

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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**GOALS FOR
MAINE AGRICULTURE**

*Report of the
Commissioner of Agriculture*

JOSEPH N. WILLIAMS

**FIRST REGULAR SESSION OF THE
108th MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE**

Maine Department of Agriculture



Joseph N. Williams, Commissioner

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January 24, 1977


To Members of the 108th Maine Legislature:

In response to your 1975 directive, I am submitting this report "with respect to methods of stimulating and encouraging the growth and modernization of agricultural enterprises in this State."

You will find this second annual report more specific than that of a year ago when I had recently assumed my duties as Commissioner of Agriculture.

Goal setting is always an on-going process. What I am submitting should be viewed, therefore, as fluid, recognizing that the reaction of this body itself is a vital part of the process. I invite your questions, and comments, and pledge myself and my staff to cooperate fully with all of you during this session.

Sincerely


Joseph N. Williams
Commissioner

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Divisions

Administration — Animal Industry — Inspections — Markets — Plant Industry — Promotions — Animal Welfare
Commissions, Committees and Boards

Harness Racing Commission, Milk Commission, Soil & Water Conservation, Seed Potato Board, Veterinarian's
Examining Board, Agricultural Bargaining Board, Pesticides Control Board, Dairy Council Committee, Milk Tax Committee

The Maine Department of Agriculture exists "for the improvement of agriculture and the advancement of the interests of husbandry."

In pursuit of these objectives, the commissioner "shall by personal observation, investigation and correspondence acquaint himself with the methods and wants of practical husbandry, the means of fertilization and the adaptation of various products to the soils and climate of the State and with the progress of scientific and practical agriculture elsewhere with a view to the more complete development of the natural resources of the State."

MRSA, Title 7, §§ 1 and 2



JOSEPH N. WILLIAMS

Goal-setting takes place, either consciously or unconsciously in every endeavor. The intent of the Legislature that the Commissioner of Agriculture report annually regarding methods of "stimulating and encouraging the growth" of agriculture in Maine reflects the desire of the Legislature that the Department of Agriculture make goal-setting a specific responsibility.

In response to this charge, the Department of Agriculture has identified eight goals which it believes to be of particular importance to agriculture during the coming decade, goals which we must address even as we continue our on-going statutory responsibilities.

GOAL 1

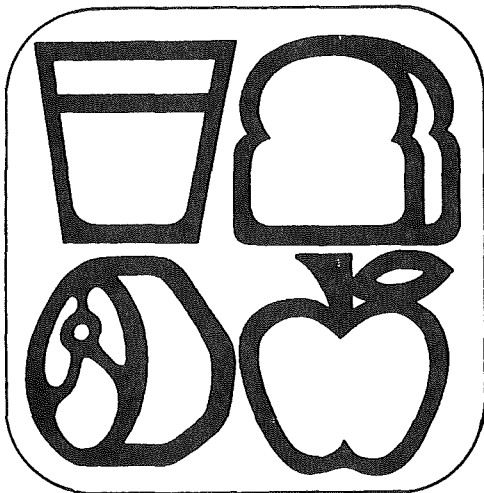
SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN FOOD PRODUCTION

Maine people are dependent on the importation of many of the basic food products consumed within the State. With transportation costs for food shipped from other regions increasing rapidly, and with the ever-present threat of a renewed energy crisis, the consumers of Maine are in an extremely vulnerable position.

Maine farmers produce many commodities in volumes exceeding our needs: broilers, eggs, milk, apples, potatoes and wild blueberries. However, in other critical commodities, we are deficit in production. Such deficit commodities include beef, veal, lamb, pork, cereals, fruits and vegetables, fats and oils, and sugar and other sweeteners.

Unlimited food production is not possible in Maine. Citrus obviously cannot be produced under our climatic conditions. The same is true of other specialized foods.

