



**Testimony of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
in Support of LD 124 - *An Act to Protect the Right to Food***

February 11, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Committee. My name is Heather Spalding and I'm deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). MOFGA appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of LD 124 - *An Act to Protect the Right to Food*.

MOFGA thanks Senator Craig Hickman for his leadership in securing the Right to Food for all Maine Citizens, and for bringing this additional legislation forward once again. MOFGA worked with Senator Hickman and a broad coalition of citizen groups to establish the Right to Food – the first amendment of its kind enshrined in a state constitution. The Right to Food gives Maine citizens standing to grow, raise, harvest and produce food, as long as they don't commit trespassing, theft, poaching, or abuses to private land, public land, or natural resources.

The Right to Food Amendment shows that Maine recognizes food as a basic human need and that all future policy decisions about our food supply should build on this value statement. MOFGA sees this constitutional amendment as an essential cornerstone in the foundation of a healthy and fair food system for all — one that generates the vast majority of Maine's food supply with locally, organically grown produce.

Maine is almost entirely reliant on food from away — currently importing an estimated 96% of its food supply — though we have the natural resources including landbase, soils, water, flora, fauna, climate and knowledge to be self-sufficient and enjoy a healthy, diverse, balanced and delicious diet.

This bill shines a light on the progress that Maine has made in promoting self-reliance and local, healthy food systems, and it also reminds us that our work is just beginning. Nearly 300,000 people in our state, including one in five children, do not have a reliable source of food. Our state imports nearly all of the food it consumes. Our precious and finite agricultural land is threatened with residential, commercial and industrial development along with persistent, toxic and bioaccumulative chemicals like PFAS.

LD 124 underscores the urgency of systemic change in our food and agriculture systems. It emphasizes more carrots than sticks from Maine's administrative departments to help Mainers grow, raise, harvest and produce food in a safe and lawful manner. I would be happy to answer questions if you have any.

About MOFGA: *A broad-based community, MOFGA is transforming our food system by supporting farmers, empowering people to feed their communities, and advocating for an organic future. MOFGA certifies 537 organic farms and processing operations representing more than \$120 million in sales. We're working hard to 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.*

