

Seth Kroeck
Brunswick
LD 1815

Honorable Rep. Roberts, Distinguished Members of the Committee and Staff

My name is Seth Kroeck and I have run Crystal Spring Farm In Brunswick. The farm produces hundreds of thousands of pounds of packaged vegetables and fruit for grocery store scale retailers in Maine and Massachusetts. Our produce is sold in Whole Foods and Rosemont Markets in Portland as well as several small independent stores. We are certified organic and have Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) food safety certification from the USDA. Our produce is packaged and cased for retail sale following industry standards.

Mainers buy 85% of their food from retail grocers yet the largest grocery store chains in Maine have very little local product on the shelves. These large chains, many owned by multinational concerns, have in place buying systems meant to discourage access for local farms or downright refuse to buy from us at all. One of these chains has built its marketing foundation on "loving local".

Of the three large retail grocers in Maine two are inaccessible to local produce. They don't return calls or email and are clearly not interested. The third retailer has a program for local growers that on the surface is welcoming but presents growers with fixed non-negotiable pricing, based on research by internal "company economists". This pricing is based on produce that is grown on massively scaled farms in California, the Southeast and abroad. These farms are able to sell California potatoes or Georgia blueberries in Maine because they are tied to national distributors that require rock bottom pricing that only the countries largest farms can meet. The scale and pricing of this system makes it inaccessible for Maine farms.

Crucial to understanding why this system is so unfair lies in the fact that all four of the country's largest grocery retailer conglomerates have posted record profits for the past 5 years.

Farming is a tough business. The margins are small and the risks are large. Those of us that have been able to stay in business year in and year out know what we need to make to feed our families, pay our employees a fair wage and be active parts of our local economies.

In closing I ask the committee to approve LD1815. This legislation will provide Mainers a pathway to protect our communities and our livelihoods from a national food system that cares nothing for the people of this state and is happy to continue sending there record profits to shareholders.