Steps have been taken, however, and still further strides must be made, to produce more beef (which represents about 40 percent of our total meat consumption), vegetables and sugar. The re-establishment of our sugar industry must not be allowed to collapse. Important gains may also be possible in grains (specifically corn, oats, barley, rye and buckwheat) and in fats and oils (specifically soybeans).



It is a major goal of this Department to formulate programs to achieve greater self-sufficiency in food production in Maine, thereby strengthening the State's farm economy and assuring the people of Maine of an adequate and consistent food supply at reasonable prices.

Short-range steps to implementation:

The following steps represent specific objectives in the Department's program for the implementation of Goal 1.

1. Increase farmland acreage. It is reasonable to expect Maine's 1.7 million acres of farmland to be increased substantially. As recently as 15 years ago farm acreage was double the present figure. For several years Maine has had an influx of people interested in farming. Between 1969 and 1974 the number of farms below 50 acres increased by 3.3 percent. The Department encourages this trend, proposes to assist people seeking to locate farmland, and to give particular attention to conservation practices which will improve the productivity of the land -- especially that which is presently marginal.

2. Production for local markets. In response to a specific need for local marketing the Department is working with farmers who wish to supply produce to local merchants or processors. We see our role to provide expertise in identifying and promoting the local sale of State of Maine-grown produce, to publicize and actively support local farm market enterprises, and to assist in the formation of processing operations for local produce -- with particular attention to producer co-operatives. The Department is specifically urging Congress to fund the "Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act of 1976."

3. Beef production. A recent study of the potential for a beef industry in Maine concluded that "Beef production in Maine is now economically feasible." Concrete steps need to be taken to implement the findings of this report through cooperation with Maine meat packers and processors so we can open up markets for Maine-produced beef.

4. Research on small grains. The Department is anxious that research priorities include further field tests to develop varieties of corn (for grain), soybeans and other small grains which yield well in Maine.

5. Sugar industry. The sugar beet industry which had had no production since 1969 was re-established in 1976. The Department sees as one of its major roles support for a successful sugar industry in Aroostook County, and will work for increased beet acreage in 1977.

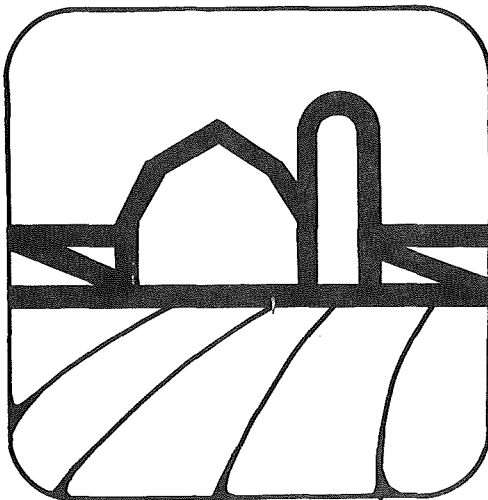
GOAL 2

PRESERVATION OF PRIME AGRICULTURE LAND

Maine's prime and unique land resources are limited and irreplaceable. Some of our best land, particularly adjacent to urban areas, is being converted to non-farm uses at an accelerating rate. Maine must provide protection for these lands.

Land in farms has declined sharply in Maine during the past decade and a half, from 3.5 million acres in 1959 to 1.7 million acres in 1975. Much of this loss has been due to factors other than development; nevertheless the pace of urbanization and other non-agricultural uses of land formerly in farms has raised considerable concern.

Between 1958 and 1967, the latest data presently available, urbanized land in Maine increased by 250,000 acres. The pressure on farmers near our cities is intense. Once good farmland is converted to housing units, parking lots and shopping centers it is lost to farming forever. The Farm Productivity and Open Space Land Law, enacted by the 107th Legislature, seeks to reduce this pressure by providing far more realistic current-use tax assessment procedures. The Department, in cooperation with the Cooperative Extension Service and Maine Agricultural Experiment Station at the University, is developing for the Bureau of Taxation productivity data for land in the State.



