

April 27, 2015

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Jon Olson. I am the Executive Secretary of Maine Farm Bureau, the state's largest general farm organization.

Maine Farm Bureau favors LD 1198 – An Act To Improve the Representation on the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System. Part of this bill directs the Governor to make every effort to appoint one member of the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System with a strong agricultural background. We would recommend to amend this bill to require that one member of the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System be an active-farmer producer.

Maine agriculture is a bright star for our state. Farming in Maine has grown, and Maine continues to lead the New England states with 8,174 farms; the value of Maine's crops and livestock grew 24% over the past 5 years. Maine's agricultural enterprises provide more than \$764 million through the sale of farm products and contribute more than \$2 billion annually to the State's economy, and Maine agricultural products are increasingly available locally in farmers' markets, schools and institutions.

Farm Bureau feels strongly there needs to be a Trustees' designated active-farmer seat. The University of Maine is a land-grant university. This was established by the Morrill Act of 1862, known also as the Land Grant College Act. It was a major boost to higher education in America. The grant was originally set up to establish institutions in each state that would educate people in agriculture and mechanical arts. The land-grant act, which is being celebrated as the 150th anniversary, was introduced by a congressman from Vermont named Justin Smith Morrill. He envisioned the financing of agricultural and mechanical education. He wanted to assure that education would be available to those in all social classes. This land-grant act signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln gave each state 30,000 acres of public land for each Senator and Representative. The land was then to be sold and the money from the sale of the land was to be put in an endowment fund which would provide support for the colleges in each of the states.

The Morrill Acts have become a major educational resource for our nation. This program is available to all people who are in search of higher education. Over the years it has proven to be an important part of our educational system. This Act changed the course of higher education. The purpose of education shifted from the classical studies and allowed for more applied studies that would prepare the students for the world that they would face once leaving the classroom.

Maine Farm Bureau has been a long-time supporter of the University of Maine. In fact, several of our earlier state presidents were on the Board of Trustees. Our very first annual meeting was at the University of Maine. But over the years there is a perception among farmers that the University is less equipped to anticipate and respond to the agricultural needs that will retain and improve the viability of Maine agriculture.

Having a direct voice on the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System will help ensure that the needs of farmers are communicated.

Thank you for your attention to the above. I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

