



MOFGA Testimony In Support Of

LD 536 - *An Act to Provide Natural Organic Reduction Facilities for Maine Residents for the Conversion of Human Remains to Soil*

April 4, 2023

Good morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Heather Spalding and I am deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA).

A broad-based community, MOFGA is creating a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us. Through education, training and advocacy, we are helping farmers thrive, making more local, organic food available and building sustainable communities. MOFGA certifies 535 organic farms and processing operations representing roughly \$90 million in sales and we are working hard to create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers.

MOFGA supports LD 536 – *An Act to Provide Natural Organic Reduction Facilities for Maine Residents for the Conversion of Human Remains to Soil*, which would legalize composting human remains an alternative to burial in a casket or cremation. The natural, gentle, organic reduction of the deceased human body mimics the process of natural decomposition by placing a body on materials like wood chips and straw inside a vessel with oxygen flowing through it. In about a month a body is reduced to compost that can be spread on the land.

This process aligns with MOFGA's mission and appeals to us on a foundational level because organic land management is all about the health of the soil, and composting is a fundamental part of most organic systems. Composting recycles and conserves nutrients and provides a product that improves the soil. It is one of the best soil conditioners. The organic matter in compost is like soil humus and is very stable. It builds soil structure, adds water and nutrient holding capacity to the soil and aerates the soil. It provides fertility, and it enhances the ability of the soil to remove carbon from the atmosphere and store it in healthy plant roots and the soil fauna and microbes that support the roots.

This legislation makes sense on a global scale and here in Maine. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN reports that "the majority of the world's soil resources are in only fair, poor or very poor condition." Maine's agricultural soils have not been immune to soil degradation over time and now we have a Maine Healthy Soils Program established in the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry with the goal of helping farmers continuously improve their soil quality. This legislation would align with the growing awareness of the needs to minimize our reliance on toxic, persistent and bio-accumulative synthetic chemicals, and to recycle nutrients back into the soil that sustains us.



Natural organic reduction of human remains offers many benefits in comparison to conventional burial and cremation. A company that provides composting services for human remains in Seattle, WA estimates savings of more than a metric ton of carbon emissions per person by composting rather than cremating a body. And composting doesn't contaminate the soil with toxic embalming fluids. Further, turning a body to compost removes the need for perpetual use and maintenance of a burial plot.

April is the month when we think about the old Benjamin Franklin adage, "in this world, nothing is certain but death and taxes." Each year many thousands of Mainers pass away – more than 17,000 in 2021. This represents a lot of potential compost that could be recycled back into our natural world to bring life to the land. The states of Washington, Colorado, Oregon, Vermont, California and, most recently, New York have legalized this practice and Maine should too.

We hope you will support this legislation to give Maine people a new option for honoring their deceased loved ones in harmony with nature and the health of our soil. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer questions if you have any.

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 15,000 members, we certify more than 500 organic farms and processing facilities representing \$90 million in sales, and we are working hard to provide training and create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions 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.