, one University administrator, and two guests were in attendance. The Board met in the Maine Capitol building with Maine Governor Janet Mills. The Board expressed gratitude for continuing support for Maine's agricultural industry, the University of Maine Agriculture and Forest Experiment Station, and Cooperative Extension. The discussion with the governor included the topics of lack of faculty and programs, PFAS and the state's response, Maine grown food and the need for economic impact study of agriculture in Maine, incentivizing participation by the younger generation, and public private research and development partnerships. The group also discussed the State government budget cycle, and what time of the year is most opportune to talk with the Governor about the State budget and the impact on the agricultural programming at the University of Maine and the University of Maine Agriculture and Forest Experiment Station, and Cooperative Extension.

The April meeting was held on the 26th at the University of Maine, with ten Board members, five UM/UMS administrators, and one guest present. In this meeting UMaine's President Ferrini-Mundy presented UMaine's fiscal year 2025 update. The update included the launching of a Strategic Re-Envision process to evaluate what UMaine would look like if we were designing it today, enrollment statistics, unit planning, ongoing infrastructure projects, a campus-wide budget hearing, and the internal timeline for fiscal year 2026 planning, submission and approval. Keys for fiscal year 2026 included refining enrollment projection to include retention and student credit hour projections. The fiscal year 2025 education and general expense budget was broken down by primary revenue sources, primary expenses, and budget targets in terms of net revenues, total expenses, and reserves. The President also provided a summary of potential new revenue opportunities. President Ferrini-Mundy suggested the Board hold a budget summit in August to further delve into the subject. Next, MAFES and Cooperative Extensions provided their budget histories, impacts to service delivery, and current needs. An announcement was made regarding MAFES acquisition of Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) through the National Institute of Standards and Technology to renovate and modernize the Analytical (soils) Lab. A list of current services was provided to the board and feedback related to priorities for the new facility was requested by MAFES.

The August meeting was held on the 23rd at the University of Maine, with eleven Board members, eight UM/UMS administrators, and seven guests present including one guest presenter, Dr. Richard (Rick) Rhodes from the AgInnovation Northeast (formerly Northeastern Regional Association of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors). UMaine's President Ferrini-Mundy provided an overview of the university's budgeting process. This overview included a summary of enrolled students as the primary source of income is tuition, major capital projects (Blueberry Hill

Farm irrigation and fresh-pack line, sawmill and classroom in DeMeritt Forest, and new dairy barn at the Witter Center), the three-phase Strategic Re-Envisioning Process, and a fiscal year 2025 and 2026 update. Next, MAFES provided their budget overview describing how MAFES is a unit within ELH and gets its funding through federal capacity grants (Hatch, Hatch-Multistate, McIntire-Stennis, and Animal Health) and state required match either education or general expense budget. All data presented are publicly available via in the AD-419 federal reporting form. After the budget overview, MAFES provided a list of priority position needs. Then, Cooperative Extension provided their budget overview highlighting the top awards received, concerns about the upcoming fiscal year, and opportunities to meet budgetary needs. All three budget overviews were followed by question-and-answer sessions. Lastly, Dr. Rick Rhodes provided an overview of the history of Experiment Stations nationally and regionally. He highlighted different levels of state match for different regions and provided recommendations for Experiment Station advancement.

