



Senator Talbot Ross

Representative Pluecker

Members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

RE: Support of LD 1601 – An Act to Create Parity in Poultry Processing and Farming Licenses and Inspections

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.

Maine's wild blueberry industry has for decades invested time and resources to maintain its impeccable food safety record, and as new technologies and best management practices are developed, has readily incorporated them to make further improvements.

That is why we are so grateful to Representative Collamore for presenting this bill which could help to provide a greater level of consistency and predictability in the interpretation and application of federal food safety laws as they apply to unique industries in Maine.

Maine's wild blueberry industry is one of, if not the, most unique cropping systems in the United States. Harvested every other year, never planted, existing as a natural contiguous mat comprised of hundreds of unique individual plants per acre—it is often hard to fit our holistic management practices into the square hole of federal regulations. This is why our industry, through our Food Safety Working Group, has invested countless hours over recent years to understand the Food Safety Modernization Act and the Produce Safety Rule, and provide education on how those laws could be interpreted to optimize practical compliance with federal rules.³

As producers adopt practices to comply with the latest federal regulations, it is essential that the interpretation and application of those regulations remain consistent. We see value in the formation of this stakeholder group and **propose consideration of a friendly amendment.** Applicable food safety regulations in the wild blueberry industry can vary between those processing wild blueberries and those growing wild blueberries. Therefore, we suggest that in addition to the "farmer of wild blueberries" member, the stakeholder group also include a "processor of wild blueberries" member.

Thank you for your time. 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 Calderwood, L. and R. Machado. 2023. Guidance on Food Safety for Wild Blueberry Producers in Maine. University of Maine Cooperative Extension Bulletin #4282. Retrieved from <https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/resource/bulletin-4282-guidance-on-food-safety-for-wild-blueberry-producers-in-maine-pdf/> on April 24, 2025.