



Senator Talbot Ross

Representative Pluecker

Members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

RE: Support of LD 1252 – An Act To Amend The Laws Governing The Maine Agriculture, Food System And Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Advisory Board

My name is Eric Venturini and I'm the Executive Director of the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine testifying in support of this bill.

The Wild Blueberry Commission (WBCM) works on behalf of Maine's 512¹ farms who grow wild blueberries on 47,600¹ acres across the State. In 2024, Maine produced approximately 85 million pounds of wild blueberries representing nearly 100% of all *wild* blueberries and approximately 10% of all *blueberries* grown in the US. Our industry contributes \$361 million dollars to the state's economy annually² and is the only state with significant commercial production of wild blueberries.

Wild blueberries are healthy, they are Maine, and they have the best story of origin and heritage than any other fruit in the US. Despite that, a recent publication by the University of Maine³ indicates that the cost of producing 1 pound of wild blueberries ranges from \$0.42 to \$0.76 per lb. In 2023, the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service's annual survey⁴ indicated that the average field price growers received that season was \$0.52 per pound. Market indicators like import pricing for frozen wild blueberries give us no reason to be optimistic.

It is programs like the Maine Agriculture, Food System and Forest Products Infrastructure Investment Fund, that give me hope of a brighter future for this industry. To survive, producers need to reinvent their businesses, develop value-added manufacturing, diversify farm business incomes, and develop new ventures that help to break their businesses away from commodity price swings, competition with cheap imports, and the race to the bottom. To do that, they need capital, pure and simple.

My favorite part of this bill is the following line, "disbursements from the funds are limited to producers." Organizations like the Wild Blueberry Commission, agricultural researchers and service providers, should not be eligible to compete for any funding allocated to this program. Such organizations are already able to compete for other funding sources. It is our producers themselves that need access to capital, and the state is positioned to strategically invest in innovative ideas that can expand product categories to access new markets, develop and improve processing infrastructure, and increase profitability.

On behalf of Maine's wild blueberry industry, I ask you to give this bill your support.

¹ USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2022. Berries: 2022. United States Census of Agriculture.

² Camoine Associates. Unpublished Data. Economic and Fiscal Impacts of the Maine Wild Blueberry Industry. Wild Blueberry Association of North America – US, October 2023.

³ Hoshide, A, and D. Yarborough. 2023. 2024 Enterprise Budgets. Retrieved from Cooperative Extension: Maine Wild Blueberries, <https://extension.umaine.edu/blueberries/factsheets/marketing-and-business-management/2024-enterprise-budgets/>, on March 24, 2025.

⁴ USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2024. New England Berries, Tree Fruit and Grapes, 2023 Crop. News Release, USDA NASS, Northeastern Regional Field Office.