The October meeting was held on the 4th was held virtually with thirteen Board members, six UM/UMS administrators, and thirteen guests present including Dr. Sabrina DeTurk the University of Maine's Strategic Re-Envisioning Project Director. For the first time, this meeting was made publicly available via a YouTube channel in accordance with Maine legislative public meeting policy. UMaine System Chancellor Malloy began the meeting with an address to the Board, which highlighted the Chancellor's appreciation for the Boards work, emphasized the system charge to educate and retain students for Maine's workforce, stressed the importance of private sector investments in meeting budgetary needs, and declared that the UMaine System has asked the state for a 6% budget increase. UMaine President Ferrini-Mundy followed with her own remarks, which summarized the infrastructure agriculture and forestry related infrastructure projects, highlighted a UMaine-wide emphasis on workforce development, and thanked the Board and deep knowledge on the issues the university faces. Each address was followed by a question-and-answer session. Next, MAFES Director Rowland led a Congressional Directed Spending ideas roundtable, where the Board was asked to provide ideas that would benefit their industries. Then, the Board discussed their participation in the upcoming Agricultural Tradeshow and Hall of Flags. Lastly, Dr. Sabrina DeTurk led a Strategic Re-Envisioning discussion. The discussion started with a short presentation reviewing the timeline of this process and five themes that are particularly relevant to agriculture in Maine: Theme 1 – allocation of space, Theme 2 – optimizing academic units, Theme 5 – optimizing research centers and institutes, and Theme 8 – economic development. Then the board discussed operational efficiency, opportunities, and workforce development as they related to these Strategic Re-Envisioning themes. To conclude, the Board Chair and MAFES Director and Associate Director were tasked with scheduling 2026 meetings.

Sincerely,



Marge Kilkenny, BOA Chair

16/06/2025

Date



[Kevin Woltemath \(Jun 16, 2025 09:22 EDT\)](#)

Kevin Woltemath, BOA Vice Chair

16/06/2025

Date

Industry Specific Comments from Board of Agriculture Members

Livestock Industry

Livestock production is an essential aspect of agriculture and the rural economy. The demand for locally grown and processed meat is growing and we are encouraged to see workshops on meat cutting. In the past couple of years sharing information and collaborating with other land grants to offer webinars on sheep and goat management has increased knowledge and expanded resources for producers.

There are two health issues that are impacting sheep, goat, llama and alpaca producers.

First, the increase in Meningeal worm disease, caused by the parasite *Parelaphostrongylus tenuis*. The parasite, native to whitetail deer, can cause neurological issues when it migrates through the spinal cord and brain of infected animals. Snails and slugs are intermediary hosts and the wet seasons we have had increase those populations. The disease is deadly if untreated and even treatment if not early is often unsuccessful. Research is needed into managing grazing in damp areas where snails and slugs thrive as well as early detection and management of the disease.

Second, Cache Valley Fever. Cache Valley Virus is a mosquito borne virus, sheep and goats infected during early pregnancy often abort or have malformed fetuses. Some animals will lamb or kid but have no milk. The disease has impacted several herds in Maine. It is zoonotic. Research on effective prevention, testing during pregnancy, and long-term impacts on the individual animal and herd would be useful tools for producers.

Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA)

The University of Maine Cooperative Extension and MAFES are critical to farm viability, pfas adaptation, and climate resilience. Maine needs a strong local food system and rural economic development. That is not possible without continued public support for the necessary staffing and infrastructure for agricultural research, diagnostics, education and technical support.

MOFGA strongly advocates for the continued support for the Maine soil testing service. This is one of the only public soil labs in the region. We do not want to leave our farmers beholden to commercial labs trying to sell fertilizer. We need increased support for the plant disease diagnostic lab, which recently has to start charging for the first time. We utilize both of these services constantly in our technical assistance work with farmers as they provide crucial information for decision making.

MOFGA is concerned about the potential dismantling of the county structure. We already have extension professionals covering multiple counties who are working beyond a sustainable capacity and we see a need for additional general crop specialists. A restructuring cannot result in spreading existing services thinner. Regardless of the structure we need additional general crop specialist(s), especially if we intend to support a viable generation of beginning farmers.

Apple Industry

The apple industry is an integral part of the history of Maine. Apple orchards from small to over 300 acres provide high quality local fruit as well as opportunities to pick your own and experience the variety of foods that can be prepared with apples. Value added is a critical part of the market mix. Cider, wine, baked goods etc. are all becoming more important to the viability of apple producers. A challenge is getting the right sized and priced equipment to efficiently make these products. Agricultural engineering is critical to developing or identifying. Meeting regulations is another hurdle.

