

§352. Program established

The Maine Healthy Soils Program, referred to in this chapter as "the program," is established within the department and is administered by the commissioner. The commissioner shall consult and cooperate with the University of Maine, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, soil and water conservation districts as defined in section 3, subsection 2 and the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service in the development and administration of the program. The commissioner may consult with the Department of Environmental Protection in carrying out the purpose of the program. [PL 2021, c. 143, §1 (NEW).]

1. Purpose. The purpose of the program is to:

A. Improve the health, yield and profitability of the State's diverse agricultural soils and commodities; [PL 2021, c. 143, §1 (NEW).]

B. Protect native biological and microbiological diversity, vitality and health and increase the greenhouse gas drawdown provided by the State's agricultural soils; [PL 2021, c. 143, §1 (NEW).]

C. Promote healthy soils agricultural practices based on indigenous knowledge, current understanding and emerging soil science as determined by the department; and [PL 2021, c. 143, §1 (NEW).]

D. Promote and expand the use of healthy soils best practices among farmers and farmland owners in the State. [PL 2021, c. 143, §1 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 143, §1 (NEW).]

2. Responsibilities of the commissioner. To carry out the purposes of the program, the commissioner shall:

A. Provide information and educational materials to educate farmers and farmland owners about the benefits of implementing practices that achieve the purposes of the program. The commissioner shall:

(1) Increase opportunities for farmer-to-farmer outreach and education by highlighting farmers and farmland owners using healthy soils best practices successfully;

(2) Facilitate peer learning opportunities for farmers and farmland owners engaged in a broad range of healthy soils best practices, maintaining an active network of practitioners and technical experts and highlighting related services and programming; and

(3) Aggregate and highlight opportunities for grant funding, loan programs and other forms of financial assistance to support the use of healthy soils best practices by farmers and farmland owners; [PL 2021, c. 143, §1 (NEW).]

B. Investigate opportunities for market-based levers and promotional activities that incentivize healthy soils best practices; [PL 2021, c. 143, §1 (NEW).]

C. Subject to availability of funding, support and make available incentives, such as technical assistance, financial assistance and research support, to implement healthy soils best practices; [PL 2021, c. 143, §1 (NEW).]

D. Design the program to equitably distribute incentives to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers as defined by 7 United States Code, Section 2279(a); and [PL 2021, c. 143, §1 (NEW).]

E. Determine how the program may be implemented to enhance other state and federal programs that provide financial assistance to farmers implementing healthy soils best practices. [PL 2021, c. 143, §1 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 143, §1 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 2021, c. 143, §1 (NEW).

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