



Permanent Commission RACIAL, INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL POPULATIONS

LD 415 "An Act to Support Hunger Prevention in Maine"

March , 2025

Senator Talbot Ross , Representative Pluecker, and Honorable Members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee.

My name is Rae Sage, and I am the Policy Coordinator for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. The Permanent Commission's role is to examine racial disparities across all systems and advise Maine State Government on ways to improve the status and outcomes of historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations.

The Policy Committee of the Permanent Commission supports legislation that expands programs that increase access to food. LD415 increases funding for the Mainers Feeding Mainers (MFM) initiative, providing locally grown nutritious food to the historically marginalized communities most impacted by food insecurity, while also providing economic opportunities for the farmers of color that make up 23%¹ of the growers that partner with Good Shepard Food Bank in this impactful work.

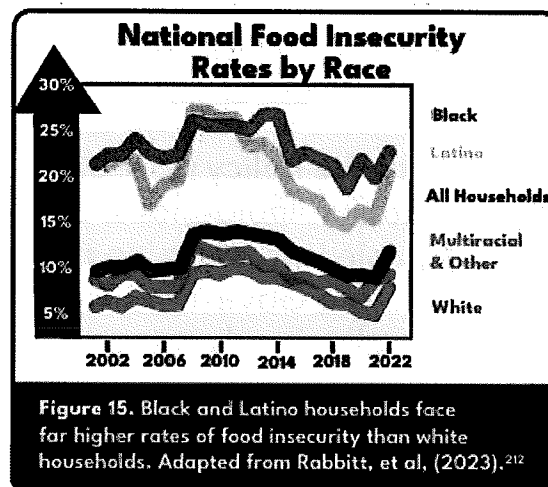
During the last grant period MFM committed to increasing the number of food producers they partnered with from traditionally underserved communities. This resulted in more than 50,000 lbs. of culturally relevant crops that were distributed directly from partner farms to community pantries who served racial populations.

In reference to disparities in food access, the Maine's Roadmap to End Hunger by 2030 report notes that food insecurity rates are higher in certain communities or among certain demographics, including African

¹ <https://www.gsfb.org/programs/mainers-feeding-mainers/>

immigrants at 51.6%, single-parent households at 42%, people with a disability that prevents them from working at 39%.²

The Permanent Commission's State of Racial Disparities Report also notes that food insecurity in households of color in Maine is 28%, many times the rate of food insecurity rate in white households (13%).³ These rates of food insecurity are particularly high among Maine's migrant farmworker populations, where national studies suggest food insecurity ranges from 37% to 64%.^{4 5 6}



As visible in these statistics, food insecurity impacts a broad range of communities in Maine leaving them vulnerable to many harms. LD415 not only strengthens communities economically by localizing what food is grown, sold, eaten, and shared- it also supports the creation of food systems that are more resilient in the face of disease outbreaks, supply-chain disruptions, and climate change. By increasing the ability of Maine communities to be responsive to food insecurity on the local level, we offer the flexibility necessary to ensure all who call Maine home may nourish themselves and their families.

² Myall, J. (2019). Issue Brief: Food Insecurity in Maine. Maine Center for Economic Policy. <https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/MECEP-Hunger-Issue-Brief-2019.pdf>

³ Myall, J. (2019). Issue Brief: Food Insecurity in Maine. Maine Center for Economic Policy. <https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/MECEP-Hunger-Issue-Brief-2019.pdf>

⁴ Mora, A. M., et al. (2022). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on California farmworkers' mental health and food security. *Journal of Agromedicine*. 27(3). 303-314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1059924X.2022.2058664>

⁵ Borre, K., Ertle, L. and Graff, M. (2010). Working to eat: Vulnerability, food insecurity, and obesity among migrant and seasonal farmworker families. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*. 53. 443-462.

⁶ Smith, J. & Cuesta, G. (2018). Hunger in the fields: Food insecurity and food access among farmworker families in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start. *Journal of Latinos and Education*. 19(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2018.1500291>