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AGRICULTURE OF MAINE

SIXTY-THIRD REPORT

OF THE

Commissioner of Agriculture

OF THE

STATE OF MAINE

July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2008

**MAINE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOOD AND RURAL RESOURCES**

Biennial Report to the Governor

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CONSUMER ADVOCACY AND SAFETY

The safety of our food systems is of paramount importance to all Maine citizens. The Department of Agriculture, through its own initiatives and in cooperation with other agencies works diligently to assure that consumers have access to the safest food possible. This section describes these efforts.

Food Safety and Sanitation is a shared responsibility of the food industry and the government. They work together to ensure that food provided to consumers is safe and honestly labeled. The Department is responsible for licensing and inspecting food establishments such as retail food stores, bakeries, food processors and beverage plants. The licensing and inspection activities ensure that food is processed, prepared, packaged, stored, and offered for sale in a sanitary and safe manner.

Food establishment operators are held to strict public health standards such as those found in the “Maine Food Code.” These rules are shaped by advances in food science and include principles of the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) food safety system, thus reducing risk of food borne disease.

The Department’s other role is one of educator. During the inspection and licensing activities, the Department is able to deliver information on good food manufacturing and retail sanitation practices to owners and employees.

The Departments of Agriculture, Food & Rural Resources, and the Department of Health and Human Services have jointly adopted the Maine Food Code as regulations for retail food establishments. Adoption of the “Maine Food Code” eliminated several duplicative rules and gives the Department and food establishment owners a comprehensive reference guide which is uniform throughout all segments of the retail food industry.

The **Maine Meat and Poultry Inspection Program (MMPI)** is celebrating its sixth year of operation and has been instrumental in increasing access to slaughtering and processing facilities for Maine producers. With the opening of state inspected slaughterhouses in June of 2003, Maine became the second state in New England to have its own meat and poultry inspection program. This program is equal to United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspection, and is federally funded for up to fifty percent of expenses incurred.

State inspected meat establishments were initially located in Aroostook, Kennebec, and York counties. MMPI has since welcomed the addition of a red meat facility in Androscoggin County, a seventh red meat facility in Piscataquis County, and a poultry processing facility in Kennebec County.

With the addition of facilities, the number of Consumer Protection Inspectors that have been specially trained for verification of slaughter operations has increased to four. These Consumer Protection Inspectors verify humane handling and slaughter, assess both the live animal and carcass for abnormalities, verify that products are processed under sanitary conditions, and verify that products are not adulterated and are properly labeled before leaving the facility. In the event that abnormalities are found by the inspectors, the MMPI veterinary officer evaluates the animals and carcasses to determine that product is fit for consumption. MMPI also engages in surveillance of all custom slaughter processing establishments.

Requirements of **Beverage Container Redemption**, (The Bottle Bill) are the responsibility of the Department of Agriculture. The Department has recently implemented changes to require the registration of all beverage container labels that are to be sold in the State of Maine. Additionally, with the assistance of the office of the Attorney General, we have increased enforcement of fraudulent redemption of beverage containers that were not originally purchased in Maine.

The Department is the designated agency for **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**, a state and federally supported program that provides USDA foods to local Emergency Feeding Organizations (EFOs) across Maine. There are over 260 food pantries, soup kitchens and temporary shelters participating in the statewide network. In 2007 there were over 1.8 million visits to the EFOs; from 2001 to 2007 over 7.9 million people were served. Those clients receive an emergency supply of food or a hot meal to carry them through a period of time where they or their families are nutritionally at risk. Over \$14.5 million of USDA Food was distributed from 2001 to 2007.

Our responsibilities include program administration, managing the state warehouse, contracting for third party storage and distribution facilities, and program oversight. We also maintain contracts with the 11 distributing agencies (mostly CAP agencies).

Maine TEFAP has an agreement with The Good Shepherd Food Bank for the distribution free of charge of Bonus USDA Commodities to the EFOs in our network. The non-profit agency also serves as our contract warehouse and deliver food for us to the USDA distribution sites.

Working through a partnership with the Cooperative Extension Service of the University of Maine, nutrition education is provided to the EFOs who request it. We periodically send them a list of incoming products so they can gear their nutrition education materials to what foods people will be receiving.

Maine TEFAP also accepts donations from industry, farmers and businesses. These help the EFOs obtain products unavailable from the USDA. Accepting these donations helps the farmers and business as well because we provide a cost free outlet for items they no longer have a use for, are unable to sell or have been in their inventory too long.

Hunters for the Hungry, a cooperative program between Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and The Emergency Food Assistance Program, provides a means for hunters to donate all or a portion of their hunt to a local food pantry, shelter or soup kitchen. This program has been a boon to our citizens providing meat to those who may no longer be able to hunt, to those who have a medical necessity of having natural low fat meat. Hunters generously donated over 7,000 lbs of wild game meat last year.

Maine TEFAP also provides for the Blueberry Rakers Center Mobile Food Pantry, another cooperative effort that includes Maine Migrant Health, and the Department of Labor. We provide about 40,000 pounds of food each year to the arriving migrant workers who harvest blueberries. This pantry at the Rakers Center meets the workers needs and helps the local pantries maintain their supplies.

