

Seth Kroeck
Brunswick
LD 1009

Good morning honorable chairs Brenner, Gramlich and esteemed members of the committee. Thank you for hearing my testimony this morning regarding LD1009. My name is Seth Kroeck and I have run Crystal Spring Farm in Brunswick for the past 20 years. We produce MOFGA certified organic wild blueberries, carrots, Brussels sprouts, small grains and hay. Additionally we have a USDA Harmonized GAP food safety certification.

I applaud the efforts of the committee to address food waste and by extension, food insecurity in Maine. That said I do not believe this bill as written would be helpful in meeting these goals.

As a food producer we harvest, wash, grade, store, package and ship fresh produce bound for retail and processing markets in Maine and beyond. As I'm sure the members of the committee are aware, food production in Maine, especially wholesale production runs on very small margins. We examine every aspect of our operation closely for efficiency and wherever possible we find a return for the calories produced. In our experience this is also true of the burgeoning local food processing sector in Maine.

As a food producer we sell several grades of produce. The best are bound for the shelves of retailers like Whole Foods and Rosemont Market or the kitchens of many of Maine's best restaurants. Utility grades make their way to processors and school kitchens (that have staff to work with them) and seconds are sent to food pantries and hunger relief kitchens. Culls that are not salable due to quality or size are composted or field spread and fertilize our hay crop, nothing is sent to a landfill.

For almost a decade we have been wild blueberry farmers. We do not sell fresh berries in the summer when we are busy with many other crops. Instead we ship all our field raked fruit (44,000LBS in 2022) to a packing processor in Hancock. Our packer takes this bulk fruit and cleans out the leaves, twigs, dirt and anything else that is not a blueberry. The berries are then separated by size, creating different grades, before flash freezing them. We buy these berries back for the cost of this service and it allows us to then package and market our fruit year round.

If this bill passes it will mandate an onerous bureaucratic requirement on business like mine and that of my blueberry packer, requiring us to report and record processes and efficiencies that we are already engaged in, not because they state regulated, but because they are good business.

The research and education programs of the Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions have shown us that there are new uses and markets for Maine foods of all grades. Developing new preparation options and modes of distribution for food should be our priority rather than mandating added costs and regulation on the producers and processors trying to build the local economy.

Thank you.