



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

Testifying in Opposition

LD 1685, An Act to Increase Acreage Eligibility and Change Requirements for Filing Plans Under the Maine Tree Growth Tax Law

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 485¹ wild blueberry farmers and businesses who grow our iconic wild blueberries on approximately 39,400² acres across the state and on Passamaquoddy tribal land. In 2022, Maine produced 77.6 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.³

Thirty-eight percent of Maine's wild blueberry farmers are 2nd, 3rd, or 4th generation farmers. Another 8% of Maine wild blueberry producers have been farming for 5 or more generations.⁴ As family farmers, they are landowners and more often than not own forest land that is adjacent to their fields. Many of these families obtain income from their forestland. They have invested their time and money to have a forester come out, walk the property, make management recommendations, and prepare a forest management plan. They have taken the time to work with state and/or municipal authorities to register that land as tree growth, and yes, they receive a tax benefit to manage that land in accordance with their regularly updated forestry management plans.

The major concern I have with this bill, is the provision that would change the minimum acreage requirement from 10 to 25 acres. If passed into law, this bill would change the assessment and taxation on land owned by hundreds of Maine's wild blueberry farmers. Of those farmers, it is the smallest that currently have less than 25 acres enrolled in the program, and the smallest who therefore, would be the most affected.

I ask that you do not impose additional costs on Maine's small wild blueberry farmers and urge you to vote Ought Not To Pass on LD 1685.

¹ USDA 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_0033_0033.pdf

² USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2023. News Release, Maine wild blueberry production down 26% from 2021.

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

³ 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>

⁴ Malacarne, J. 2021. Maine Wild Blueberry Industry Survey. University of Maine. Unpublished data.