The **Maine Milk Commission** exercises economic control over the purchase, distribution and sale of milk within the State, while taking into consideration the public health and welfare, and the need for an adequate supply of milk

The Commission consists of four consumer members and the Commissioner of Agriculture, ex officio. The Commission holds regular meetings monthly and special meetings may be called by the chairman. The Commission is financed by a fee assessed on milk produced by industry members and it receives no State tax monies.

The Commission establishes a uniform system of accounts for reporting and allocating costs of processing, packaging and distributing milk within the state. Recent studies have been conducted to determine the cost of handling milk in retail food stores. The retail study information is used to establish minimum retail prices for milk sold in various containers in order to avoid anti-competitive practices.

The Commission does not establish prices; it does set minimum prices based on the lowest achievable cost at which milk purchased from Maine producers can be received, processed, packaged and distributed within the State at a just and reasonable return, while ensuring an adequate supply of pure and wholesome milk to Maine consumers.

The Commission also administers the Maine Milk Pool, which balances prices paid to producers whether they ship milk to the "Boston market" or the "Maine market." In addition the Commission administers the Maine Dairy Stabilization Program.

The **Agricultural Compliance Program**, working in close collaboration with the Nutrient Management Program, handles complaints from the public concerning farms and farm operations, and investigates threats to human and animal health and safety, and to the environment. During the complaint resolution process, an agricultural compliance officer makes recommendations for remedying any agriculture-related problems, through the development of appropriate best management practices (BMPs) for implementation by the farmer. The Agricultural Compliance Program works closely with other state and federal agencies, when appropriate, to resolve complaints associated with farming operations.

The Department employs two compliance officers, who conduct 300 initial and repeat visits annually throughout the state. Approximately, 40 percent of these complaints are water-quality related, 40 percent involve odors or insect problems, and the remaining 20 percent include cull potatoes, livestock, and other miscellaneous issues. Many of these complaints arise from neighbors or individuals who are unfamiliar with the operational complexity of today's farms, while an increasing number of complaints involve manure issues associated with small, non-commercial farm operations. The complaint resolution process established by the Department has proven to be very successful, both for the farming community and for the general public, for resolving conflicts in a timely and meaningful way.

The Agricultural Compliance Program officers inspect and provide technical assistance to farms seeking Livestock Operations Permits and/or MEPDES (Maine Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) Permits. They also conduct farm visits to evaluate applications submitted requesting variances for applying manure to fields during the prohibited spreading period of December 1 through March 15. Sixty-nine such variances and several extensions were granted during the past biennium.

When requested, the Department's Agricultural Compliance Program assists new farming operations with developing best management practices, and works with towns and the agricultural community to address issues associated with the Right-to-Farm Law, new development projects and municipal ordinances. A comprehensive booklet describing Maine's Agricultural Compliance Program was published during this biennium as an informational tool for farmers and the general public.

The **Animal Welfare Program** continues to make great strides in the animal protection field, while ensuring humane and proper treatment of animals through communication, education and enforcement. District Human Agents responded to 1,628 animal cruelty complaints in 2006-2007. There were 1,338 animals removed from abusive situations and 'puppy mills'.

The "Help Fix ME" spay and neuter program for low-income dog and cat owners continues to make great strides to reduce pet overpopulation. With the support of over 100 veterinarians and the dedicated Animal Welfare Staff this program is the State's only proactive approach to stop future animal abuse situations. During 2006-2007, 3244 dogs and cats were altered through the "Help Fix ME" program.

The online dog-licensing program continues to grow. The program started in 2003 with only 60 dog owners buying their dog licenses on line. In 2006 and 2007 a total of 7306 dog owners participated in the program with more and more towns joining this public service effort.

For the majority of years since 1981, the Maine Board of Pesticides Control has conducted the **Obsolete Pesticide Collection Program**, a free collection program for old, unusable pesticides. Following preregistration, participants, including homeowners and non-corporate farmers and greenhouse operators, are directed to one of four sites around the state. The collected chemicals are taken to out-of-state disposal facilities licensed by the EPA, where they are incinerated or reprocessed. Since its inception, the program, funded by federal grants and pesticide registration fees, has collected and disposed of more than 150,000 pounds of pesticides.

The **Pesticide Container Recycling Program** was instituted in Maine in 1983, when a deposit law was enacted for restricted use pesticide containers. Over the years, Board of Pesticide Control (BPC) inspectors assured that the most hazardous pesticide containers were returned, thoroughly cleaned and properly disposed of in a licensed solid waste facility. However, the law does not include general-use pesticide

containers, which, without any controls, end up burned on-site, or in public landfills and incinerators.

