

**On Behalf of the Maine Local Food Access Network
(MLFAN)**

**In Support of LD 210 and its appropriation to the State
Fund for Nutrition Incentives**

Good Afternoon Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Talbot Ross, and Representative Pleucker, and members from both Joint Standing Committees. My name is **Jimmy DeBiasi**, and I am here today on behalf of the Maine Local Food Access Network (MLFAN), a coalition that includes the Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets, Good Shepherd Food Bank, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, and Cultivating Community.

**MAINE
LOCAL
FOODS
ACCESS
NETWORK**

We are here in support of LD 210 and its support of the FUND TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY/PROVIDE NUTRITION INCENTIVES (Page A-80 of part A) because it is an investment in food security, Maine farmers, and our local economy.

Maine's nutrition incentive programs, including Maine Harvest Bucks and Farm Fresh Rewards, empower low-income families to purchase fresh, local fruits and vegetables by providing bonus dollars or a discount when they use their SNAP benefits at participating locations. These programs are a proven win-win-win: they improve food security through dignified access to produce, promote positive health outcomes, and generate critical revenue for over 500 small Maine farms and food producers.

Since 2021, these programs have generated over \$3.5 million in food sales at 107 participating locations in all 16 counties. For every \$1 in SNAP spent in Maine, more than \$1.70 circulates back into our state's economy. The return on investment is undeniable. With just one year of state funding support, in 2024, we expanded access to nutrition incentives by 30%, reaching over 5,000 new shoppers and increasing benefits distribution during a time of hardship for Mainers experiencing poverty. The recent state funding from the previous budget strengthened markets for immigrant farmers, doubled WIC transactions, and helped onboard new locations, including our first BIPOC-owned store in Portland.

The state dollars are also used to leverage and secure federal grants that require a match; meaning every state dollar invested brings additional federal dollars into Maine's economy.

These programs have experienced instability for years due to changing circumstances with federal grant funding. In 2025, we face a funding gap of more than \$1.2 million. Statewide - we're seeing that food insecurity is only increasing. From 2022 to 2024, enrollment in SNAP has grown by 9%, to over 180,000 Mainers. Yet, the average benefit per person has shrunk by 31%. This shrinkage is even greater if you adjust for inflation. The average Mainer receiving SNAP gets less than \$6 a day - most of these folks are senior citizens and children.

Without sustained state support, these vital programs could shrink—reducing access to healthy food for over 15,000 low-income Mainers and jeopardizing economic opportunities for over 500 local farmers and food producers.

LD 210's appropriation to this fund is not just about numbers—it's about people. It's about Maine families who rely on SNAP to feed their children, seniors who stretch their fixed incomes at farmers' markets, and small farmers whose livelihoods depend on local food sales. By securing a permanent, ongoing, appropriation of \$600,000 million annually, we are creating a more resilient, accessible, and sustainable food system that works for all Mainers. LD 210 will create a new foundation for these programs, and we are working with Senator Ingwersen on a separate bill to increase the appropriation for this important program.

I urge you to support LD 210's appropriation to the FUND TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY/PROVIDE NUTRITION INCENTIVES and invest in a future where all Mainers—regardless of income—have access to fresh, local food. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Maine's families and farmers. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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