

Brandon McDonald
Presque Isle
LD 468

Testimony of Brandon McDonald of Presque Isle before the 132nd Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

Dear Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

My name is Brandon McDonald, and I am from Presque Isle. As a dedicated shopper at both the Presque Isle Farmers Market and the Micmac Farms Markets, I am writing to express my strong support for LD 468 – An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food.

My career in entrepreneurial development began by assisting small Maine microenterprise businesses in accessing guidance, funding, and support. This journey was significantly shaped by the stories of local farmers in Aroostook County, starting in 2016. From the late Leo Nadeau, a potato farmer renowned as the creator of Bub's Potato Chips, to the dynamic educators Tracy Roberts and Jan Grieco, founders of Great North Woods Teas & Herbs, I have witnessed firsthand how determined entrepreneurs utilize Aroostook County's Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets (MFFM) to launch, innovate, and test their business concepts without substantial financial burdens. Farmers markets across Maine have provided a safe and accessible environment for entrepreneurial experimentation for decades. In recent years, these entrepreneurs have achieved even greater success, progressing from a simple table rental at a local market to operating food trucks and eventually expanding into physical retail spaces and shipping beyond Maine.

While I am not an economist and cannot precisely quantify the financial impact of 15-20 vendors in a Saturday market on Maine's economy (for that, I rely on Amanda Rector!), I can confidently assert that a local farmers market acting as an incubator for 15+ businesses, attracting hundreds of customers each Saturday, and facilitating the sale of 100% Maine-made or grown products and services is a significant asset to Maine's economy. Smaller regional incubator systems often request nearly \$1 million in funding to replicate the work MFFM markets accomplish at a fraction of the cost statewide. This is considering only the entrepreneurial ecosystem benefits of MFFM, not the countless other advantages, such as increased access to healthy, local, and sustainable agriculture.

The funding requested in LD 468 is a modest investment that will enable Maine's entrepreneurial ecosystem to diversify through the support of microentrepreneurs, many of whom establish thriving businesses by testing their ideas at farmers markets. I urge you to consider LD 468 favorably and vote for its advancement. Thank you.