



Testimony of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
in support of LD 2093 - An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents
Access Locally Produced Food

January 22, 2024

Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the joint standing committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Anna Libby and I am the Community Education Director at the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). I am speaking today in support of LD 2093 - An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food.

MOFGA is working to build 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. Enabling increased access to food for all Mainers is an important piece of this mission, and it is for that reason that I am here today to support this bill and provide information about Maine Harvest Bucks and the impact the program has, as well as our hopes for increased and ongoing funding for this important food access work that benefits participants, farmers, and our local communities.

MOFGA works closely with our partners at the Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets, Cultivating Community, and Good Shepherd Food Bank to collectively manage nutrition incentive programs in the state of Maine. MOFGA's role in the collaborative is to facilitate engagement in the Maine Harvest Bucks program through farms offering CSAs or "community supported agriculture." Such programs, which are also called "farm shares", take various forms; usually, they are boxes of vegetables delivered weekly through the summer and fall, though some farmers offer them throughout the winter.

The Maine Harvest Bucks program makes it possible for SNAP participants to stretch their SNAP funds, giving them bonus dollars to spend on fruits and vegetables for every dollar they spend on local foods. Within the CSA arm of this program, we have been fortunate to be able to offer bonus dollars on a 1:1 basis, meaning that SNAP participants pay 50% of the regular price for a vegetable CSA.

This has a great impact on participants in the program. In a survey last year, 100% of respondents said they were able to afford essentials they might not otherwise be able to due to their participation in the program. 97% said they found themselves eating more vegetables, and 88% reported feeling healthier because they were able to afford a



farmshare. As one participant said, "This program has helped in so many ways. My 3 year old daughter has grown up with the majority of her veggies coming from local farms, mostly organic, and it allows me to purchase other foods that are sourced locally with the savings. Besides the amazing benefits to supporting Maine Businesses and people, my family is directly benefiting from the nutritious and delicious veggies we bring home. My beef and veggie chili is a fan favorite and just one of the many ways the veggies are utilized. The program is a game changer in our health."

The program also benefits participating farms and the local food economy. We had sixteen farms participating in the program in 2023, and the result was over 50,000 dollars in local food being purchased directly from participating farms using SNAP and Maine Harvest Bucks. This means that these funds remain in our local economy, supporting our farmers and local businesses. When looking at this nutrition incentives program as a whole, the impact is even larger, making a broader impact across our communities. It also helps support a more resilient local food economy and the goals of Maine's Climate Action Plan, which aims for 30% local food being consumed in Maine by 2030.

Ongoing funding is critical to this important program that benefits us all - participants in the program, our farmers and our local food and economic systems. As another participant in the program said, "The Maine Harvest Bucks program has assisted our family and our neighbors/community live a positive, healthy, grateful and well nourished life. The local farms have grown and created such gorgeous, fresh food. We are humbled and honored to have such nutritious, organic fresh ingredients. Thank you. Thank you. HUGE Gratitude!"

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation. I urge the Committee to vote unanimously in support of LD 2093 - An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food.

I would be happy to answer questions if you have any.