

§163. Pilot program for establishing agricultural districts and agriculture enhancement groups

The commissioner may establish a pilot program to examine the effectiveness of agricultural districts in keeping farmland in agricultural production and enhancing the profitability of farming. For the purposes of this section, "pilot program" means an agricultural districts program that allows farmers to propose that the department designate their farmland as an agricultural district where commercial agriculture is encouraged and farmland protected through collaborative efforts at the state and local level. [PL 2009, c. 356, Pt. A, §2 (NEW).]

1. Eligibility criteria for agricultural districts. In order to be eligible to participate in the pilot program, farms must form agricultural districts. An agricultural district must be composed of 3 or more farms that are located in geographic proximity to each other, produce similar types of agricultural products or share common marketing interests. The commissioner shall review eligibility criteria for participants in agricultural districts in other states and may develop additional criteria for participation with the pilot program, including, but not limited to, minimum acreage and farm income thresholds. [PL 2009, c. 356, Pt. A, §2 (NEW).]

2. Benefits. The commissioner shall review benefits accruing to participants in agricultural districts in other states. Prior to initiating the pilot program, the commissioner shall develop a description of potential benefits accruing to participants in a pilot program. Potential benefits may include, but are not limited to, scoring bonuses for competitive grants, loans or business assistance programs and for project proposals screened for submission to the Land for Maine's Future Trust Fund under Title 5, section 6203-D or the Conservation and Recreation Fund under Title 5, section 6203-E. The commissioner shall consult with other agencies administering programs affected by the proposed benefits. [PL 2023, c. 284, §19 (AMD).]

3. Selection of regions. The commissioner shall distribute a description of the purpose and potential benefits of forming an agricultural district. Distribution may be through public agencies and private organizations that have regular contact with farmers in the State. The description must be posted on the department's publicly accessible website. The description notice must include information on how to contact the department to express interest in learning more about or participating in an agricultural district.

Based on the response to the initial solicitation, the commissioner may designate one or more districts. Prior to making a selection, the commissioner shall communicate with local or regional planning commissions and state, local or regional land trusts to ascertain their willingness to participate in efforts to protect farmland in the proposed districts.

If more than one district is designated for the pilot program, the commissioner shall strive to select districts in different parts of the State or different sectors of the State's agricultural economy. [PL 2009, c. 356, Pt. A, §2 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 2009, c. 356, Pt. A, §2 (NEW). PL 2023, c. 284, §19 (AMD).

The State of Maine claims a copyright in its codified statutes. If you intend to republish this material, we require that you include the following disclaimer in your publication:

All copyrights and other rights to statutory text are reserved by the State of Maine. The text included in this publication reflects changes made through the Second Regular Session of the 131st Legislature and is current through October 15, 2024. The text is subject to change without notice. It is a version that has not been officially certified by the Secretary of State. Refer to the Maine Revised Statutes Annotated and supplements for certified text.

The Office of the Revisor of Statutes also requests that you send us one copy of any statutory publication you may produce. Our goal is not to restrict publishing activity, but to keep track of who is publishing what, to identify any needless duplication and to preserve the State's copyright rights.

PLEASE NOTE: The Revisor's Office cannot perform research for or provide legal advice or interpretation of Maine law to the public. If you need legal assistance, please contact a qualified attorney.