

Marilyn Meyerhans

Good afternoon Governor, and everyone else here. I am not a public speaker; I'm a farmer, so excuse me if I get nervous. I'm here to speak on behalf of the Land for Maine's Future, for a large part. My husband and I own Lakeside Orchards in Manchester but we also own the apple farm in Fairfield. We've done this for 36 years. We have over 100 acres of apple orchard; we produce more than 15,000 bushels of apples, more than 40 varieties. We sell wholesale to local stores like Hannaford's, we sell to school systems and colleges, and some small markets. We also have two of our own farm markets where we sell local products, baked goods, produce, cider, and apples.

One of the biggest challenges facing agriculture today is the rising cost of land and the development pressures that can drive up property taxes and force farmers to sell as well as to prevent new farmers from getting the land that they need, or for farmers like ourselves expanding. In our case, the state's Land for Maine's Future program helped keep Lakeside Orchards in the apple business. In 1999, the previous owners decided they needed to retire, they wanted to sell, the only people looking at the farm at that point in time were housing developers. After two years, we rented it for two years to try to keep it in production for them while they sought a buyer. No one was interested, and they couldn't afford it. Land for Maine's Future got involved, bought the development rights, made the property more realistically priced for farmers, because that's what we are, we weren't coming in as developers. The easement was bought, we were able to buy the farm, and it was a good combination with our farm in Fairfield. It's keeping both farms going; it's made both of them more productive and more profitable. It's been pretty invaluable to us and to our employees; we now have 6 full-time employees where before it was just my husband and I, and as many as 40 part-time workers, because of those two farms working together.

The programs have been very popular with other folks in the state, and I think every time a bond issue comes for the Land for Maine's Future, whether it be bonded, or in the general fund, or however it's funded, I think it's a very valuable program. I'm probably an 11th generation Mainer, my family's been in Southern Maine from Sanford since the 1740s, been here for a long time, very proud of the state of Maine and how we are able to preserve land and I think the Land for Maine's Future has been a big part of that.

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