

**Testimony for the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture,
Conservation and Forestry in Support of LD 468 An Act to Address Food
Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food**

March 6, 2025

**MAINE
LOCAL
FOODS
ACCESS
NETWORK**

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Jimmy DeBiasi, and I represent the Maine Local Food Access Network (MLFAN), a coalition supporting food security, Maine farmers, and our local economy.

We strongly support **LD 468 An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food**, which will increase funding for nutrition incentive programs like Maine Harvest Bucks and Farm Fresh Rewards that help low-income families purchase fresh, local produce by providing bonus dollars or discounts when using SNAP benefits at local farmers markets, CSA's, farm stands, and retailers.

These programs:

- **Improve food security and health outcomes in addition to providing dignified access to food for Maine low-income families.**
- **Support over 500 small Maine farms, food producers, and locally owned retail stores.**
- **Strengthen Maine's economy—every \$1 in SNAP generates \$1.70 in local economic activity.**

Since 2021, these programs have generated \$3.5 million in food sales at 107 locations across all 16 counties. With state funding in 2024, our impact grew by 30%, benefiting over 5,000 new shoppers and expanding support for rural communities, immigrant farmers, and BIPOC-owned businesses.

However, funding instability threatens these critical programs. In 2025, we face a \$1.2 million funding gap, despite rising food insecurity. SNAP enrollment has increased by 9% since 2022, yet the average benefit per person has dropped by 31%, leaving many with less than \$6 per day for food—most of whom are seniors and children.

Without sustained state support, these programs could shrink, limiting access to fresh food for 15,000+ low-income Mainers and reducing economic opportunities for farmers. LD 468's proposed \$1.2M annual appropriation would provide long-term stability and help leverage additional federal funding.

This investment is about more than numbers—it's about **ensuring all Mainers, regardless of income, can access fresh, local food** while supporting our farmers and economy. I urge you to support LD 468 and invest in a stronger, more resilient food system for Maine.

This fund has deepened our Network's partnership with DACF in the past 2 years. We are grateful to be working with DACF staff to advance this work. We're also very pleased to see the Governor's continued support for this Fund, with the upcoming biennial budget establishing a new, ongoing appropriation at \$600k a year.

Thank you for your time and commitment.

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