Grain Industry

Maine Agricultural and Forest Experiment Station houses grain research plots at Roger's Farm to address weed management, disease management, tillage practices and variety trials that support Maine's milling brewing and seed industries and the markets they serve. Dr. Ellen Mallory has been tapped to address PFAS issues, so the work of Grains has been taken up by Researcher Tom Malloy. Tom helps provide experimental seeds and guidance to Maine's grain farming community. Retired extension agent Rick Kersbergen had led the formative efforts to teach Maine's organic dairy farmers to grow grains, creating a base of knowledge for which the revival of marketable grain on Maine farms has blossomed. UMaine Cooperative Extension and MAFES in partnership with Cornell University and other nationwide partners under an OREI Grant recently researched comparative nutrient analysis for locally grown grains compared to industry accepted norms to quantify differences for value added marketing. The recent resignation of Facility Manager, Rob Dumas from The Food Science Innovation center leaves a gap in leadership for helping Maine food, producers innovate new recipes and processes for margin improvement in Maine food businesses. Sodexo has just renewed another three-year pledge to focus on increasing the consumption of Maine grown grains in all university campus dining facilities, leadership that is already influencing the purchasing practices of colleges and institutions throughout the northeast. The addition of an Agroforestry project on the University of Maine Orono campus is exciting, where researchers in the UK and elsewhere have led progress establishing the benefits of agroforestry and mixed population planting for disease management and supporting biodiversity and resilience on farms. Maine's grain industry has benefited greatly from post pandemic state, and federal investments in infrastructure to build resilience in the food system, though current USDA funding freezes, threats of tariffs with Canada, increasing aluminum prices, and economic uncertainty have already stymied the growth of Maine's grain economy in 2025.

Maine Wild Blueberry Industry

The Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine, as representative of Maine's wild blueberry industry, is pleased to have this opportunity to provide crucial feedback to the University of Maine on the status of agricultural research and development, and agricultural programs delivered to the wild blueberry industry in service to the University of Maine's Land Grant Mission.

Status of Wild Blueberry Demonstration Projects:

Blueberry Hill Farm, initiated through legislative action and funding in the 1940's and strong support from the wild blueberry industry, is a critical resource for the University's wild blueberry research and Extension program. Its fields are used for experimental plots by researchers annually, and each June, Extension hosts Blueberry Farm Field Day to share the latest about their research and findings with the producer community. The farm is regularly visited by state and

federal policy makers interested in learning more about the important role that the University plays in Maine's wild blueberry industry.

Blueberry Hill Farm, with strong industry support, received a \$2.9M Congressional Directed Spending allocation and is in the process of strategically allocating that funding to improve the grounds and the farm's research capability.

The ongoing partnership between the University of Maine and the wild blueberry industry has driven a 500% increase in production over the last 50 years and is foundational to the cutting-edge Integrated Pest Management practices employed throughout the industry that reduce impacts on the environment while effectively controlling pests. In 2024, wild blueberry MAFES and Extension faculty leveraged grants and support from our industry tax funding to generate \$23 of external funding for every \$1 invested by the industry. In 2024, there were at least 22 different wild blueberry MAFES and Extension projects carried out by more than 15 different University of Maine faculty and staff members. The purpose of this work is to try and optimize net returns for growers and processors, and deliver concrete and practical recommendations that our industry can use.

