

# Cultivating Community



January 22, 2024

Senator Ingwersen and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today with enthusiastic support of LD2093 and increasing the state's funding for access to local food for low-income families.

I am here representing Cultivating Community, a non-profit food justice organization in Southern Maine. In addition to youth development, New American farmer training, and community garden programs, we support multilingual farm stands that match SNAP and WIC benefits dollar for dollar for fresh local produce.


Since 2011 we have worked to increase the use of SNAP/EBT benefits on local food purchases. Benefitting both Maine farmers and neighbors who are working to make ends meet. Last year SNAP and WIC made up more than 95% of our farm stand sales and we doubled more than \$83,000 in SNAP and WIC purchases and we have seen a sharp increase in need.

Approximately 10% of households in Maine experience hunger, the highest rate in New England. For African immigrant families, the rate of hunger is more than 50%.

Every year programs like ours struggle to find funding, leaving us scrambling to fill gaps. The stability of this proposed legislation would not only allow us to provide nutrition incentives, but also scale our programs and cover the cost of merchant service fees, translation, and technical assistance for farmers who struggle to navigate the complex bureaucracies that surround access to food benefits, especially for families where English is not their primary language.

This bill is both necessary and timely. As federal benefits are cut and the cost of both food and farming increases, it is up to us to come together and increase support for proven solutions that connect Maine's anti-hunger, local food, and climate goals with programs that are working.

Thank you again and please support this bill,

Silvan Shawe  


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