In 1991, to keep plastic pesticide containers completely out of the waste stream, Aroostook County took the next logical step: On a strictly voluntary basis, pesticide dealers, and the non-profit Ag Container Recycling Council (ACRC) began recycling both restricted- and general-use plastic pesticide containers, to be used to create specific new products where chemical purity is not a priority. With oversight and coordination from the BPC, plastic containers, collected throughout the growing season, are taken to a transfer station, baled, and then sold and recycled for use in non-consumer products, such as railroad ties, pallets, fence posts, and speed bumps. Through this program, Maine has recycled an average of 30,000 pounds of #2 plastic annually since 2001. Nationally, since the program started in 1992, approximately 100 million pounds have been recycled. While this effort has continued to work well in Aroostook County, success in southern and central Maine has been more limited, due to a lack of participating transfer stations. During 2007, the BPC worked with the ACRC to establish two new participating transfer stations: one in Dexter and one in Machias. This should help facilitate expansion of the recycling program in southern areas.

The **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)** program supports and promotes least risk approaches to managing pest and pesticide risks on the farm and in our communities. With grant funding we have developed tools and training aimed at increasing the availability of technical and financial resources for environmental conservation and IPM through existing federal programs. Workshops held on Maine farms in 2007 and 2008 drew more than 100 participants who learned basic and advanced agricultural practices that minimize environmental impacts. As a result, USDA piloted a program offering increased incentive payments for adoption of new IPM practices by Maine vegetable growers. Other new initiatives included a series of five IPM workshops held at commercial greenhouses in Spring 2008. These hands-on learning opportunities, aimed at sustainable production of pest-free ornamental crops will be offered again in 2009. The Department of Agriculture's IPM program also hosts the Maine IPM Council, whose mission is to promote best management practices that support healthy environments and economic sustainability.

Since 2003, a strain of **Avian Influenza** deadly to both birds and humans has spread through large sections of Asia, Europe and Africa. While this strain of AI has been especially pathogenic to poultry, in instances of extreme close contact with poultry, humans have become infected. As of Sept. 10, 2008, there have been 387 confirmed cases and 245 deaths in humans. None of these were in the United States. Currently

there is little evidence to suggest that the disease is readily transmitted from human to human but the fear is that a subtle mutation could enable the virus to spread between people. The worst case scenario could result in a worldwide pandemic which has not been seen since the Spanish flu in 1918.

With assistance from the USDA, the Department hired a poultry health technician who provides outreach and education to poultry flock owners statewide. Surveillance efforts are ongoing with both the USDA and the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. The Department has been extremely active over the past two years working with our state, federal and industry partners in updating and testing our response plans for this potentially devastating disease.

The United States has not experienced an outbreak of **Foot and Mouth Disease** (FMD) since 1929. Recent outbreaks of FMD in the United Kingdom and South America have demonstrated how crippling and devastating this disease can be to the economy of a country. On November 20, 2008, the Department conducted a functional on-farm exercise to test certain aspects of our response plan including: interagency cooperation, scene management, biosecurity and personal protective equipment for workers and carcass disposal using composting as the method of choice. Over 45 individuals from numerous state and federal agencies (Departments of Labor, Transportation and Environmental Protection, Maine Forest Service, State Planning Office, National Guard, USDA, University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service) took part and helped make this a success. Next steps include future exercises focused on milk and animal movement, vaccination, quarantines and regional cooperation. The overarching goal is to ensure that the State and nation is as prepared as we can be when this disease strikes.

The legislature determined that **Invasive Terrestrial Plants** were important by passing Resolve Chapter 21 directing the Department to study invasive terrestrial plant species during the past session. This issue has gained importance because of the public's awareness of the impacts of invasive species and the fact that most New England states regulate these plants. To complete the work outlined in the Resolve, a committee of stakeholders was appointed, a list of criteria were developed for evaluating these species and a report with recommendations was presented to the legislature. One recommendation requested resources to evaluate plant species with a goal of developing a Maine list of regulated invasive plant species. Hopefully this process can move forward in the next biennium

Hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA), an insect pest of hemlocks, has been confined to southern York county until this summer when it was detected in Saco. Since

1988, the Department has had a quarantine in effect to prevent the human assisted movement of HWA. Inspectors checked about 2,600 hemlocks shipped in the last two years from out of state sources to insure freedom from HWA. The Maine Forest Service has been surveying to determine where the pest is found and then controlling outlying populations of the pest. This cooperative effort is helping to slow the spread of HWA to other parts of Maine and encouraging nurseries to purchase hemlock and other plants from local sources.

The **Weights and Measures Program** is part of the consumer protection programs of the division of the Department. This program regulates commerce by ensuring a level playing field for business and industry and protection to the consumer by assuring the accuracy of retail transactions. With today's high prices of petroleum products such as home heating fuels, LP Gas, gasoline, and diesel, the role of weights and measures testing takes on a more important role than in years past. Other areas of weights and measures activities include small, medium and large capacity scales, scanner price verification, and packaging and labeling.

The **Metrology Laboratory** provides the technical foundation for equity in the marketplace and provides measurement technology transfer at the most precise levels to the private manufacturing and business sector. This has a major impact on quality of life as technical advances are made in all aspects, such as biological research, pharmaceuticals, and the quality of manufactured goods. The laboratory also provides measurement support for law enforcement at the state and local levels, and several state agencies such as the DEP's Air Quality Division, and DHHS and DOT laboratories.