Because concern has been expressed regarding the effectiveness of the language of this legislation in meeting the stated objective to "encourage the preservation of farmland," additional legislation may be desirable in the 108th.

Short-range steps to implementation:

The following steps represent specific objectives in the Department's program for the implementation of Goal 2.

1. Coordination of land use planning. Land use planning at the State level is fragmented. There must be coordi-

nation of efforts to prevent over-lapping and to provide positive leadership for the people of Maine.

2. Land needs study. The agricultural land requirements for Maine for the next quarter century should be studied. Such a study is important if we are to identify and preserve the land essential to meet the future food needs of the State's population and our out-of-state markets.

3. Identify prime farm land. An important step in preservation of land is the identification of soil types. The Department is working in cooperation with the Soil Conservation Service, USDA to complete this major project.

4. Legislation. Legislation is desirable which will firmly establish legislative intent relative to the need for farmland preservation, with particular attention to the issue of development rights.

GOAL 3

COORDINATION OF PROMOTIONAL AND MARKETING PROGRAMS

Maine's economy suffers from the failure of major segments of the farm community to provide coordinated promotional and marketing programs for our farm products, and consistency in supplying our markets.

Successful marketing is the hallmark of the American economic system. But farmers today -- and for years past -- have suffered from "image" problems. Producers of many of our commodities have found that while they sell their products they do not necessarily "market" them.

Maine has dropped to third place in production among the potato producing states, and DelMarva broiler producers are challenging Maine in Maine's traditional markets.

In addition, disparity in transportation rates between New England and the Southeast on feed grains works a serious competitive hardship on Maine poultry and dairymen.

These are of major concern to the Department.

Legislation passed by the 107th Legislature was designed to help keep poor quality potatoes off the market and encourage more shipping point inspection. The Department has launched a series of agricultural festivals designed to "sell" Maine farming to Maine people. The State has been actively involved in the export of potatoes during the past calendar year. The Department, in cooperation with the feed industry, has for the past decade sought to gain more equitable feed grain rail rates for Maine agriculture. It is currently involved in a proceeding before the Interstate Commerce Commission challenging the lawfulness of these rates.



Short-range steps to implementation:

The following steps represent specific objectives in the Department's program for the implementation of Goal 3:

1. Quality control. Quality control for all farm commodities is basic to any agricultural marketing program. The Department is committed to efforts to maintain and improve quality.
2. Marketing programs. Comprehensive industry-based promotional and marketing programs are needed to make consumers more aware of quality Maine products.
3. Branding law enforcement. More intensive enforcement of the revised Branding Law for potatoes, with provision for an anticipated increase in overall shipping point inspection, will help assure the public of quality potatoes.
4. Agricultural story. Continued and expanded efforts must be made to tell the agricultural story to Maine's non-farm population through speaking engagements, the media, films, informational brochures, and trade festivals. The Department has, since the first of the year, redesigned and expanded its weekly market report into a more useful publication. Maine-ly Agriculture is available by subscription.
5. Export markets. Recent potato exports, along with ongoing exports of apples, blueberries, poultry products and other commodities, have given Maine additional contacts in foreign markets. The Department believes that by keeping abreast of agricultural developments abroad, generating new export outlets, particularly in Central America, South America and Southern Europe, encouraging farmers and dealers to offer products for export, establishment of a Maine export firm, and tailoring of commodity varieties, grades and controls for markets abroad, Maine can establish itself as a farm export State.

