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AMANDA E. BEAL
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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 569

"Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Submit to the United States Secretary of Agriculture a Plan for Continued Implementation of the Maine Industrial Hemp Program"

January 9th, 2020

Senator Dill, Representative Hickman, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Gary Fish. I am the State Horticulturist at the Division of Animal and Plant Health in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, speaking neither for nor against LD 569 "Resolve, Directing the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry To Submit to the United States Secretary of Agriculture a Plan for Continued Implementation of the Maine Industrial Hemp Program."

The Department, alongside the Governor's office, has been working closely with Maine's Congressional delegation and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding hemp production in the State of Maine. This past fall, Commissioner Beal and Governor Mills sent a letter to Secretary Sonny Perdue, urging the USDA to release guidance for state implementation. In October, the USDA announced the interim final rules for state hemp production, and although the department has raised several concerns and continues to have questions as to how these rules will impact Maine, we are grateful that the USDA is working on this important issue. I've included a copy of the department's letter to the USDA with our testimony today.

The Department's Hemp Program is also undergoing new proposed rules. These rules establish the requirements for becoming licensed to grow hemp indoors and outdoors in Maine. They outline the application and licensing process, the fees involved, and the procedures for monitoring the growth of hemp. They also include the potential penalties for violation of the rules.

There was a public hearing regarding the proposed rules on January 7, and written comments may be submitted to the DACF Hemp Program until 5:00 PM on January 20, 2020.

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The Department intends to submit a plan to the USDA later in the summer after they have received comment on the interim final rule and made any necessary adjustments. The current law and interim final rule allow states that have previously managed a hemp licensing program under the 2014 Farm Bill to continue licensing growers through their existing programs. The existing program can operate until October 31, 2020.

We appreciate the support from the ACF committee as we continue to navigate both state and federal rules and are hopeful that we will have an approved plan that works for Maine hemp growers in place prior to the October 31, 2020 deadline. Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions that you have.