



**Eric Venturini, Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine**

**Testifying in Support**

**LD 210, An Act to Expand the List of Persons Exempt from the Real Estate Transfer Tax**

Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, and esteemed members of the Committee on Taxation, my name is Eric Venturini and I am the Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine.

The Wild Blueberry Commission works on behalf of Maine's 485<sup>1</sup> wild blueberry farmers and businesses who grow our iconic wild blueberries on approximately 42,000<sup>2</sup> acres across the state and on Passamaquoddy tribal land. In 2022, Maine produced 76 million pounds of wild blueberries representing nearly 100% of all **wild blueberries** and 9.6% of all **blueberries** grown in the US. Our industry contributes an estimated 250 million dollars to the state's economy each year and that contribution brings vital economic activity to Maine's most impoverished county, Washington County.<sup>3</sup>

Wild blueberry farming is the most time honored agricultural tradition in Maine. The Wabanaki have been managing wild blueberry fields for thousands of years, and many other Maine farmers have wild blueberry farming traditions that extend eight or more generations. This family tradition is what drew my attention to this bill and wild blueberry producers agree that the State should not tax transfers of farmland between any family members. Fifty-eight percent of Maine wild blueberry farmers have been farming for 2, 3, 4, or more generations. However, 42% are first generation farmers and would have had to pay 50% of this transfer tax to start farming.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, farmers trying to afford retirement would have to pay the other 50% of this tax, which would come directly out of their retirement savings.

Consider that the average age of the Maine wild blueberry producer is 64.5<sup>4</sup>. Many are entering retirement. Consider that the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine as representative of this important Maine industry, has identified as a,

---

<sup>1</sup> National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2017. Berries: 2017.

[https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_2\\_County\\_Level/Maine/st23\\_2\\_003\\_3\\_0033.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_County_Level/Maine/st23_2_003_3_0033.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Based on 2021 harvested acreage (appx. half of total acreage in any given year).

<https://extension.umaine.edu/blueberries/factsheets/statistics-2/crop-production-statistics-2019/>

<sup>3</sup> Washington County has the highest poverty rates in Maine (18.7%) according to the Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information (2021). <https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/county-economic-profiles/countyProfiles.html>

<sup>4</sup> Malacarne, J. 2021. Maine wild blueberry industry survey. Unpublished data.



*Barrier to Prosperity:*

*Lack of profitability discourage[ing] the next generation from growing wild blueberries and contribut[ing] to the loss of farms and acreage.*

2023 Priority

*Develop[ing] strategic initiative(s) to reverse the trend of decreasing wild blueberry farm numbers*

Long Term Priority

*Grow[ing] the number of Maine wild blueberry farms and businesses*

Consider also the significant investments made by the State of Maine, and by agricultural organizations like Maine Farmland Trust to assist the next generation of farmers in getting on farmland.

With these considerations in mind, I respectfully ask this Committee, why would we charge aspiring and retiring farmers \$1.2 dollars each, on every \$500 to sell or transfer their farm?

I support this legislation and respectfully ask the Commission to consider further expanding the list of exempted real estate transfers to include all transfers of commercial agricultural real estate (as defined in MRS Title 36, §2013 (1)(A)).

I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you for granting me some of your time.