The laboratory is accredited by the National Voluntary Laboratory Accreditation Program and is ranked in the top 3 percent nationally in its quality and technical systems. The laboratory performs in excess of 5,400 calibrations annually. The demand for high precision calibrations is rapidly growing and the internationally recognized accreditation has positioned the laboratory to perform work with more regional scope encompassing the entire Northeast region.

Maine's Animal Identification Program (IDME) exists through a cooperative agreement with the USDA. This grant has allowed the Department to fund a part-time Animal ID Coordinator position.

This position, under the guidelines of the USDA's National Animal Identification System, continues to move forward to orchestrate the voluntary registration of premises where livestock and/or poultry are raised or housed.

The IDME Advisory Council which consists of representation from over 20 Maine animal agriculture affiliations and interest groups, provides the Department with feedback from the public regarding voluntary premises registration and animal identification. It is through this feedback that the Council is able to offer advice on how animal identification can support livestock and poultry producers in Maine.

GROWING AGRICULTURAL BUSINESSES

The best way to promote robust and thriving agricultural industries in Maine is to assist our farmers and producers in growing their businesses. The programs and initiatives of the Department that highlight this vital element of our work are included in this section.

Through the **Fruit & Vegetable Inspection Program** the Federal/State Inspection Service provides an impartial and unbiased grading, inspection and auditing services to the fresh fruit and vegetable industry. Grading and inspection services are conducted on the basis of USDA and Maine grade standards or customer specifications. The results of grading and inspection services provide growers, packers, shippers, brokers, truckers, receivers, importers and other financially interested parties with quality, condition, temperature, count, net weight or other desired information pertaining to produce that may be ready for harvest, harvested, packed or already shipped to a destination. This information may be used for general information, to verify sales contract requirements, to obtain letters of credit or for compliance purposes with various regulations. Inspection results are provided on a legal document that is acceptable in all United States courts of law.

Auditing services are provided on a fee basis to verify a company's continuing performance to a documented Good Agricultural Practices, Good Handling Practices USDA food safety program.

These services are accomplished through a cooperative agreement between the Department and the USDA. Potatoes, which have a mandatory inspection requirement on consumer size packages and broccoli are the major commodities, with sweet potatoes, apples and cauliflower being inspected as well. Some of the inspectors are licensed for 85 fresh fruits, vegetables and other related commodities.

Last season staff inspected over 2 million hundredweight of tablestock potatoes, over 7 million hundredweight of processing potatoes, 141,000 hundredweight of sweet potatoes and 134,000 hundredweight of broccoli.

The **Maine Farms for the Future Program** provides business planning assistance to farmers to make it possible for their farms to become more viable. The program also awards grants through a competitive application process to assist farmers with implementing changes to their farm operation.

The goals of the program are to prevent the decline of locally-owned farms in Maine, to provide financial and organizational support to farm businesses whose success depends upon their ability to fundamentally transform, to encourage and support farmers in building financial, business and decision-making skills, to protect active, working farmland by improving farm profitability and providing farmers with an introduction to farmland protection through the seven year non-development agreement with the Department.

In 2008, a comprehensive evaluation of the program was conducted by Pan Atlantic, SMS Group. They surveyed 64 of the 75 farms that had participated in both phases of the program and reported hiring 71 new employees; private investment had matched grant funding by a factor of five to one. \$7.74 million in private investment was leveraged by \$1.57 million in state grants; more than 18,000 acres of farmland had been temporarily protected and significantly reduced the risk of sale and conversion; 67 percent of the participating farms had added new technologies; 82 percent had increased their production; 55 percent had introduced new products; and 63 percent had developed new market channels.

Maine's Farm Businesses have continued to be supported by the various grant and loan programs offered by the Department. The **Agricultural Development Grant Program** provided over \$144,000 to six farm businesses and organizations to assess market potential of new ideas, increasing market promotion of existing businesses, or improve the adoption of new technology on the farm. Poultry producers established a first ever mobile processing unit, Dairy farmers built a new mobile milking parlor to promote dairy at county fairs, Cheese producers promoted their products at key food events, winning many medals for top quality cheese, and the organic dairy farms were working on ways to reduce grain costs.

Eight farmers improved their access to capital to build new buildings, purchase machinery and land through \$812,263 of new low interest loans from the **Agricultural Marketing Loan Fund**. Recent legislation increased state participation in the loans from 55 percent to up to 90 percent depending on the size of the loan. Twenty Potato Farmers continued to access the successful **Potato Marketing Loan Fund** to help retrofit or builds new potato storages, making Maine the leading state in postharvest storage conditioning of potatoes in the country. This fund also supported several research projects during this time period.

Export Assistance for Maine's Specialty Food industry is available through a working relationship between the Department and Food Export USA. The two have

teamed up to support Maine food and agricultural businesses that are ready for, or are currently in international markets by helping them access federally funded programs and services. Several programs such as the Branded Program and Food Export Helpline offer assistance to small companies ready to participate in a wide variety of trade show activities. In just the last two years, 25 different Maine companies have attended eight different shows or events and have positioned themselves and their products to be sold globally. The prospect for increasing food exports from Maine continues to be a bright spot.

