



**Testimony of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
in Support of
LD 1141 - *An Act to Increase the Procurement of Maine Foods by State-funded Institutions***

April 1, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Heather Spalding and I'm deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). MOFGA appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1141 - *An Act to Increase the Procurement of Maine Foods by State-funded Institutions*. We appreciate Senator Hickman's leadership with this bill and also are happy to see the bi-partisan support for prioritizing state institutional buying of foods produced here in Maine.

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.

Maine is almost entirely reliant on food from away — currently importing an estimated 96% of its food supply — though we have the natural resources including landbase, soils, water, flora, fauna, climate and knowledge to be self-sufficient and enjoy a healthy, diverse, balanced and delicious diet. LD 1141 will help move the needle toward self-reliance in our food and agriculture system by requiring, rather than simply encouraging, the procurement of Maine foods and food products by state institutions.

MOFGA is especially enthusiastic about the potential for increased production and procurement of local foods at the Maine Department of Corrections (MDOC). Under the current leadership of Randall Liberty, the MDOC is taking on food inequities at Maine's seven adult correctional facilities and one youth facility — creating cooking and baking apprenticeships, building compost piles and raised beds, mixing potting soil and giving residents the chance to get their hands dirty. MOFGA was fortunate to have a group of residents from the Mountain View Correctional Facility in Charleston who came to MOFGA's headquarters in Unity to help with set up for the 2024 Common Ground Country Fair. They also provided an enormous amount of produce from their organic gardens to help feed the thousands of volunteers who make our event happen. Thank you to Mark McBrine and Commissioner Liberty for their commitment, vision and leadership with producing, consuming and sharing fresh, local, healthy organic foods.

MOFGA is firmly committed to building a more local, more organic agriculture. The organic market in the United States grew from \$11 billion to almost \$64 billion in the last two decades. The market is expected to grow by 28% through 2029. We need public policy to ensure continued growth in our domestic production. Concerningly, our global economic competitiveness in organic production is waning. In 2016, the U.S. managed the third most organically certified land in the world. In 2022, we ranked ninth. Furthermore, organic imports are precipitously increasing while our organic exports have remained flat for years. I mention this to underscore the importance of local and state policy actions in the face of uncertainty at the federal policy level.

Maine's Climate Action Plan has a goal of producing 30% of the food that is consumed in-state, though current law only requires establishment of a 20% goal for Maine foods procured by state institutions. LD 1411 increases this goal to 30% in alignment with the state's Climate Action plan. It also dedicates staff resources specifically to healthy local foods procurement efforts. Maine's Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry is a lean and productive wing of the Mills Administration and they deserve to have additional funding and staff support to ensure a vibrant future for Maine farms.

We urge the Committee to support this important legislation and look forward to working with you on this and many other initiatives to make Maine's food and agriculture system, and our fellow Mainers, healthier and more self-reliant.