

**Testimony for the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
and the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
in Support of LD 210, Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget**

February 27, 2025

Testimony in Support of LD 210

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Matthew Manson, and I am the Owner at Blackie's Farm Fresh Produce in Auburn, Maine.

I am testifying today in strong support of LD 210, the Governor's proposed Biennial Budget, specifically the initiative which provides ongoing funding for the Fund To Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives. This funding is critical to supporting Nutrition Incentives, including Farm Fresh Rewards and Maine Harvest Bucks, which not only increase access to healthy, locally grown food for low-income Mainers but also strengthen Maine's economy and lifting up hardworking farmers and local retailers.

Our 30 acre mixed vegetable farm has growing fields in Minot, Maine, and a year-round farmstand in Auburn. Throughout the growing season, we proudly sell our own native produce alongside fresh offerings from other area farms. Even in the off-season, we continue sourcing as much Maine-grown produce as possible to ensure our community has access to high-quality, farm-fresh fruits and vegetables year-round.

We serve a diverse customer base, including many low-income families and a significant population of New Americans. For these individuals, programs like Nutrition Incentives—through Farm Fresh Rewards and Maine Harvest Bucks—are a lifeline to good local foods, breaking down financial barriers to fresh, nutritious and local food. Since implementing these programs in May 2023, we've received overwhelming feedback from families expressing their gratitude for the ability to stretch their grocery budgets while making healthier choices for their children.

Beyond benefiting families, these programs are a major win for Maine's economy and agricultural sector. By helping more Mainers afford fresh local food, Nutrition Incentives drive money back into our state's farms and food system. Blackie's serves as a retail hub for many small farms that rely on us as a market for their crops. When demand for local

food increases, our farmers can grow more, invest in their operations, and hire more workers—directly fueling Maine farms owned by Mainers.

The impact of these programs has been undeniable. Before implementation, we averaged about 350 SNAP transactions per month. Since launching Nutrition Incentives, we have seen participation skyrocket to nearly 850 transactions per month—a 140% increase, at the peak of the local harvest season. SNAP/Nutrition Incentive transactions surged by more than 50% over the previous year, demonstrating their effectiveness in connecting families to fresh, local produce while simultaneously supporting Maine’s farmers.

By securing ongoing funding for these programs, we are making a long-term investment in Maine’s economy, ensuring the viability of our small farms, and improving food security for families across the state. I urge you to support LD 210 so that we can continue growing a healthier, more resilient Maine.

Thank you.