2024 Research Findings

- Unmanaged field edges offer refuge and help to sustain increasingly widespread populations of two new parasitoid wasp natural predators of the spotted wing drosophila.
- Early results indicate that the spotted wing drosophila natural parasitoid, *Ganaspis kimorum* can overwinter in Maine. This indicates promise for its ability to contribute to natural control of the invasive pest.
- Verdepryn shows early promise as a spotted wing drosophila control tool, but additional testing is needed before making recommendations.
- Early results indicate that two newly introduced spotted wing drosophila parasitoids show some ability to survive low levels of tested crop protectants.
- 2024 wild blueberry native pollinator surveys indicate similar levels of diversity and abundance as previous surveys (10+ years ago).
- Drone research indicates a need for additional development.
- Elysis shows early promise for control of mummy berry disease, but an additional year of testing is needed prior to making a recommendation.
- Leaf spot management activities should be conducted in the prune year.
- Extension's wild blueberry Phenology Tracker Tool is available to producers looking to more effectively and efficiently plan their seasonal management activities.
- Results to date indicate that wood chip mulching does not tie up or steal nitrogen from the crop.
- Results indicate potential for woodchip mulch to reduce leaf spot diseases in the first few years after application, but look for leaf spot diseases to show up again in the third year.
- Mulch should be applied in the fall after mowing, or in the early spring prior to stem emergence.
- Research does not yet support the use of biochar as a soil amendment, and does not support the use of sawdust as a mulch material.
- If solar panels are installed over wild blueberry fields, plant productivity will no longer support commercial production.
- Mechanical harvesters should be used at slow speeds to minimize fruit loss, which can exceed 30% of the fruit load.

- Early crop image modelling as a predictive tool shows some promise for multiple future uses. More research is needed.
- Berries should be brought down to less than 44 degrees Fahrenheit as soon as possible after harvest to maintain quality and food safety.

Informational Activities:

- Wild blueberry Extension activities reached more than 386 producers, primarily in-person, in 2024. This includes industry wide gatherings as well as dozens of one-on-one consultations.
- Due to research conducted through Extension, Hancock County producers applied for more than 160 new acres of whole-field mulching through the NRCS in 2024.
- 77% of attendees at the February Wild Blueberry Conference (2025) indicated that they learned something new about weed management and 66% indicated that they would change a practice on their farm related to weed management.

Evaluation and Recommendations:

Continued research, development, and Extension provided by the University of Maine in support of the wild blueberry industry is critical to the success of the industry. We support the recommendations put forward by the Board of Agriculture to the University and highlight in particular, the following:

- There is a critical need to hire an Agricultural Engineer to support multiple ongoing wild blueberry projects in the Advanced Manufacturing Center (AMC). Note that the Maine USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service has also lost an estimated 50% of its engineer capacity in the first quarter of 2025. This statewide lack of agricultural engineering capacity is a major gap, and will limit the ability of Maine agriculture to remain competitive, limit the ability of the State of Maine to meet its goal of increasing the amount of food consumed in the state from Maine food producers to 30% by 2030, and limit the ability of Maine agricultural industries to address their own pressing needs for research and development.
- The Board of Agriculture can serve an essential role in providing stakeholder input to the University at key points in the planning and budget allocation process. In the past 5 to 10 years, a lack of timely information seems to have limited the ability of the board to carry out its statutory duties. We recommend that the Maine Board of Trustees include a crossover appointee from the Board of Agriculture, to better keep both bodies informed, improve the trustees' knowledge of agricultural industry needs and opportunities, and improve the Board's ability to provide timely input into pressing budgetary decisions that impact Maine's agricultural communities.
- The condition of Blueberry Hill Farm, which is both an outward-facing representation of the wild blueberry industry to farm visitors, and a crucial research facility, is poor. Improved maintenance and upkeep standards may help to better leverage this asset for the industry and other farm visitors.



December 27, 2024

FROM: Agricultural Council of Maine

TO: Board of Agriculture

RE: Priorities for the University of Maine's Maine Agriculture and Forest Experiment Station and Extension

Dear Chair Kilkelly and Members of the Board,

The Agricultural Council of Maine ("AgCOM") is an organization whose members are representative of most of the major agricultural organizations across the State. We support Maine agriculture by providing a forum for communication among agricultural groups and providing leadership and advocacy on issues that affect all sectors of Maine agriculture.

We recognize the importance of the work of the Board of Agriculture (the Board), especially in light of ongoing budgetary challenges at the University of Maine. The production of food in Maine, and the MAFES research and Extension teams and facilities at the University that support it, are foundational to the health, independence, and economy of our State.

