

Colleen Hanlon-Smith
Unity, maine
LD 577

Testimony of Colleen Hanlon-Smith, Peak Season Produce in Unity In Support of LD 577

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Colleen Hanlon-Smith, I'm the owner operator of Peak Season Produce, a Maine farm foods distribution company located in Unity, Maine.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 577 "An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine's Universal School Meals Program". I'd like to thank Senator Tipping for his commitment to school meals in Maine.

Peak Season distributes to over 30 k-12 schools in Maine and hopes to double this number in the next school year. We aggregate, market and distribute exclusively Maine foods, representing over 70 Maine farmers and food producers. We have been astounded by our growth in sales to k-12 schools and school nutrition team's commitment to incorporating local foods in their school menus. We can't continue to grow this work without continued State support to schools safeguarding access to free school meals. Free school meals means universal food access to all our schoolchildren, creating a critical foundation through which our work to increase local food in schools can grow.

Free school meals eases the administrative burden for schools allowing for school nutrition teams to focus on feeding kids and incorporating healthy, local foods into menus. The economic impact for farmers and communities of selling Maine foods to schools cannot be understated and our work is just underway with potential to grow tremendously, with your help.

By safeguarding free school meals for Maine students you are also safeguarding the opportunity for farmers to sell to schools and the opportunity for our youth to have exposure to where their food comes from.

Thank you to the committee for your time today and your support of this important bill.