

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 Courtney Kennedy, Nutrition and Education Director at Good Shepherd Food Bank. I am writing to strongly support **LD 468 An Act to Address Food Insecurity**, which will increase funding for nutrition incentive programs like Maine Harvest Bucks and Farm Fresh Rewards that help low-income families purchase fresh, local produce by providing bonus dollars or discounts when using SNAP benefits at local farmers markets and retailers.

At Good Shepherd Food Bank, our mission is to **eliminate hunger in Maine** by increasing access to nutritious food, fostering strong community partnerships, and mobilizing public support. We collaborate with nearly **600 partner organizations**—including food pantries, meal sites, schools, and healthcare facilities—to ensure food reaches those who need it most. As we continue to center equity in our work, we are strengthening efforts to support communities of color in a culturally responsive way.

One of our key initiatives, **Farm Fresh Rewards**, helps SNAP/EBT shoppers afford local, fresh produce by providing financial incentives. These programs benefit not only families in need but also **Maine farmers, small businesses, and the local economy**. Since its inception, over **\$600,000 in incentives** have been redeemed on locally grown products, and participation continues to grow.

These programs:

- **Improve food security and health outcomes in addition to providing dignified access to food for Maine low-income families.**
- **Support over 500 small Maine farms, food producers, and locally owned retail stores.**
- **Strengthen Maine's economy—every \$1 in SNAP generates \$1.70 in local economic activity.**

Community Impact:

Our Farm Fresh Rewards partners, deeply embedded in their communities, see firsthand the difference this program makes:

- **Jordan's Farm:** "A new customer unfamiliar with the program said he's now going to come back regularly because of the discount on our veggies."
- **Rising Tide Co-op:** "Customers love using Farm Fresh Rewards on their local blueberry pre-orders."
- **Blackie's Farm Fresh Produce:** "Many people say they love the program, but one customer specifically comes to our farm store because she can double her money and support local farms."

SNAP/EBT shoppers tell us time and again that **this program allows them to prioritize local, healthy foods for their families**—improving nutrition, reducing diet-related diseases, and building stronger communities. Families no longer have to choose between affordability and nutrition; they can invest in fresh, local produce while stretching their food dollars.

Why We Need Your Support

While Farm Fresh Rewards has been highly successful, only partial funding is available through the **Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP)**, which requires a **dollar-for-dollar match** from nonprofits or government agencies. To ensure Maine's food-insecure families continue to have access to fresh, local, and nutritious foods, I urge you to support **LD 468**.

Together, we can reduce hunger and strengthen Maine's food system for all.

Sincerely,

Courtney Kennedy

Director of Nutrition

Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine

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