The **Poultry & Shell Egg Inspection Program** provides the poultry and shell egg industries with an unbiased nationally recognized and uniform grading service for poultry and shell eggs. This uniform grading is a key component in accessing local, national and international markets.

Maine's **Nutrient Management Program** helps farmers address how plant nutrients, particularly those from animal manures, are stored, managed and utilized. This is achieved by promoting best management practices on farms and by ensuring implementation of these practices through a variety of efforts, thereby reducing non-point and point source pollution from agriculture. Since the development and implementation of nutrient management plans requires specialized technical assistance and knowledge, 180 Certified Nutrient Management Planning Specialists in Maine are available to prepare and certify nutrient management plans, of which 636 are in place covering 132,000 acres. During the past biennium, 28 planner recertification workshops, some of which were multi-day events, were held around the state that were approved and/or offered by the Department or in cooperation with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and others, for nutrient management recertification credits.

One of the more significant aspects of the Nutrient Management Act is the financial burden placed on farmers with its implementation. To mitigate this impact, a nutrient management grant program was established for the construction of manure and milk house waste storage structures to help farmers comply with the Act. During the past two years, a Phase II Supplemental Nutrient Management Grant Program committed \$425,000 for funding an additional 22 projects, many of which have been completed. Additional grant programs are being pursued to meet on-going needs. A nutrient management loan fund is available to provide farmers with low-interest loans when grant funds must be supplemented to cover the cost of a project.

Another important aspect of the Nutrient Management Program involves the review of applications for issuance of Livestock Operations Permits that are required for livestock farming operations that meet certain criteria. Several applications are under active office review at this time, while others are scheduled for submission in the near future.

A highlight of the Program during this biennium was completion of the “Manual of Best Management Practices for Maine Agriculture” that had been several years in preparation. This Manual is a tool for assisting planners charged with developing and/or evaluating best management practices on farms for resolving agriculture-related environmental concerns, and may be used as a guide for determining whether a farm is conforming to or has adopted best management practices operations.

The **Sustainable Agricultural Water Source Development** bonds and the continuation of the cost share grant program have continued to provide relief to Maine farmers that have suffered from severe droughts. The Department has distributed \$4.2 million for over 127 projects located throughout the state. Over 9,700 acres of farmland has been protected from drought, representing about \$12.1 million in annual crop value. Fifty six farms have reduced use of direct withdrawals by putting in new ponds or wells, making the program a win-win for farms and the environment.

The **Maine Harness Racing Commission** has the responsibility to license parimutuel wagering facilities and all individuals who participate in parimutuel harness racing. The commission also promulgates rules, enforces those rules and statutes that govern parimutuel wagering and live racing activities

There are two commercial racetracks and nine agricultural fairs licensed to conduct live racing and parimutuel wagering. The two commercial racetracks are authorized to accept pari mutual wagers throughout the full year on interstate simulcast races. The commission licenses four off track betting facilities to accept parimutuel wagers on interstate simulcast races and races originating at Maine’s licensed parimutuel racetracks.

The staff is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of the Commission including correspondence; rule enforcement; licensing participants; collecting commissions on parimutuel wagers; distributing funds pursuant to statutory authority and preparing reports.

The industry continues to experience increased activity due to funds made available from the operation of slot machines at the commercial racetrack located in Bangor. The revenues generated for calendar year 2007 that supports purses; agricultural fairs; commercial racetracks; off-track betting facilities; and, the Maine Sire Stakes Program exceeded \$8.1 million.

Since its inception in 2003, Maine's **Beef Quality Assurance (BQA)** program, the first of its kind in New England, has continued to grow. Currently over 100 Maine beef producers are enrolled in the program and approximately 30 percent have achieved BQA certification. The certification program is based on the recommendations of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association's guidelines and research. Maine's BQA certification program includes hands-on trainings, continuing education courses and on-farm audits.

Producers participating in BQA accept responsibility for all aspects of beef production in a cooperative effort to protect consumer confidence and subsequently add value to their product. Cattle produced on the farms of BQA certified producers are identified with BQA ear tags that are recognized nationally.

The **Maine Agricultural Trades Show** is one of the longest standing traditions in Maine agriculture and takes place every January in Augusta. The 2008 Trades Show was the 67th annual show, attracting thousands of farmers and hundreds of exhibitors, food industry people, financial services organizations, equipment dealers, commodity associations, and consumers. The show is a time for a farmer to meet and discuss common concerns, learn about innovative techniques, see the latest equipment, attend association meetings, training sessions, and take time to socialize. The Commissioner's luncheon and awards ceremony featuring Maine food is always sold out, and the legislative reception is a great warm up for the new legislative season. The show functions at maximum capacity now, restricted by the floor space of the Augusta Civic Center. Interest in agriculture has expanded to include many non-profit organizations and other special interest groups, and is evident by the mix of people attending the annual event.