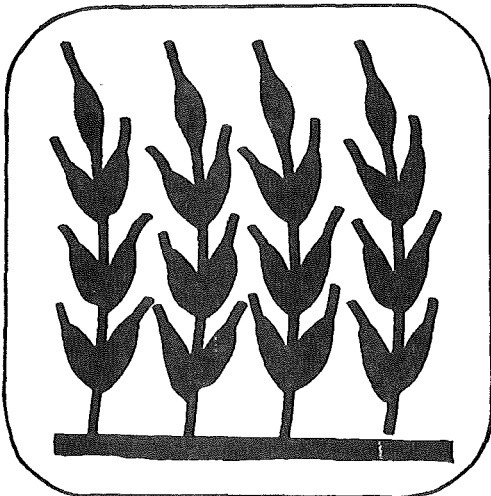
GOAL 4

RESTORE PRODUCTIVITY TO THE LAND

The most recent Conservation Needs Inventory indicates that only 1/3 of the cropland in the State is adequately treated to keep erosion losses within limits which will maintain the long-term productivity of the land. Studies have shown an estimated soil loss of 50 to 80 tons per acre per year. (150 tons of soil = 1 acre inch.) Geologically, it takes over 1000 years to form an inch of soil. Many of our cropland fields in Maine are 24 inches to bedrock.

Maine's 16 Soil and Water Conservation Districts are working with landowners in planning and applying soil conservation measures on the land. This has been a voluntary program. Federal funds have been utilized for technical and financial assistance to landowners. However, federal assistance is limited.

Soil erosion is most prevalent in Aroostook County where most cropland is used for clean-tilled crops, namely potatoes. The crop is harvested too late in the season to allow a winter cover crop to be planted. Soil erosion is increasing in other portions of the State as more corn for grain and silage is planted.



Because of soil erosion, production per acre is decreasing, use of commercial fertilizer is increasing, the quality of the crop is decreasing. A major effort to expand conservation practices is required in order to restore and maintain the long-term productivity of Maine's land resources.

Short-range steps to implementation:

The following steps represent specific objectives in the Department's program for the implementation of Goal 4.

1. Technical assistance. The Department encourages land owners to utilize all available funding programs to

gain technical assistance in improving their conservation program.

2. Erosion and sediment control. State and regional planning agencies have a responsibility to evaluate erosion and sediment problems as they impact on both the environment and the economy, and to increase public information programs to increase awareness of erosion and sediment problems.

3. Long-term practices. Greater use of federal financial assistance for long-term conservation practices will enable Maine farmers to maintain and improve the fertility of their land.

GOAL 5

FINANCIAL STABILITY FOR MAINE AGRICULTURE

Maine's agricultural economy -- for both farmers and agri-business -- is in need of greater capitalization. The number of farm operations in the State has decreased by 48 percent in the past decade and major processing plants have recently undergone bankruptcy. The livestock and poultry industries are under intense economic pressure. Farming today is a costly business, involving major capital investment. On the return side it involves risks related to weather and a widely fluctuating market economy. Of particular concern is the difficulties facing Maine's youth who wish to enter farming. According to farm leaders in Congress "neither the Government nor the private sector is able to meet the financial requirements necessary to permit young people of ordinary means to engage in farming on a career basis." The fact that the average age of Maine's farmers is 52 years intensifies the need to find adequate farm capital at reasonable interest rates.

Agri-business enterprises are affected by most of the same natural and economic forces which plague the farmer.

Lending institutions in Maine make a substantial financial contribution to the State's farm community. During 1976



Maine banks loaned farmers \$28.5 million, the production credit associations \$32.6 million, the Farmers Home Administration \$25.6 million and other institutions \$25.4 million, for a total of \$112.1 million. In addition, recent legislation has given the Small Business Administration authority to make loans to all types of farms.

Short-range steps to implementation:

The following steps represent specific objectives in the Department's program for the implementation of Goal 5.

1. Capital financing. The financial needs of Maine agriculture have doubled

during the past decade. Because of inflation alone, those needs will, in all likelihood, double again in the coming 10 years, not taking into account anticipated growth. It is essential, therefore, that commercial institutions assume a larger share of the financial needs. The Department intends to work closely with Maine banks to this end.

2. Feed grain rates. Efforts to gain greater equity in rail feed grain rates for Maine's feed consuming industries must continue to occupy the Department and our poultry and livestock industries.

