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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

IN SUPPORT OF LD 568

*An Act to Provide Funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition  
Incentives*

February 27, 2023

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Michelle Webb and I am the Agriculture Resource Development Director within the Bureau of Agriculture, Food & Rural Resources. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry in support of LD 568, *An Act to Provide Funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives*.

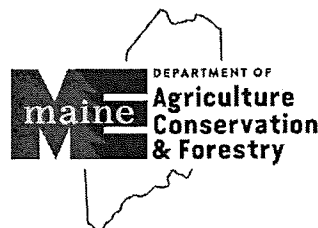
Two years ago, the Department came before you in support of LD 691, the bill that established Maine's Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives. We are pleased to be back supporting LD 568, which would put significant resources into that fund. We note that a parallel request for \$600,000 per year for the upcoming biennium has also been included in the Governor's budget.

The Bureau of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Resources has several important constituencies. Chief among them are **farmers**, whom we serve with technical assistance, food safety resources, financial tools, grant programs, market development support, and more. Another is **Maine people experiencing food insecurity**. These are the people we serve with programs like Maine Senior FarmShare, the Emergency Food Assistance Program, Hunters for the Hungry, and others.

LD 568 is about maintaining and supporting programs that are textbook "win-win" situations for these two important constituencies. They create additional markets for Maine growers, and they lower barriers to healthy food for Maine families. These funds will provide needed matching funds to draw in federal funds.

Programs exist both within private philanthropy and within the USDA that fund efforts to encourage people who use nutrition benefits like SNAP and WIC to spend their benefits on local

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foods. For over a dozen years, Maine organizations have been successful in leveraging these resources to create incentive programs like Farm Fresh Rewards, which incentivizes purchases at retail outlets, and Maine Harvest Bucks, which incentivizes purchases in direct-to-consumer settings like CSAs and farmers' markets. In 2022, together these programs generated over \$1 million in high-value sales for Maine farms. Programs that encourage Maine SNAP recipients—who are overwhelmingly comprised of seniors, the disabled, and working families with children—to spend more of their benefits on healthy, local food will have immense, positive impacts on our farms and our communities. We are supportive of the State partnering in these efforts.

In addition to the economic benefit for farmers and the health benefits for consumers, there is another important reason to support initiatives that increase the consumption of local produce. The Maine Climate Action Plan, under Strategy D “Grow Maine’s Clean-Energy Economy and Protect Our Natural-Resource Industries,” includes action item D1.3: “Increase the amount of food consumed in Maine from state food producers from 10% to 20% by 2025 and 30% by 2030 through local food system development.” Right now, the overwhelming majority of food purchased with federal food benefits is not grown in Maine. In addition to its other positive impacts, we view LD 568 as providing a boost to the state’s broader efforts to increase local food consumption, as well as enhance access to Maine-grown foods through various market channels.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions at a work session in the future.