The Board's work to ensure that the University continues to strongly support agricultural research, development, and outreach through MAFES and Extension is critical. In this time of a shifting economic, environmental, and regulatory landscape; the maintenance and improvement of existing facilities, and the support and expansion of faculty and staff capacity are both essential in underpinning Maine agriculture's resilience. Thank you for your volunteerism and dedication to your charge.

We thank both Dean Rowland and Dean Carter for their leadership excellence and commitment to helping to address the priorities of the Maine agricultural community. Both leaders have pursued innovative new partnership models (e.g., Extension's Agricultural Engineer position) and have been awarded significant funding to support MAFES farms through (e.g.) Congressionally Directed Spending (e.g., Blueberry Hill Farm, Analytical Laboratory, Mesonet, Agricultural Roadmap).

While the University struggles with budgetary challenges and attempts to correct them, the position of Dean is more challenging than ever. A farmer's investment in their land and infrastructure represents a long-term commitment to Maine and the Maine economy. To be successful, that long-term vision requires the support of Maine's Land Grant University. We

encourage the University to provide the MAFES and Extension Deans with all possibilities for input and involvement into budgetary planning processes, decisions to invoke hiring freezes (and exemptions to them), and as much flexibility as possible within their own budgets to facilitate long-term cost-effectiveness and help resolve the growing economic challenges in Maine's agricultural sector. MAFES and Extension staff interact with growers and processors every day and understand sector needs and concerns. We share these insights as candid observations that we hope will be useful.

We understand that the University has invoked a hiring freeze. MAFES and Extension are in the midst of several important hires at various stages of the process. We urge the Board to take any necessary steps to ensure that those positions in the midst of the hiring process (e.g., Extension Agricultural Engineer, Ornamental Horticulturist, and Extension Farmer Grant Writer) are permitted to bear fruit.

Annually, the Board of Agriculture is required to submit to the legislative Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, University of Maine System Trustees, the Governor, and the public, a report that includes "recommendations regarding changes or improvements in the programs and budget." It is our intention that the recommendations in this letter be used to assist the Board as it develops that report.

We asked our members to consider and provide comments on four questions:

1. *Are there faculty positions that your sector would like the University to consider creating/replacing to better serve your sector or Maine ag more broadly?*
2. *Are there staff support positions that you believe are needed to better support existing faculty/teams in their work to serve Maine agriculture?*
3. *What facility or infrastructure needs does the University need to address to continue to be a leader in Maine agricultural research and Extension?*
4. *What are the most critical existing faculty/staff positions for your sector?*

Their compiled responses to those questions are as follows:

1. Many sectors highlighted the need to continue to build capacity in Agricultural/Aquacultural Engineering, and the need for Applied Agricultural/Aquacultural Economists with agricultural experience. Multiple sectors identified the need to refill the Ornamental Horticulturist Extension position.

Additional individual sector needs include an Aquaculture Geneticist, Phycologist (seaweed pathology/physiology), Animal Science Instructor/Researcher, Applied Veterinarian, Organic post-harvest handling position, Ornamental Horticulturist Teaching/Extension (refill), Extension Vegetable Specialist (additional), Sustainable Agriculture Extension Specialist (additional), Dairy Extension Specialist, Urban/Suburban Agronomist, Christmas Tree Extension Specialist, and Wild Blueberry Agronomist.

2. Many agricultural sectors, and both Extension and MAFES leadership recognize a need for support staff for key agricultural faculty, as well as agricultural and animal expertise at Extension county offices. Many members pointed to the need for additional support

staff at MAFES farms, support staff for Extension faculty, and support staff within the Analytical Lab and Maine Soil Testing Service.

More specifically, our members called out for additional farm animal production expertise at county Extension offices, a Scientific Research Professional located at Blueberry Hill Farm, technical expertise and capacity to develop Technical Service Providers for irrigation and forest restoration, and support staff for potential new hires (i.e., Agricultural Engineer, Aquaculture Engineer, Aquaculture Geneticist).