3. Crop insurance. A program of insurance coverage for Maine crops can help farmers withstand natural disasters. The Federal Crop Insurance Corporation may be a suitable vehicle for such a program, or some form of self-help assessment could establish an insurance fund, with the State possibly providing initial financing.

4. Rural development. It is the intent of the Rural Development Act "to create job opportunities, community services, a better quality of living, and an improved social and physical environment in the small cities, towns, villages, and farm communities." Rural development is best achieved by maintaining a healthy farm economy. In those areas where farmers are prosperous the community at large prospers. Nevertheless, in cooperation with Rural Development officials and other appropriate agencies and individuals the Department will propose programs to secure the goals of the Rural Development Act in Maine.

5. Federal legislation. Legislation such as the proposed Federal Young Farmers Homestead Act will enable young people to more easily finance entry into farming. The Department believes the realities of present-day farm financing requires some type of concession to those young people who want to farm. We support, therefore, legislation which promises to achieve such objectives.

GOAL 6

EXPAND AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

Agriculture is subject to complex economic forces, high production costs, changes in technology, weather and disease. Failure to maintain well-funded, innovative programs of research and development threatens the survival of Maine's farming community.

We have, consequently, a critical need for continued and intensified efforts in the research field. In cooperation with the University, we must continue to search for ways to adapt crops and horticultural products to Maine's climate and soils, with particular emphasis on corn for grain and disease-resistant varieties of potatoes. Maine's poultry industry leads New England and is 10th in the nation, but 95 percent of the corn needed annually by Maine farm industries is imported at discriminatory rates from the mid-west. If we had domestic corn production adequate for reserves only, it could be the salvation of our broiler, egg and dairy businesses.

The problems of leaf-roll and blight in our potato industry -- especially certified seed -- are of serious concern, and activities to deal with these diseases must continue to command the highest priority of our research dollars. The Department presently has a plant pathologist at work.



New and continued research is essential also in such areas as livestock production and nutrition, new crops, pesticides, soil productivity, agricultural technology, agricultural marketing economics, and statistics.

Dollars spent for basic research must be seen as an investment in the future well-being of all our people.

Short-range steps to implementation:

The following steps represent special objectives in the Department's program for the implementation of Goal 6.

1. Physical research. The Department is not involved in extensive physical research. We do employ a plant pathologist to work on potato disease problems, and the Department performs experiments related to poultry Pullorum Typhoid in our Federal-State laboratory. Most such research is the responsibility of the Agricultural Experiment Station and, to a lesser extent, the Extension Service. These agencies must have funds to enable them to intensify their efforts in areas which will directly benefit farming. It is the intent of the Department to encourage and actively support such additional research projects. We intend also to negotiate for a more direct and formalized input into University research -- perhaps through a research coordinator.

2. Economic and statistical research. While Departmental research in the field of economics and statistics is limited, it is to be a continuing effort.

3. Poultry industry. The Department presently conducts poultry research related to its Production and Pullet Test. This is to be a continuing effort.

GOAL 7

MAINTAIN ANIMAL DISEASE CONTROL

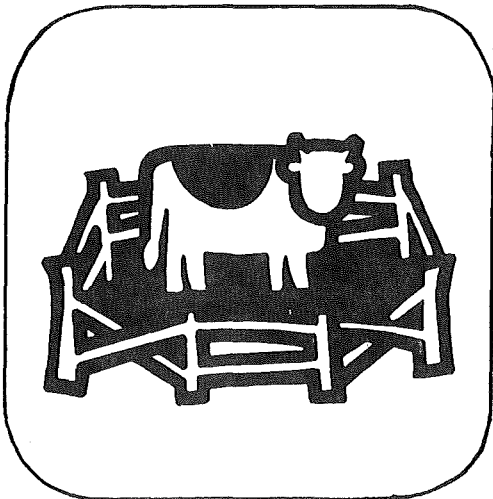
Maine faces the constant danger of infectious disease outbreak among our poultry, livestock and domestic animals. The State is presently free of bovine and swine Brucellosis and free of Pullorum-Typhoid in our poultry industry. But without constant surveillance and effective programs of control and eradication, the State cannot escape a costly animal disease epidemic, such as the recent outbreaks of hog cholera in neighboring states.

