

# *Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association*

## *Common Ground Country Fair*

October 18, 2012

Henry Jennings, Director  
Maine Board of Pesticides Control  
State House Station 28  
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Mr. Jennings,

I am writing to provide follow up comments to emergency rulemaking enacted by the Board at the September meeting regarding spraying for mosquito control. The Board's urgency to put something in place led to rulemaking to allow emergency spraying, which, thankfully, did not happen. In anticipation of the Board undertaking full rulemaking regarding pesticide spraying to control the spread of arboviral diseases MOFGA would like to reiterate points made at that meeting and express the serious concerns about the implications of these government-sponsored spraying programs.

The products labeled for this use in Maine are known to be toxic and these spraying programs are known to be ineffective. Just last month the state of Massachusetts failed to provide proof that their widespread spraying program that took place in July was effective by any measure. Mosquito control pesticides most commonly used across the country are neurotoxic and have been linked to cancer and other illnesses. People with compromised immune systems, chemically sensitive people, pregnant women, and children with respiratory problems, such as asthma, are particularly vulnerable to these pesticides and will suffer disproportionately from exposure. The health of citizens in the spray area should not be compromised for ineffective spraying programs.

Spraying also presents a serious threat to some of Maine's most vital industries including farming, lobstering and beekeeping as well as others that depend on healthy natural environments and diverse wildlife populations.

It is appalling that 50 years after the publication of *Silent Spring* we still are struggling against the same environmental and human health threats posed by pesticide spraying. The clear, and widely accepted, message from the book is that the perceived benefits of toxic spraying do not outweigh the harmful, widespread and long-term repercussions. This is the crux of the argument in front of you now. Prior learning opportunities should not be set aside.

There are now more than 350 certified organic farms in Maine, and roughly 50 additional certified organic processors. If mandated emergency spraying occurs on these farms, the owners will be automatically disqualified from selling their contaminated crops or livestock as organic. These standards are set at the national level and apply to organic farms across the country. A study from 2010 found that organic farms in Maine leverage \$91.6 million for the local Maine economy. The economic implications to the state and detrimental impact to the livelihoods of these farmers cannot be understated or forgotten in your discussions.

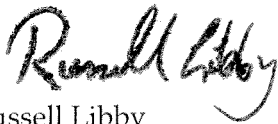
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If the Board chooses to initiate full rulemaking to allow spraying for public health emergencies, it must articulate and incorporate defensible regulations protecting certified organic farms. The current language does not go far enough. Occupants and owners of Maine properties must be allowed to protect their properties and residences from spraying by opting out of the emergency spray program and designating no-spray zones around their properties. Applicators must be held accountable for off-target spray drift. Vermont and Massachusetts already have established systems to protect organic farms from mosquito spraying. The automated, GIS-based notification system that your staff developed could be reactivated to identify no spray zones for organic farms, other economic sectors and the general public. MOFGA staff members will be happy to work cooperatively with your staff in order to ensure protections for certified organic farms and concerned citizens.

We recognize the Board is in a balancing act of protecting public health while keeping in mind the interests of individual landowners and constituency groups and appreciate the difficult decisions that have to be made.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Russell Libby". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Russell Libby  
Executive Director