The second annual **Northeast Livestock Expo** event was held in May 2008 at the Windsor Fairgrounds. This multi-species event is supported by the Maine Beef Producers Association (MBPA), The Department, Maine Cooperative Extension and the Maine Beef Industry Council (MBIC). The expo consists of a commercial feeder calf sale, purebred cattle sales, American Boer Goat Association sanctioned show and Boer goat sale, market lamb and purebred sheep show and sale, fiber (alpaca) animal

demonstration /sale, Western Maine Rabbit Breeders (WMRB) show, youth shows and educational clinics.

The sales at this event consisted of 105 head of pre-conditioned feeder calves, 45 head of purebred cattle, 67 lots of boer goats, and 37 sheep.

The Maine Sheep Breeders Association (MSBA) runs a **Wool Pool** each year at the Fiber Frolic, held in June at the Windsor Fairgrounds. This event assists sheep breeders in Maine to sell their commercial grade wool, by allowing individual farms to “pool” their wool and sell it on one day. MSBA solicits bids and finalizes a contract before the pool. The Association makes no profit on the pool; the money collected is paid in a price per pound to the wool producers. The wool is weighed by the Department of Agriculture. In 2008, 19 farms contributed 3,351 lbs of wool, for which they were paid 50 cents a pound. The Central Maine Sheep Breeders also hold a wool pool at the end of June.

The **New England Products Trade Show** is a popular spring event held in Portland and drawing buyers from all over the country. The Department participates every year to show our support for the specialty foods industry and is one the major sponsors of the show. It is a premier showcase of all the great specialty foods from Maine.

The Department continues to seek outside grants to leverage state dollars for our programs. The Department received a \$57,000 grant from the **USDA-Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program** to develop an on-line ordering system for consumers to purchase fresh products directly from farmers.

The Department has also secured federal funds from the **USDA-Specialty Crop Block Grant** program to fund several projects. The Department is redesigning and updating it’s producer database to make it more easily accessible to consumers. It has provided reimbursement to farmers for Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) audits, and produced four “Buy Local” advertising inserts that were distributed through newspaper statewide to a readership of over 685,000 households per distribution.

KEEPING IT LOCAL

Agriculture is a driving force in Maine's economy. Its success depends in large measure on farmers and producers ability to have a local market for their goods. The Department assists the agricultural community through a variety of programs and services, which are described in this section.

Maine **Farmers' Markets** (71 in 2008) continue to flourish and evolve. In the past, most Maine markets were started, promoted and run by farmers looking for a good location to sell their produce and other farm products. Today, more and more communities recognize the value of bringing a market to their towns and support continued agricultural activity in the immediate and surrounding area. As a result, they are playing a more active role in farmers' market organization and support. A new market started in Gardiner was organized by Gardiner Main Street as a result of input from residents and local businesses. The Gardiner Market also hosts a winter market, which is an excellent opportunity to continue to market healthy local food year round. In many communities, the challenge today is finding enough farmers for existing and potential new markets, a situation which provides the farmers more choice in where they sell. Communities that support their markets ultimately will draw more and better farmers. Farmers' markets are ideal business "incubators" where many farms and food producers just getting into direct marketing may start out, and then go on to develop retail businesses at other locations or evolve to serve wholesale or even international markets.

Challenges still continue with the impact of the transition from paper food stamps to an electronic benefit system (EBT). To date there has been no affordable solution to enable farmers at outdoors markets to be able to accept the electronic benefits. Collaborative efforts with various state agencies are being made to overcome this challenge.

In 2008, the Maine **Senior FarmShare** Program provided 18,000 low-income Maine seniors throughout the State with \$50 of fresh, local produce from one of over 140 participating Maine farms. This popular program provides nutritional and social benefits for seniors and provides markets for Maine produce farms. With the passage of the Farm Bill in 2008, funding through the USDA's Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program is almost guaranteed for another four years. Maine's unique

program, which is modeled on Community Supported Agriculture, continues to be cited nationally as an exceptionally effective government program.

The mission of the **Farmland Protection Program** is to protect currently active and potentially productive farmland as a means to sustaining economically viable agricultural communities.

Currently the Department uses five strategies to assist farmland owners with protecting their farmland. 1) Agricultural conservation easements permanently protect farmland and help landowners capitalize a portion of their land's value (by selling development rights) or reduce their income tax (by donating a conservation easement) to reinvest in their farm operations. 2) Farmland protection agreements temporarily protect farmland.

3) The Farmland Property Tax Program helps to protect farms and farmland from development pressure by reducing property taxes and shifting a portion of the tax burden to the community. 4) The Maine Farms for the Future Program and other tax and estate planning programs help members of current generation retire from farming and transfer their land and businesses to a new generation Maine's farmers. 5) More than 150 local, state and federal government agency partners and non-governmental agencies collaborate with the Department to craft policies that will protect Maine's farmers, farms and farmland for the long-term.

To date, the Department has sponsored 38 working farms to the Land for Maine's Future and USDA Farmland Protection Program. Currently, 26 farms in 11 counties (7,551 acres) are protected and another 12 will be protected by 2010. It is important to note that every dollar from LMF (\$7.9 million) has been more than matched by combination of federal, municipal and private investments (~\$9.5 million).