The problem of animal diseases is an on-going one. The Department in conjunction with Federal animal health officials, must continue its program of surveillance and quarantine.

Short-range steps to implementation:

The following steps represent specific objectives in the Department's program for the implementation of Goal 7.

1. Brucellosis: The Department is continuing programs of market cattle testing, ring test, testing of imported cattle 30 days prior to entry and within 30 days of entry and blood drawn at the Canadian border.



2. Equine Infectious Anemia: We are in phase 2. Phase 1 required that all equine imported into State be negative to Coggins test within 6 months. Phase 2 requires that all equines assembled at shows, fairs, race meets, pulling exhibitions or other such functions must be negative to Coggins within a year. Under Phase 3 all equine must show negative to Coggins test.

3. Hog Cholera. There is no Hog Cholera in Maine at present time; however a surveillance program began in June 1976. Such surveillance includes inspection of garbage feeders bi-weekly, weekly and monthly.

4. Poultry disease. The Department is continuing its permit system for the importation of avian species or fertile eggs of such species. It will continue its surveillance program for Pullorum-Typhoid, Bronchitis Newcastle, and Infectious Laryngotracheitis.

GOAL 8

CONTROL AND ELIMINATION OF POTATO DISEASE

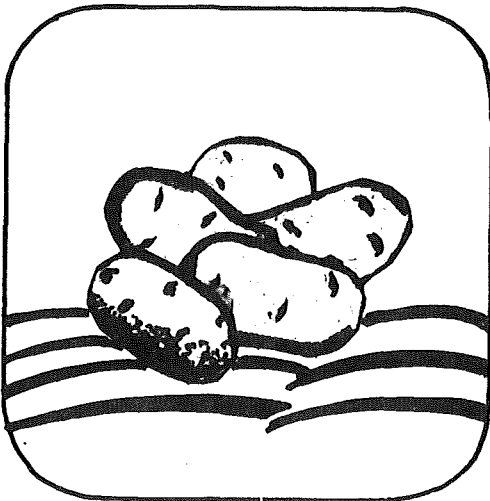
The presence of leaf roll, mosaic, and ring rot has plagued the Maine potato industry in recent years. Failure to control and eradicate these diseases, especially in our seed potatoes, is causing serious economic harm to the industry and the State.

Through research, we are determining the best way to avoid infections and by application of effective programs of disease control working to eliminate these problems.

Short-range steps to implementation:

The following steps represent specific objectives in the Department's program for the implementation of Goal 8:

1. Seed stock tests. The Department is requiring testing of all seed stocks to be planted so that the disease content is known.
2. Seed stock supplies. Efforts are being made to develop sufficient local supplies of disease-free seed to plant all acreage in Maine.



3. Insecticides. The wider use of certain insecticides among all growers is essential for a healthy industry.

4. Diseased seeds. Programs are essential which eliminate the planting of badly diseased lots which provide infection sources.

PRESENT STATUTORY SERVICES

STATUTORY PROGRAMS VITAL TO MAINE CITIZENS

While the Department views the foregoing Goals as of particular importance to Maine agriculture in the coming decade, many other wide-ranging programs, not singled out above, are already a part of the on-going work of the Department. Among these are:

- General food inspection
- Weights and measures standards
- Registration of feed, fertilizer and seeds
- Meat and poultry inspection
- Produce grading
- Pesticides registration and certification
- Plant inspection
- Research and promotion of milk, potatoes and blueberries
- Milk program administration
- Nutritional education
- Animal welfare
- Harness racing administration
- Licensing of dogs and livestock promotion
- Veterinary examination
- Farmland conservation projects