

Testimony of Kate Del Vecchio testifying in support of LD 2093.

Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Plueker and esteemed members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee.

My name is Kate Del Vecchio, I live in Richmond where I own a farm along with my husband and I am here today to support LD 2093.

We started Tender Soles Farm in 2013, we are a small, MOFGA certified organic farm and we raise vegetables, cut flowers, and value added goods. We have a 60 member weekly veggie CSA, a farm stand, and attend the Yarmouth, Bowdoinham and Brunswick farmers' markets.

We have been taking EBT cards since 2015. We have seen our SNAP sales grow exponentially each year since then. In the first few years we were taking in \$100 or less in EBT sales, by 2022 we took in \$1,100 in SNAP and Maine Harvest Bucks. In 2023, we had customers spend just under \$3,000 with us in SNAP through our farm's CSA and farm stand, - and the same amount - in Maine Harvest Bucks for \$5,551.00. We took in another \$900 in SNAP and MHB/ Bumper Crop through our farmers' markets for a total of \$6,450 in 2023. With federal food benefits being cut for people in 2023, nutrition incentive programs that help customers to stretch their dollars are hugely important and customers are seeking out farms and markets that provide this service.

It is obvious to us how much the MHB, Bumper Crop and other nutrition incentive programs have helped to support people to use their SNAP dollars at local farms and farmers' markets. By accepting SNAP and being able to give bonus nutrition bucks we are not only adding more access points for community members to access fresh food, but these programs are definitively boosting the viability of our farm by helping us to grow our markets and customer base. It really is a WIN WIN!

Our farm and farms like us- who have gone through the hoops to accept SNAP donate a significant amount of time to the programs' administration, customer service, and fundraising. We need more support at the state and federal levels for people with low incomes to access fresh, local food- and to support for farms that are supplying this food.

We were the only farm at the Common Ground Fair that accepted SNAP and we are the only vendors at the Yarmouth market that accept SNAP. This bill would help to take some of the pressure off of farmers' by strengthening the consistency of the program to change the funding language so it is ongoing, and add another \$600,000 a year to the fund.