3. Many of our sectors' responses to this question focused on maintenance, upkeep, and upgrades to existing facilities. For example, many of the MAFES research farms are sorely in need of ongoing, preventative, facilities maintenance to prevent more costly repairs in the future and to better represent the University to the broader stakeholder community. MAFES keeps a list of priority maintenance and repair needs at the farms, and we request that the University allocate the resources to allow the college and MAFES to undertake this basic work.

Our members also generated some interesting, cost-effective infrastructure recommendations. Many in the Maine dairy industry are transitioning to beef production, and there is a need for research on this topic, and on the transition process. In the short-term, MAFES could utilize a retired dairy facility to conduct this work. In the long-term, there is a need for a dedicated beef cattle facility. In some cases, Extension has partnered with farms to expand their capacity in a similar way (e.g., the Hartland Seed Orchard).

In aquaculture, an opportunity exists for Maine to build upon their current excellence in aquaculture research by developing a finfish research feed manufacturing facility. There are only two small facilities in the country, both of which have multi-year wait times for new trials. Newly recruited top-notch University of Maine Fish Nutritionists need a pilot scale feed manufacturing facility to allow them to develop small batches of test formulated feed. Such a facility could pay for itself through contract feed development for private companies.

4. Our members noted a number of critical existing positions. This list should not be considered exhaustive, but includes the following in no particular order:
 - Extension Professor and State Livestock Specialist (Dr. Knight)
 - Integrated Pest Management Specialist (Dr. Kohler)
 - Tree Fruit Specialist and Professor of Pomology (Dr. Moran)
 - Wild Blueberry Extension Specialist (Dr. Calderwood)
 - Extension Professor and Plant Pathology Specialist (Dr. Annis)
 - Professor of Agricultural Entomology (Dr. Fanning)
 - Professor of Sustainable Agriculture (Dr. Schattman)
 - Director of Marketing and Communications (Melissa Arndt)
 - Food Science Specialist (Beth Calder)
 - Professor of Food Microbiology (Dr. Perry)
 - Extension Professor and Professor of Sustainable Agriculture (Dr. Chim)

- Director of the Diagnostic and Research Laboratory and Pest Management Specialist (Dr. Dill)
- Extension Professor in Human Development (Dr. Fordstat)
- Vegetable and Small Fruit Specialist (Dr. Handley)
- Professor of Vegetable Crops and Extension (Dr. Hutton)
- Assistant Extension Professor, Maine Sustainable Agriculture and Maple Industry Educator (Jason Lilley)
- Food Science Specialist (Robson Machado)
- Veteran Outreach Professional for Maine's AgrAbility Program (Anne Martin)
- Extension Dairy Specialist (Dr. Pereira)
- Extension Professor and Sustainable Agriculture and Ornamental Horticulture Educator (Dr. Singh)
- Extension Professor and Extension Plant Pathologist (Dr. Smart)
- Professor of Native American Studies and Food Systems (Dr. Sutton)
- Extension Professor, Sustainable Agriculture and Farm Business Management Educator (Brett Johnson)
- Director of the Aquaculture Research Institute (Dr. Bouchard) and her staff
- Extension Professor and Dairy Forage Educator (Dr. Garzon)
- Professor of Animal Nutrition, Animal and Veterinary Sciences (Dr. Romero)

Thank you again for your service on the Board of Agriculture. We hope that this information is helpful as you deliver recommendations to the University of Maine System.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Council of Maine

Eric Venturini, President
Executive Director, Wild Blueberry
Commission of Maine
(207) 478-7612

Scott Miller, Vice President
Treasurer, Maine State
Pomological Society

Kevin Woltemath, Treasurer
Vice President, Maine Beef
Producers Association

Annie Watson, Secretary
President, Maine Dairy Industry
Association

Member Organizations:

