



**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**

**March 6, 2025**

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, I'm Anna Korsen, Policy and Program Director with [Full Plates Full Potential](#), a statewide non-profit working to address childhood food insecurity in Maine by maximizing access to federally funded USDA nutrition programs like SUN Bucks, SNAP, and school meals. Strengthening SUN Bucks and SNAP by investing in nutrition incentive programs like Maine Harvest Bucks and Farm Fresh Rewards is critical to ensure food security for Maine kids.

I am testifying in support of LD 468 An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food because children's nutrition begins at home, but access to nutritious and healthy food in school and at home begins on our farms. These nutrition incentive programs run by our partners in ending hunger work provide bonus bucks to buy fresh local produce to shoppers using their SNAP or SUN Bucks EBT card. These programs have resulted in \$3.5 million in food sales to over 320+ local farms - many of which also work with our school nutrition programs to expand healthy and culturally appropriate food options in our schools.

**Maine is leading the nation** in feeding kids at school, and unfortunately we are also first in New England with the **highest rates of food insecurity**.<sup>1</sup> For many students, school meals are the only reliable source of food and the most nutritious meals they receive<sup>2</sup>, and Maine's historic law to feed every child at school at no cost has helped to increase access to food during the school day. However, when school is out on weekends, during vacations, on snowdays, and over the summer, children living in food insecure households lose access to those reliable meals. Many schools and communities operate summer meal programs that are meant to supplement school meals and address summer hunger, but those programs only reach about 27% of the kids that need them<sup>3</sup>. SUN Bucks, a new benefit program, gives families \$120 in grocery benefits per eligible child to be spent on food, including fresh produce, during summer vacation. Last summer, over 100,000 Maine students were enrolled in SUN Bucks and able to purchase fresh, local food through these nutrition incentive programs during the summer months.

Furthermore, food insecurity is on the rise again in Maine with rising costs of food and other basic costs of living, and households and local farms are struggling to make ends meet. Maine Harvest Bucks and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2022/child/maine>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/13/health/healthy-school-food-nutrition-wellness/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://frac.org/research/resource-library/hunger-doesnt-take-a-vacation-summer-nutrition-status-report-2022>



Farm Fresh rewards have helped 25,000 Mainers who participate in SNAP buy more fruits and vegetables and we know that over 30% of SNAP users include families with children<sup>4</sup>. Full Plates and our partners believe that all Mainers, despite their economic status, deserve high quality nutritious food and that programs to address food insecurity require ongoing funding.

The investment proposed in this bill will not only generate economic activity that will directly benefit Maine farms, but will also bring additional federal dollars into our state. According to the Maine Federation of Farmers Markets, every \$1 of state support for Maine Harvest Bucks results in \$3 from the federal government<sup>5</sup>. This type of investment will pay dividends and improve the health of Maine's kids by increasing access to healthy, local food.

We are also supporting LD 415, An Act to Support Hunger Prevention in Maine which would provide additional investment in the state's Mainers Feeding Mainers program. State investments like Healthy School Meals for All, local food incentives (LD 468), and Mainers Feeding Mainers (LD 415) together increase Maine kids' access to healthy food all year. These programs together help Maine households with low income stretch their limited grocery budgets and support Maine growers and producers - all needed elements to end hunger in Maine.

On a personal note, as a former SNAP recipient I benefited from Maine Harvest Buckets at my local farmers market. It meant that I could purchase nutritious local foods to feed myself and my son, establishing healthy eating habits for my child at a young age, all while supporting the wonderful growers and producers that provided our food. We urge you to fund this ongoing appropriation at this critical time when federal food benefit programs are being threatened with cuts and we thank you for your commitment to feeding Maine's children and supporting Maine's growers and producers.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap\\_factsheet\\_maine.pdf](https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_maine.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://mainefarmersmarkets.org/help-secure-state-funding-for-maine-harvest-bucks-ld-2093/>