



BELFAST COMMUNITY CO-OP

Owned by you. Food for all.

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Jamie Cermak and I am the Marketing Manager of Belfast Community Co-op. I am a resident of Belfast, Maine. I am testifying here today in support of LD 468.

The poverty rate in Waldo County is 12.75%, and food insecurity is a growing problem. I have worked with this community since 2018 and have observed the rising demand for food access. For example, SNAP sales in our store have tripled since 2019 as the need for assistance has increased.

Belfast Community Co-op has been a retail partner of the Farm Fresh Rewards Program since it began as Maine Harvest Bucks in 2016. We have the highest redemption rate of the program in Maine, with over \$78,000 in redemptions in 2024. This program has a growing impact, as it provides nutritious, local food to our low-income shoppers, including young families and elders, that they would not otherwise be able to afford.

In 2024, Belfast Community Co-op achieved \$3.5M in local sales from 220 farmers and producers in Maine. This includes our new partnership with Harvesting Good, a subsidiary of Good Shepherd Food Bank, where all profits go to local food banks. Funding provided for food access through LD 468 will allow our community and the communities of all FFR partners to participate in our local food economy by giving them the opportunity to buy locally grown food.

Thank you for your consideration.
Jamie Cermak, Marketing Manager
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Belfast Community Co-op