In addition, the Department has protected 18,000 acres through the Farms for the Future Program and increased voluntary enrollment in the Farmland Property Tax Program by approximately 5percent per year since 2002 (205,347 enrolled in 2008). The Department has assisted the State Planning Office, numerous towns and community groups with planning how to conserve and protect farmland.

The Department is collaborating with individuals, groups and agencies statewide to support the **Farm to School** effort. This initiative is working to provide healthy and nutritious local foods to all students in Maine's schools. Unique efforts are underway in several areas of the state, all with the same goal in mind. The Department brings the farmer's perspective into discussions with representatives of the school food service programs.

The Department continues to provide **marketing and promotion support** to Maine food and farm businesses through printed buyers guides (for farmers' markets, and farmstands), our marketing web site (www.getrealmaine.com), through special events such as Maine Maple Sunday and Open Farm Day, and through other public relations and media activities including a Time/Warner Cable TV series with the First Lady called Focus on the Farm. The "get real. get maine!" branding program is the anchor for the state's promotional program, with our efforts leveraged through the use of promotional materials by hundreds of producers, retailers and special event venues.

Thanks to the successful collaboration with Time Warner the Department continues to produce the popular Channel 9 Cable TV series called "Focus on the Farm" featuring first lady Karen Baldacci speaking with farmers, industry representatives and experts "in the field" about various aspect of food and farming in Maine. The first lady visited several locations throughout Maine to produce on-site episodes.

Maine's historical tradition of **Agricultural Fairs** makes these local events a major attraction for visitors and citizens alike, from July through October. Maine has 25 licensed fairs and one non-licensed fair, and it is home to the oldest fair in America, the Skowhegan Fair.

Agri-Tourism provides Farmers in Maine an avenue to increasingly diversify their operations to respond to interest from Maine people and tourists who want to be able to "experience" a real farm, and to purchase locally produced real food and fiber directly from the farmer. These activities are often referred to as "agritourism", which can be broadly defined to include direct "farmer-to-consumer" sales, on-farm recreational activities, farm bed-and-breakfasts, entertainment or educational programs on the farm, and agriculturally focused special events and fairs. Additionally, locally sourced foods served at restaurants throughout the State are creating a reputation for Maine as a food destination for travelers from around the world.

The **Maine Food Policy Council's** goal is to ensure the availability of an adequate supply of safe, wholesome and nutritious food for its citizens. The Council also encourages the increased production of food in Maine in order to decrease our reliance on out-of-state food sources, while enhancing rural economic development and contributing positively to Maine's rural quality of life.

The council has worked diligently over the past year toward the goals outlined in the

Statutes. Throughout the coming year, members will continue their efforts to work on the strategic plan, continue the work of the subcommittees and craft a secure plan for Maine's Food Policy.

EDUCATION FOR OUR FUTURE

Though everything Department staff does provides education about agriculture, it important to highlight some specific activities. This section includes educational programs and activities.

YardScaping is incorporating the concept that healthy and beautiful landscapes can be created and maintained through ecologically based practices, minimizing reliance on water, fertilizer, and pesticides. It continues to gain momentum as an alternative to conventional landscaping and gardening practices. Spearheaded by the Board of Pesticides Control, the Maine YardScaping Partnership continues to grow, with more and more agencies, organizations, and businesses from around the state becoming involved every day.

The demand for YardScaping information and expertise is high, and presentations are being given year-round to Master Gardeners and other gardening groups, at conferences, meetings, and local gatherings. Almost daily inquiries come in from businesses and private landowners offering their properties for development or asking for assistance in landscape design using YardScaping principles.

The YardScaping Partnership has developed and implemented a train-the-trainer program to create “Master YardScapers.” A core of Master Gardeners interested in YardScaping participated and many have subsequently carried out their own presentations, neighborhood socials, and other forms of education and outreach, which have given YardScaping a major boost in public interest and understanding.

The centerpiece of YardScaping, the two-and-a-half-acre Back Cove demonstration site, being developed with the City of Portland, came to life in 2008, when more than 1,000 trees, shrubs, and perennials were installed in the project’s first phase. This site will provide a YardScaping model for both homeowners and other municipalities across the state. The project, accomplished largely through donations and volunteer labor, has received partial funding from the US Environmental Protection Agency and the Davis Conservation Foundation.

With out-of-state trade comes out-of-state pest problems, which is a good reason to “Keep it local”. The **Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey (CAPS) Program** has been under the Maine Department of Agriculture since 2003, with the primary

focus of protecting the state from harmful exotic plant pests. Thanks to annual funding from the USDA, the CAPS Program has allowed the department and other agencies, including the Maine Forest Service and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, to augment existing programs responsible for protecting Maine's crops, horticulture industry, and forest-products industry by engaging in early detection of exotic pests through survey and inspection. The biggest exotic threats facing our plant resources today are two exotic woodboring beetles that kill trees, and a minute organism that could devastate the potato industry.

