

PLEASE NOTE: Legislative Information **cannot** perform research, provide legal advice, or interpret Maine law. For legal assistance, please contact a qualified attorney.

An Act To Expand the Local Foods Economy by Promoting Local Foods Procurement

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 7 MRSA §401-B, sub-§7 is enacted to read:

7. Good local foods procurement program. The commissioner shall establish and promote a good local foods procurement program, referred to in this subsection as "the program."

A. As used in this subsection, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.

(1) "Community supported agriculture" means an arrangement in which individual consumers have agreements with a farmer to be provided with food or other agricultural products produced on the farmer's farm.

(2) "Farmers' market" has the same meaning as in section 415, subsection 1, paragraph A.

(3) "Good local foods" means foods that are:

(a) Produced or harvested in this State;

(b) Healthy, safe, wholesome and nutritious and meet the dietary guidelines for Americans published jointly by the United States Department of Health and Human Services and the United States Department of Agriculture;

(c) Affordable;

(d) Accessible to all residents of this State;

(e) Equitably distributed so that producers and harvesters receive and consumers pay a reasonable price and so that producers and harvesters have an equal opportunity to sell foods and consumers have an equal opportunity to purchase foods; and

(f) Sustainably produced in terms of water, soil and pesticide management.

B. The program must help farmers and fishermen in this State by increasing demand for and direct purchasing of their products by individuals and institutions with a goal of increasing the sale and purchase of good local foods by 20% no later than 2025 and supporting local economies, farms, fisheries, jobs, nutrition, environmental sustainability and animal welfare. The program also must improve access to good local foods.

C. The program must increase the purchase of good local foods by public and private institutions in this State, including, but not limited to, primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, hospitals, jails, community centers serving senior citizens, child care centers, restaurants and grocery stores. The commissioner shall establish guidelines to assist these institutions to assess their ability to procure good local foods while minimizing costs.

D. The program must provide education and outreach for the purpose of supporting farms, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture and seafood providers to further the goal of increasing the sale and purchase of good local foods.

E. The program must improve access to good local foods for recipients of benefits under any food supplement program administered by the Department of Health and Human Services under Title 22. The commissioner shall expand opportunities for farmers to sell good local foods to recipients of food supplement program benefits by promoting the use of electronic benefits transfer cards at farmers' markets and, in partnership with a statewide federation of farmers' markets, encouraging participation in community supported agriculture by recipients of food supplement program benefits. The commissioner shall assist farmers' markets in accepting payments through the electronic benefits transfer system by helping them secure scanners and equipment, including equipment that does not require the use of electricity, for processing payments through the electronic benefits transfer system. The commissioner, in partnership with the Commissioner of Health and Human Services, shall educate recipients of food supplement program benefits of the opportunity to use the benefits at farmers' markets and the advantages of such use.

SUMMARY

This bill requires the Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to establish a good local foods procurement program to encourage the purchase and sale of foods that are produced and harvested in this State and that are healthy, safe, wholesome, nutritious, affordable, accessible and sustainably produced. The program, administered by the commissioner, must help farmers and fishermen in this State by increasing demand for and direct purchasing of their products by individuals and institutions with a goal of increasing the sale and purchase of good local foods by 20% no later than 2025 and supporting local economies, farms, fisheries, jobs, nutrition, environmental sustainability and animal welfare. The program also must improve access to good local foods.

The program must increase the purchase of good local foods by public and private institutions in this State, including, but not limited to, primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, hospitals, jails, community centers serving senior citizens, child care centers, restaurants and grocery stores.

The program must provide education and outreach for the purpose of supporting farms, farmers' markets and community supported agriculture to further the goal of increasing the sale and purchase of good local foods.

The program must improve access to good local foods for recipients of food supplement program benefits. The commissioner must expand opportunities for farmers to sell good local foods to recipients of food supplement program benefits by promoting the use of electronic benefits transfer cards at farmers' markets and, in partnership with a statewide federation of farmers' markets, encouraging participation in community supported agriculture by recipients of food supplement program benefits. The commissioner must assist farmers' markets in accepting payments through the electronic benefits transfer system by helping them secure scanners and equipment, including equipment that does not require the use of electricity for locations that do not have access to electricity, for processing payments through the electronic benefits transfer system. The commissioner, in partnership with the Commissioner of Health and Human Services, must educate recipients of food supplement program benefits of the opportunity to use the benefits at farmers' markets and the advantages of such use.