



Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association

Common Ground Country Fair

March 2, 2021

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Heather Spalding and I'm deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association. MOFGA supports LD 125 - *An Act To Prohibit the Aerial Spraying of Glyphosate and Other Synthetic Herbicides for the Purpose of Silviculture*. We want to thank Senate President Troy Jackson again for his commitment to banning this practice.

For fifty years, MOFGA has advocated for policies that reduce all farmers', foresters, and landowners' reliance on pesticides, and all citizens' exposures to pesticides in their diets and in the air and drinking water. The dramatic increases since the 1950s in childhood and adult cancer rates, as well as endocrine system, immune system, neurological and reproductive abnormalities, are directly related to the toxins that increasingly contaminate our environment and threaten the very existence of many plant and animal species, including the pollinators on which our food systems rely.

The practice of clearcutting and drenching vast acreage (sometimes more than 15,000 acres per year) of Maine's woodlands with deadly herbicides not only poisons the forest ecosystem, it leads to increased greenhouse gas emissions. We often hear from the forest industry that soil health is a priority and that young trees take up carbon faster than old trees. However, the soil disturbance and decomposition of organic matter caused by clearcutting and subsequent herbicide spraying actually leads to net carbon emission, which can last for up to fifteen years.¹ This practice flies in the face of Governor Mills' Climate Action Plan and its ambitious emissions reduction goals.² MOFGA supports LD 125 because banning aerial herbicide spraying for silviculture will accelerate the necessary transition to ecologically sound, climate friendly forestry practices that protect Maine's land, water, wildlife, and people and create a healthier north woods economy.

Certification programs of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) call on forest land owners to avoid and minimize pesticide use.³ However, in the last decade Maine has experienced an increase in aerial spraying of glyphosate by corporations with SFI or FSC credentials. The largest forest land owners use herbicide spraying to denude and sterilize the landscape, in order to transform diverse forest ecosystems into monoculture plantations managed for short rotations.

Glyphosate is the most common herbicide used in forestry. In addition to being classified by the World Health Organization as a probable human carcinogen⁴, it also is linked to chromosomal damage, fetal development harm, reduced liver and kidney function, and endocrine system disruption.⁵ The chemical giant Bayer (which purchased Monsanto in 2018) paid a settlement of \$9.2 billion for more than 100,000 plaintiffs asserting they had contracted non-Hodgkin's lymphoma from glyphosate exposure. Now the company intends to pay another \$2 billion to cover claims over the next four years.⁶ Recent studies

¹ [Forest Carbon: An essential natural solution for climate change](#). Catanzaro & D'Amato. U MA Amherst and UVM. 2019.

² [Maine Won't Wait: A Four-Year Climate Action Plan](#). Maine Climate Council. December 2020.

³ FSC Pesticides Policy: Guidance on Implementation. FSC-GUI-30-001 VERSION 2-0 EN.

⁴ (<http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/pdf/MonographVolume112.pdf>)

⁵ [Herbicides and Your Health](#). WebMD Cancer Center.

⁶ [Bayer to pay up to \\$10.9 billion to settle bulk of Roundup weedkiller cancer lawsuits](#). Reuters. June 24, 2020. [Bayer reaches \\$2 billion deal over future Roundup cancer claims](#). Reuters. February 3, 2021.

show that glyphosate is also toxic to amphibians, and soil fungi. The Environmental Protection Agency reported in December 2020 that 93% of the plants and animals on the endangered species list and 96% of their habitat were directly threatened by glyphosate.⁷ Just last week, the Journal of Molecular Biology and Evolution reported that soil sprayed with weedkillers glyphosate, glufosinate, or dicamba are likely to contain higher amounts of antibiotic resistant bacteria.⁸ Glyphosate now is banned or restricted in 17 countries worldwide.⁹ There is no justification for aerially spraying glyphosate and other herbicides over Maine's north woods.

Aerially spraying pesticides causes drift, sometimes up to a mile from the targeted site. The practice has posed a serious threat to Maine farmers, some of whom have lost crops and their organic certification status through no fault of their own. MOFGA-certified farmers from Wood Prairie Farm in Bridgewater experienced drift from a forestry operation that cost them their certification for three years. Organic farmers already have to sacrifice buffer zones of their property when threatened by nearby spray operations. Corporations with control over forest land must take full responsibility for their management practices and avoid chemical trespass. Banning aerial spraying or herbicides for forestry is an essential step toward protecting Maine's organic farmers.

We appreciate your consideration of this critically important initiative and we look forward to a day when aerial spraying of glyphosate and other synthetic chemicals will not be regulated because they will cease to exist in forestry and agriculture. Maine has a clear and present opportunity to make systemic change for good. We must stop industrial forestry corporations from: dousing our north woods with deadly poisons; hindering efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; and destroying essential wildlife habitat.

With glyphosate and other synthetic herbicides out of the picture, Maine can focus on building healthy and resilient communities, providing incentives for forest land owners to improve yields and the value of their trees, and helping to restore the health of our northern forest ecosystems.

About MOFGA

The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) started in 1971 and is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. We're a broad-based community that educates about and advocates for organic agriculture, illuminating its interdependence with a healthy environment, local food production, and thriving communities. We have a staff of just under 50 employees, a membership of more than 10,000, and an amazing community of about 2500 volunteers, many of whom we rely on to host our annual Common Ground Country Fair.

Since our beginning we have advocated for policies that reduce all farmers' and homeowners' reliance on pesticides, and all citizens' exposures to pesticides in their diets and in the air and drinking water. We believe that the dramatic increases since the 1950s in childhood and adult cancer rates, as well as immune system and reproductive abnormalities, are directly related to the toxins that increasingly contaminate our environment and threaten the very existence of the pollinators on which our food systems rely.

⁷ [New EPA finding: Glyphosate harms 93 percent of endangered species.](#) The Counter. December 2020.

⁸ [Herbicide selection promotes antibiotic resistance in soil microbiomes.](#) *Molecular Biology and Evolution.* February 21, 2021.

⁹ <https://sustainablepulse.com/2019/05/28/glyphosate-herbicides-now-banned-or-restricted-in-17-countries-worldwide-sustainable-pulse-research/#.YC7vvOhKiyI>.

MOFGA is a statewide organization that has experienced significant growth over the past couple of decades. By the year 2030, we aim to increase the number of certified organic growers from 550 to 750 and the amount of organically managed land from 7% to 10% of the state's agricultural land. We offer an introductory farm apprenticeship program, beginning farmer training through our two-year Journey person program, and a Farm Resilience Program for farmers in years 5-10 of their business when they're statistically the most likely to experience business failure. MOFGA Certification Services (MCS) is our USDA accredited organic certification program. MCS also administers MOFGA's Certified Clean Cannabis program for medicinal and adult cannabis use in Maine. MCS certifies more than 70,000 acres of farmland in Maine, representing more than \$60 million in organic farm product sales. MOFGA-certified operations are run by Maine businesspeople for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While we envision a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum. We are members of the Agricultural Council of Maine and, while we don't always agree on all policy measures, we recognize and wholeheartedly agree that farmers must be financially successful if we expect to have a healthy Maine agriculture.