The emerald ash borer and the Asian longhorned beetle, two woodboring beetles from Asia, attack healthy hardwood trees. Millions of ash, maple, birch, elm and others in the United States have been destroyed by these two beetles, and they are a car ride away from Maine. Yes, these beetles can be easily transported in firewood, and the primary focus of the CAPS Program and the Maine Forest Service these days is to educate the public to "leave your firewood at home. Buy it where you burn it."

In 2007, the Maine potato industry was informed that a neighboring Canadian seed potato field harbored potato cyst nematodes, minute soil-dwelling organisms that attack roots, resulting in reduced growth and yields. Maine growers often buy seed from Canada. These are USDA regulated pests, and through CAPS funding, stringent sampling and testing of potato fields has been implemented country-wide. To date, no Maine potato fields have tested positive for these nematodes. We dodged that bullet, but let's keep it local potato growers.

The Department has spent considerable effort to improve the ability of farmers to establish business plans through the the **NxLevel Tilling the Soil of Opportunity Business Planning Course**. Over 200 farmers have taken NxLevel. NxLevel has provided education on what goes into a business plan and how to write a plan. Many of the farmers used the course to improve their skills and develop plans for accessing capital financing for expansions in their business.

Recognizing that our children are our future the Department helps schools provide healthy learning environments through the **Maine School Integrated Pest Management Program**. The School IPM Program provides training, technical expertise and other resources to help schools implement best management practices that minimize reliance on pesticides in accordance with state requirements. During 2007-2008 a number of workshops and educational events were held at schools and conferences. In addition, we assisted Wells-Ogunquit School Department in its successful bid to become Maine's second school system to receive the prestigious IPM STAR certification award offered by the IPM Institute. The Maine School IPM

Program was selected to participate in a nationally funded grant program to develop and test a facilities management budgeting tool at Bangor, Richmond, Portland and Waterville schools. A workshop to train users in the tool's use will be offered in 2009. Other initiatives include collaboration with other northeastern states to establish a regional School IPM Working Group which has been successful in obtaining grant funding to support its activities. .

The **Maine Ag in the Classroom** Program is supported by Department staff who are members of the board of directors of both the association and council for Maine Ag in the Classroom. Efforts are underway to combine curriculum from Ag in the Classroom with Farm to School programs. Both programs have the underlying goal to educate Maine children about the importance of agriculture and buying local.

Currently, over 10,000 Maine Agricultural Specialty plates are already on passenger, commercial vehicles and Farm Trucks across the state. Ten dollars from the sale of each set of this colorful plate will be transferred to a special fund for agricultural education programs in Maine administered by the Maine Agriculture in the Classroom Council.

The State of Maine Building at the **Eastern States Exposition** located in Springfield, Massachusetts attracts nearly 1 million visitors each September, all looking for specialty products and tourism information from Maine. The building features local food, products and a wealth of vacation information about this beautiful northeastern-most state. You'll have a chance to try Maine's famous blueberries or smoked salmon, devour a Maine baked potato with all the fixins and participate in special Maine Day activities showcasing the Pine Tree State. Flags, maple syrup, dried flowers, children's fleece clothing, lobster, nature prints, cheesecake, kettle corn, equine prints, wood products, college recruiting services are showcased Maine products and services provided in the Maine Building. Information on hunting, fishing, camping, snowmobiling and skiing is also available in the building.

The 18th **Annual National Belted Galloway Sale and Youth Expo** was held in April 2008 at the Fryeburg Fairgrounds. The sale and youth expo are sponsored by the New England Galloway Group (NEGG) and supported by the Maine Beef Producers Association (MBPA) and the Department.

The sale consisted of 33 head of quality Galloway and Hereford cattle consigned by 23 farms, representing all of the Northeastern states and South Carolina. One

member of the youth show received the registered Galloway heifer for the heifer project. The animal was purchased by the NEGG. This project allows the recipient to train, grow and show the heifer for two years. The animal is bred and her first heifer calf is returned to the program for another recipient.

Over the three day expo, a large contingent of youth prepped themselves and their animals for showmanship and breed classes and competed for Best Herdperson.

The **Maine Association of Livestock Exhibitors (MALE)** was first formed in 2005 and continues to grow and make things happen. It is composed of Livestock Exhibitors who show at the 26 fairs in the State of Maine. Their first order of business was to obtain insurance for the group which would include each member. This filled a very large gap in insurance coverage for those having only one or two animals that their home provider would not cover when exhibited at the fairs. Next the group solicited donations and sponsorships to build a mobile milking parlor for use by the dairymen exhibiting at the fairs. This allows the farmers to be paid for their milk while at the fairs. The parlor is supported by the Department and also serves as an education tool as the public is able to see cows milked and the product stored until pick up. MALE provided the fairs with notices stating “livestock for viewing, not petting” to be placed on cattle barns and avoid some of the accidents that have occurred when the public goes in with the cattle.

Respectfully submitted to the Governor and the Joint Standing Committee on
Agriculture, Forestry, and Conservation pursuant to 7 MRSA, Chapter 1, §2

by

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