

Jean Koons  
Sidney  
LD 468

Testimony of Jean Koons of Sidney before the 132st 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 Jean Koons, I am a resident of Sidney, and I am here today as a Farmer and Shopper to express my support of LD 468 – An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food.

We are Kennebec Cheesery, a goat dairy licensed in 2008 and that year joined both the Skowhegan Farmers' Market and Downtown Waterville Farmers Market. Over the years we have also been part of Portland Farmers Market, Augusta Farmers Market and Belgrade Farmers Market. While at Skowhegan Farmers Market we saw the start of the movement to provide vouchers to encourage low income folks to buy locally at the Farmers Markets through the pilot study of the Paul Newman foundation, which then morphed into the Maine Harvest Bucks of MFFM. It has been wonderful to see the increase in the SNAP customers over the years.

As Treasurer of the Downtown Waterville Farmers for many years I documented the increase in SNAP sales from \$5710 in 2016 to \$10,365 in 2019, nearly doubling again to \$19,334 in 2022. Along with those sales to the market members who could accept SNAP sales, there was the additional \$3,094 MHB redeemed (paid out to vegetable vendors only) of \$3,913 distributed in 2016; \$11,510 MHB redeemed in 2019 of \$10,705 distributed and \$8546 redeemed in 2022 of \$11,121 distributed.

Originally each market had their own MHBucks but now SNAP customers can spend those MHB vouchers at any Farmers Market. The numbers show that our SNAP customers spend most of the MHBucks they receive so this is a valuable program fighting food insecurity and encouraging healthy buying habits.

The importance of CONTINUOUS FUNDING at the \$1.2 million level per year is money well spent as then the markets (and MFFM) can plan for growth and expansion of the program without any funding uncertainties or interruption, which has happened in past years.