

Brenn Thomas-Googins
Patch Farm
LD 468

Testimony for the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry in Support of LD 468 An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food

Sponsored by Senator Henry Ingwersen

March 6, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is BrennaMae Thomas-Googins and I am the owner/operator of Patch Farm in Denmark, Maine. I am a resident of Denmark, Maine. I am providing my written testimony today in support of LD 468. In 2016 Patch Farm (a small, highly diversified, certified organic farm) began participating as an Harvest Bucks eligible vendor at the Bridgton Farmers' Market. In 2017, during the Bridgton Farmers Market summer season Patch Farm had Harvest Bucks income of \$245. Last year, in 2025, in the same 6 month timeframe, we took \$1,233 in Harvest Bucks. In that time, much love and energy was brought to the program in our state - and that hard work, and funding has so clearly paid off! As the program became more accessible to participate in, in 2020 we began accepting Harvest Bucks directly at our farm through sales in our farmstand and CSA program. While we see the majority of our Harvest Bucks and EBT sales through the farmers' market, having those programs accessible at our farm offer our customers flexibility on when they can spend their dollars - no longer being locked into a single day of Farmers' Market (which oftentimes customers cannot attend due to other obligations). This has also helped to diversify our own income through these programs - as those customers find themselves able to attend our (open daily!) farmstand and spend those dollars.

It is always so fun to see a customer in line at the farmers market who has a special gleam in their eye, like they are just so excited to share something with me, or find me familiar in a way I don't quite understand. It's happened to me several times that when I finally engage in an interaction with them they say something like, "Oh! It's so good to meet you!" I smile back and generally reply with, "You, too!" and they follow up with, "I'm the one who always buys the spinach from your farmstand - I leave the harvest bucks under the tray?" and while I don't quite recognize the person, I do recognize just the very thing they speak of: the things they buy, and how they buy it. Often a conversation will ensue about how they are always driving by on Friday afternoons and how they realized that's the best time to get the food - and I get to explain our harvest days and we laugh a familiar laugh, having never interacted before in person - but in many small ways over their joy in the produce that we provide them. Often times we don't need to have in-person interactions to develop a relationship over food, and I love those moments at farmers' market, physically bonding with people from all walks of life over a bunch of radishes... but I also love lifting up the cashbox and seeing a handful of Harvest Bucks and knowing that spinach went to someone who really needed and appreciated it.

Additional state funding on the Maine Harvest Bucks program means these programs can continue to thrive - and we can continue to allow and support one another through food. I do know that we all need to eat, sleep and breathe for a living - and to ensure that we can help out that eating thing for everybody in this state, no matter their economic standing, is super exciting. The Maine Harvest Bucks program does that, and it's evidenced by the growth in Harvest Bucks spending, and the ability of farmers' like me being able to expand the opportunities to accept Harvest Bucks from just at a farmers' market, to being able to accept it through our farmstands, through our CSA programs. So consider supporting LD 468, it'll mean the world to a whole host of eaters.