



Maine Grocers &
Food Producers
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**IN SUPPORT – LD 1605 An Act to Support Farmers and Food Banks Affected by
Federal Funding Cuts to Their Existing Contracts**

Dear Senator Talbot Ross – Chair, Representative Pluecker - Chair, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry,

My name is Christine Cummings and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Grocers & Food Producers Association (MGFPA). The Maine Grocers & Food Producers Association is a business trade association representing Maine's food community; Main Street businesses, including independently owned and operated grocery stores and supermarkets, food and beverage producers and processors, manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors, and supportive service companies. I also serve on the Board of Directors for Good Shepherd Food Bank.

Maine's food producers and farmers have a significant economic impact here in Maine; Maine's total direct economic impact across agriculture, manufacturing, wholesaling, and on and off-premise retailing creates more than 109,000 jobs, \$4B in wages and \$15B in output.¹ Maine's food producers and farmers are the backbone of our local economy and food system.

Supporting the fight against food insecurity, the Maine Grocers & Food Producers Association is committed to helping Mainers access fresh, local, and healthy food.

The recent federal cuts and continued uncertainty have compounding economic harm on Maine's farmers, producers and hungry-Mainers. This bill recognizes the critical need to support producers and nonprofit organizations that have been disproportionately impacted by recent federal funding cuts and contract changes. By establishing the 'Food System Protection Program' within the ME DACF, we can take an important step toward protecting our local food economy and enhancing food security for communities across the state.

The inclusion of zero-interest loans and other resources is a pragmatic and forward-thinking approach. It will empower local producers to continue their vital work and give hunger-relief organizations the tools they need to be sustainable and ideally more resilient.

As the Department moves forward with implementing the Food System Protection Program, we recognize the importance of collaboration with stakeholders to navigate questions of feasibility and program design. The Department brings valuable expertise from administering past grants and awards, as well as a deep understanding of Maine's agricultural landscape. However, ongoing dialogue and input will be essential to ensure that the program's details are refined in ways that provide the most effective and equitable support.

MGFPA supports this bill's intent and urges the committee to vote Ought to Pass to ensure Maine's producers and nonprofit partners have the resources they need to serve our communities. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Christine Cummings
Executive Director

¹ *The 2024 Feeding the Economy report*