

Seth Kroeck  
Brunswick  
LD 2256

Dear Distinguished Chairs, Honorable Members and Valued Staff,

My name is Seth Kroeck and I have been an organic wild blueberry grower in Brunswick Maine for more than a decade. I am submitting testimony today to ask that you support LD2256, an act to provide emergency one-time relief from the blueberry tax.

In a good year we are able to harvest around 40,000 lbs of berries from the lot we manage in Cumberland County. This harvest is the culmination of hundreds of hours of management that begin almost two years prior with pruning, mulching and adding sulphur. During the harvest year we hire crew, monitor pests, bring in pollinators, and prepare trucks, tractors and harvesters, all in anticipation of a good crop.

For three of the last five years we have not had a crop to harvest. 2019 brought drought that burned up the berries before they could ripen. In 2020 a late freeze on June 1 burned every last flower before they could set fruit and again this year on May 18 we had 26 degrees, the cold air destroying even buds that had yet to open into flowers. These losses have been catastrophic for our farm and our family. While we have been able to stay in business there have been many Maine wild blueberry growers who could not. Some of these farmers have been second, third and fourth generation stewards of family held blueberry ground.

With more hard work and some good weather we hope to have a marketable crop of wild blueberries this year. We desperately need the income to keep up with the equipment, fuel and labor costs of this crop from the current year, as well as years past. Relief from the blueberry tax would be significant for our farm, allowing us to keep more of our profits and ensuring we will be able to farm another year.

Please consider supporting this bill. The Wild Blueberry Commission, which is the beneficiary of the tax, has said they will be solvent without the income for a year and I know Maine growers will know what to do with the extra money in their pockets after harvest.