

**Re: Testimony in Opposition of LD 588 and LD589**

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor:

My name is Michael Goss and I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation farmer and first member of my family to make farming my fulltime career. I am writing to testify against LD588 and LD589, An Act to Enact the Agricultural Employees Concerted Activity Protection Act, and An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Related Workers Employees Under the Wage and Hour Laws.

We are a small family farm in Mechanic Falls that grows a variety of crops, but we are most known for our small fruits (raspberries, blueberries, and strawberries). Like most farms in this state we are struggling against rising input prices, scarce and expensive labor availability, and foreign competition undercutting prices. Currently 60% of fresh fruit consumed in the USA is grown in a foreign country per the USDA. We see a lot small fruit coming into Maine that is grown in Quebec and we have lost wholesale accounts to Canadian distributors.

Farming has been getting more expensive and more difficult year to year. These bills will radically increase farm labor cost, which is the biggest expense any farm has. Agricultural overtime laws in the USA, while intended to improve worker rights, have often backfired for farmworkers, cutting their earnings. In states like California, Washington, and Oregon, employers have cut hours to avoid overtime costs, shrinking weekly paychecks for workers who once relied on 50-60 hour workweeks. Instead of lifting livelihoods, these laws have left many agricultural workers with fewer hours, less money, and heightened job insecurity in an already struggling industry.

Many farms struggle to find seasonal domestic workers so they rely on foreign workers under the H2A program which has a minimum wage in 2025 of \$18.83/hr in Maine, and increases every year. Farms are also required by federal law to provide free housing and transportation to workers at no cost to them. For our farm this means renting a building for a year round lease for \$1,200/month plus utilities to house workers from April-October. Our foreign workers come to Maine to work as many hours as possible to make as much money as possible before they go home. If farm worker overtime laws are passed we will be required to reduce our workers hours and attempt to hire more workers. If we can't find more workers, we will reduce our acreage and produce less which will have negative impacts on our farms viability.

If passed these bills will hurt Maine farmers and Maine's agriculture industry and will likely have negative impacts for Maine farmworkers.

Thank You for your time.

-Michael Goss

