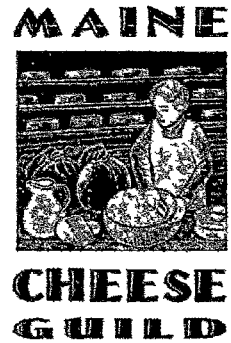


Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, members of the Joint Legislative Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, and members of the public, thank you for the opportunity to speak to this proposed legislation. My name is Jean Koons, I am a cheese maker in Sidney, and I am the current President of the Maine Cheese Guild. On behalf of the Guild, I testify **Against** LD1823 *An Act To Protect and Respect the Right to Food*. This extreme bill does not, in fact, protect and respect the right to food, but it proposes to greatly broaden the ability of unregulated food processors to sell their products in Maine and beyond.



I will begin with the Guild's Quality Statement – published in 2009 – which is a fundamental tenant of our group:

The Maine Cheese Guild believes that cheese of the highest quality can only be made with a thorough and regularly refreshed knowledge of food safety.

The Maine Cheese Guild promotes and sponsors regular opportunities to learn about best practices for cheese making. The Guild also believes that the best way for professional cheese makers to guarantee the quality of their product is by being appropriately licensed by the Maine Department of Agriculture, as only licensed cheese makers are legally allowed to sell cheese to the wider public, and only licensed cheese makers receive feedback from the dairy regulatory unit through regular testing for contamination and facility inspections. This feedback is critical, together with on-going education, in maintaining the high quality of award-winning Maine cheese.

Those who would argue that state licensing and regulation are 'impossible' standards for a struggling farmer or dairy processor to meet are ignoring the vast number of small farms and dairy processors who have been licensed in the past 15 years. Those who would argue that it's too expensive to meet current regulatory standards have probably never called a dairy inspector to ask for help planning an affordable, sensible, and sanitary milking parlors and processing room. In our long experience, Maine's dairy inspectors and milk lab have always worked to help small dairy processors succeed in becoming and remaining licensed, and to succeed in becoming successful sustainable businesses. All of these valuable resources are available from the State at the cost of the minimum \$35 annual licensing fee. A single private lab product test for coliform costs more than \$35 today, and the State provides at least ten tests a year for licensed dairy processors at no additional cost. The state also tests every non-municipal water supply annually for licensed processors.

Instead, LD1823 threatens many small farmers who have gained the trust of their local community. We are concerned that this bill threatens the whole local food movement that has slowly grown in this state over the last 50 years with the help of MOFGA, the Guild, and other support groups, as well as the success of many new farmers markets over the last 20 years. The changes proposed by this legislation further distance the "Know Your Farmer" stance that the supporters have always argued was so important. If this legislation is passed, the customer will no longer need to visit the farm or learn anything about a farmer's skills, the farm's connection to their community, or the sustainability of the operation. Unregulated food producers cannot be insured, shifting all risk to the consumer, and LD1823 provides no legal requirement to disclose to the public that their food is produced in unlicensed and uninspected facilities. Without such labeling, the consumer is not given choice, but rather is given the entire responsibility for researching the licensed status of any food producer for any Maine food item found on store shelves or on the internet. Further, explicitly removing the authority of DACF from implementing food quality and food safety programs threatens not only the food system, but also unsuspecting consumers across the state.

In our opinion, this extreme bill is an ambitious attempt to further deregulate Maine's food system that was working extremely well for small farmers before this kind of legislation was ever considered. The Maine Cheese Guild urges this committee to vote **OUGHT NOT TO PASS** on LD1823.