

Jesse Watson  
Rockland  
LD 124

Testimony by Jesse Watson in favor of LD 124 An Act to Protect the Right to Food

Senator Talbot Ross, esteemed Representative Pluecker, honorable members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry, my name is Jesse Watson I am a resident of Rockland and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 124. I founded Midcoast Permaculture Design ([midcoastpermaculture.com](http://midcoastpermaculture.com)) in 2009 which provides design and planning services to individual and collective land managers of all sorts seeking to cultivate edible ecosystems using sustainable and regenerative methods. I help residential clients grow food not lawns. As a farm designer, I help commercial clients diversify their operations to include perennial food crop systems like fruit, nut and spice orchards. I co-founded the Maine Ecological Design School ([maineecologicaldesign.org](http://maineecologicaldesign.org)) in 2020 to help reconnect people to the landscapes immediately around them in profound new ways and to teach them how to plan and design a landscape and lifeway that results in the kind of world we want to build for the grandchildren.

I have been a longtime advocate for food sovereignty principles at the municipal and state levels. It has been a pleasure to observe the process of horizontal diffusion resulting in vertical integration. Food sovereignty started as a municipal movement here in Maine. As these ordinances passed from town to town, it became clear that vertical integration with State agencies became necessary. Hence the Maine Food Sovereignty Act in 2017 and the now infamous Right to Food Constitutional amendment in 2021 which passed with 61% approval across the whole state. This is an issue that unites people across politics which is incredibly important.

During the evolution of this idea and movement for food sovereignty, issues of risk, scale, agency and state preemption have repeatedly surfaced. We're here today to sort out some of those tangled bits of yarn from different portions of the quilt. It's interesting that what started at the municipal ordinance level now requires a systemic foundation grounded in state law. This bill is essential in describing how state agencies can support this work at the municipal level. Of equal importance, this bill describes how state-level agencies cannot preempt, restrict or impose certain legal frameworks on municipal ordinances. It is up to local people to decide how they want to design and define food sovereignty for themselves.

This is of national importance because it is direct democracy in action in a beautiful form surrounding an idea that is intuitively easy to grasp. Local people should design local food systems between producers and direct "me-to-thee" consumers. It's pretty basic and straightforward, because these ordinances are hyper-local and define terms internal to the municipality only. This is an elegant idea whose time is now, and I urge you all to vote ought to pass so we can continue this important work. Thank you.