Maine Aquaculture Association
Maine Association of Conservation Districts
Maine Beef Producers Association
Maine Christmas Tree Association
Maine Dairy Industry Association
Maine Farm Bureau
Maine Farmland Trust
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners
Association
Maine Ornamental Horticultural Council
Maine State Pomological Society
Maine Vegetable and Small Fruit Growers
Association
Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine

Letters from Farmers to the Board of Agriculture

Penny Jordan, Vegetable and Fruit Grower

Marge – it was great seeing you at the ag trade show and thank you for taking the time to discuss Cooperative Extension. As I stated as part of our conversation, I am very concerned about cuts that could be made in the University of Maine's budget related to Cooperative Extension resources. Maine farms of all sizes depend on their services, especially services that provide scouting services and advise on how to address the any issues that might be impacting crops. Profitability of Maine farms is dependent on how we manage new and existing diseases and pest that can impact the yield of products. An example is the movement of SWD (fruit fly) that impacts berries (strawberries, high bush blueberries and wild blueberries). We need to know pests are headed our way and be given approaches on how to protect our crops. Climate change is causing farms to respond in ways they might not have had to in the past, our resources at Cooperative Extension are key.

I am not sure what to do but I thought in your role on the Maine Board of Agriculture you might offer guidance. Hopefully, we can ensure Cooperative Extensions can continue to provide the level of service needed by farms. They are critical to profitability of our farms and safety of our food.

Angela Baglione, Seek-No-Further Farmstead

Hi Marge,

My name is Angela Baglione, and I am the owner and manager of a diversified farm in Waldo County, Maine. I've been hearing that we are to expect some budget cuts to Cooperative Extension over the next few years, and I wanted to reach out to express my concern about that, and the hope that we might be able to turn that around!

My farm is small but highly diversified - we grow vegetables year round, tulips in high tunnels in the winter and early spring, and have a small herd of goats for dairy production and meat. I employ 4 other local people nearly year round. We've been in business for going on 6 years. Cooperative Extension and the resources they provide have been immensely helpful at every phase of my farm's start up and growth. I have accessed services, education, and advice from my local extension office throughout my farm's history, and hope to be able to continue to do so. It is an invaluable resource for farmers at all phases of business, and contributes overall to the economic and environmental well-being of Maine.

I appreciate you taking the time to hear from farmers about this issue!

Thank you,
Angela

Molly DellaToman, 5 Star Nursery and Orchard

Dear Ms. Kilkelly,

My name is Molly DellaRoman and my partner, Tim Skillin, and I own and operate 5 Star Nursery and Orchard in Brooklin, ME. We took over this existing MOFGA-certified organic orchard that was started in the 1980's in 2017. Since the transition, we have expanded the scope of the operation to include a native plant nursery, small berry production, log-grown mushrooms and several value-added products.

We were very concerned to learn of possible large and consequential budget cuts to the myriad of programs that UMaine Cooperative Extension and the Maine Agriculture and Forest Experiment Stations offer to famers. We take full advantage of the research coming out of the Station at Highmoor Farm and depend on quick and timely responses from the orchard specialists Renae Moran and Glen Koehler for advice on insect and disease outbreaks, including their on-site visits if need be. We also have greatly benefited from the Food Testing Services offered by Extension in not only developing safe value-added products but also from the marketing programming that they offer. As our weather becomes more extreme and farmers face greater and more frequent challenges, these cuts could become seriously detrimental to food production in Maine.

I also am the founder and chair of the Brooklin Food Corps (brooklinfoodcorps.org). We are a small organization that focuses on empowering our community with the skills to grow and process their own food. We have had the privilege of collaborating with Master Gardens and Master Food Processors and extension agents from multiple departments and can attest that the loss of these partnerships would be extensive for organizations like ours and many other like-minded organizations in Maine.

We would be very interested in learning more about the budgeting process at this time to know who to contact further to express our concerns. Transparency at this time is critical for farmers making plans for the future.

Thank you for your time,
Molly DellaRoman