

Kevin Gardner

East Machias, ME 04630

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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. The following is my testimony in support of LD 2256, An Act to Provide Emergency One-Time Relief from the Wild Blueberry Tax for Growers in Maine. I own and operate a wild Blueberry farm and manage wild blueberries in the towns of Whiting, Marion and Jonesport.

I own approximately 100 acres and manage another 40 acres for other landowners. I am a 4<sup>th</sup> generation farmer who owns 50 acres of family land that has been passed down through the generations and I am doing the same for my son. This has been an important part of my family's income over the years and continues to be a big part of mine. I am also the president of our local Co-op and am frequently asked by our growers where the .0075 blueberry tax is being spent because they don't feel they are getting any benefit from it and could really use the extra money to offset the rising cost of fuel, chemicals, fertilizer and other things associated with operating their farms, all the while getting paid less for their crops each year. We are getting paid the same or less some years than we were decades ago. Meanwhile, the cost of operating our farms has quadrupled or more. As a small grower this has been devastating and we need all the help and support that we can get at this time.

I ask you to vote to pass LD2256.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kevin Gardner