



Testimony of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
in support of LD 1213 - *An Act to Allow the Premiums and Gratuities Paid for*
Any Agricultural Events Approved by the Commissioner of Agriculture,
Conservation and Forestry to Be Considered in Apportionment of Stipends to
Agricultural Fairs.

April 1, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Committee. My name is April Boucher and I'm the Director for the Common Ground Country Fair, which is hosted by the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). MOFGA appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1213, SP0502 An Act to Allow the Premiums and Gratuities Paid for Any Agricultural Events Approved by the Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to Be Considered in Apportionment of Stipends to Agricultural Fairs.

At the Common Ground Country Fair we are seeing a steady interest and demand for educational talks, workshops, and demonstrations, especially for those that teach agrarian and sustainability skills. Many of our 24 educational venues are packed as fairgoers have the opportunity to attend over 450 educational offerings over the three days of our event. We are also seeing more school groups attending the Fair and last year alone we had 6,205 students & chaperones on our Friday School Day at the Fair.

We are fortunate to have a wealth of knowledge and experience in our communities both near and far. At the same time, many cannot afford to volunteer to teach at our fairs and need stipends or gratuities to take time away from farming or their businesses to share their knowledge. I am requesting that we add gratuities paid to educators and for educational purposes to be allowed to count towards the state stipend for agricultural fairs.

Currently, the stipend statute is focused on the betterment of agriculture through competition and has long supported exhibition halls, livestock shows, and other competitions at Maine's agricultural fairs.





By adding educational opportunities, this would allow fairs to sustain their current offerings and expand to support the interest of our communities and the public. This will also support local educators and would facilitate experts outside the state sharing their knowledge. This in turn will help our communities become more resilient and help maximize the amazing resource that agricultural fairs are to our communities both near and far.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions if you have any.

About MOFGA: A broad-based community, MOFGA is transforming our food system by supporting farmers, empowering people to feed their communities, and advocating for an organic future. MOFGA certifies 537 organic farms and processing operations representing more than \$120 million in sales. We're working hard to create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions a future of healthy ecosystems, communities; people, and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum.

