

Testimony of Max Bachvarova
March 6, 2025

To:

Senator Henry Ingwerson
Senator Margaret Rotundo
Senator Russell Black
Senator Matthea Larsen Daughtry
Representative Kristen Cloutier
Representative Suzanne Salisbury
Representative William Pluecker
Representative Randall Hall
Representative Daniel Sayre
Representative John Ducharme

LD 468, An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food

Good afternoon Senators and Representatives. My name is Max Bachvarova; I am a resident of Portland and a farmworker and market manager for Whatley Farm in Topsham. I manage our farmstand each weekend at the Brunswick-Topsham Farmers Market and at the Brunswick Winter Market. I appreciate the opportunity to stand before you today, strongly in support of LD 468.

During my time producing and vending local produce, I have had the great opportunity to meet a wide variety of individuals from our community. My job at the farmers market is often the highlight of my week because of the relationships I get to cultivate with my fellow farmers and vendors as well as the folks who take home our vegetables each week. I get to help educate our community about the wide variety of foods we grow year-round, share my passion and creativity for cooking meals for my family, and I get to learn a little bit about everyone's lives. As a result of this position in our community, I have become intimate with the power local food access has to transform lives.

At our markets, I see children (regardless of the income-status of their caregivers) delight in the colors and flavors of fresh vegetables. I hear market regulars chatting with friends they've brought along about how empowered they feel and how excited they are to share the possibilities that SNAP and Maine Harvest Bucks provide to their tables. I listen as people pass along information I've shared with them to someone new and suggest their recipe ideas to a person beside them in line. I watch as food access dissolves the barriers within our community, as strangers become acquaintances and caregivers and kids become peers in discovery.

The farming community in Maine is deeply dedicated to increasing food accessibility to low-income Mainers. In addition to the vibrance it brings to our lives, it also increases our economic stability. This past year, \$1 million flowed through the Maine Federation of Farmers Markets to farmers and vendors across the state, in large part directed from SNAP and the Maine Harvest Bucks nutrition incentive program that doubles SNAP benefits used

at markets statewide. Between 2023 and 2024, SNAP transactions at farmers markets increased by 5% and Maine Harvest Bucks use increased by 80%. Last year across Maine, 44 farmers markets doubled SNAP benefits through the Maine Harvest Bucks program. And as a combined result of funding and the passion of Maine farmers, 91% of SNAP recipients shopping at farmers markets in 2024 reported that it increases their feelings of security to be able to access and afford the foods that they want to eat (*Annual Report, Maine Federation of Farmers Markets, 2025*).

I urge you, on behalf of farmers and community members alike, to support continuous funding for food insecure Mainers.

Thank you for your time,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Max Bachvarova". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "M".

Max Bachvarova