



Henry L. Ingwersen
Senator, District 32

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony of Senator Henry Ingwersen in introducing LD 468, "*An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Foods*"
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
March 6, 2025

Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker, and Esteemed Members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee. I am Senator Henry Ingwersen, representing Senate District 32 - Biddeford, Arundel, Dayton, Hollis, and Lyman. I am before you today to introduce and give my support to LD 468, An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Foods.

This bill, if enacted, will provide \$1.2 million dollars per year in ongoing funding for an existing program within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry - the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives. This nutrition incentive program, provided with one-time state appropriations, gives low-income shoppers who use SNAP or EBT bonus bucks or a discount when they buy local produce from Maine farms. Nutrition incentive programs like Maine Harvest Bucks & Farm Fresh Rewards are an investment in public health & local economic resilience.

LD 486 will help these programs grow their impact - benefitting more farms and more people facing food insecurity. Secured, ongoing state funding, which is what this bill requests, is necessary for these programs to exist, grow, and continue.

Maine's Nutrition Incentive Programs are incredibly effective because the return on investment is multi-faceted:

1. Matching Funds from the Federal Government:

- LD 468 funds leverage federal dollars at 3:1. For every \$1 Maine invests, we're getting \$1-\$2 from the Federal Government in SNAP, and \$1-\$2 from a matching USDA grant.

2. Benefits to local economies: farmers and local food producers:

- These programs direct SNAP sales to local producers, where the money stays in our local economy.
- In 2024, state funding helped to expand Maine farmers and farmers' markets' food access impact by over 30%, reaching over 5,000 new shoppers.

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Proudly representing Senate District 32: Arundel, Biddeford, Dayton, Hollis, Lyman



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- Since 2021, there has been over \$3.5 million in additional sales at over 107 farmers' markets, farm stands, and small stores in all 16 counties.
- At some markets, 20-30% of farmer sales come from SNAP & Maine Harvest Bucks. Thus, this program is boosting farm viability and helping markets grow. When farmers' markets grow and add new vendors, they're supporting small business development in their communities.
- 25,000 Mainers have been fed by these programs, with over 95% reporting eating more fruits and vegetables.

3. Benefits to low-income Mainers:

- **Emergency Food Reliance** - Local surveys show that these programs reduce people's need for food pantries and the emergency food system.
- **Health** - Nationwide studies show that people who participate in nutrition incentive programs eat more fruits and vegetables than the average American. 70% of participants report learning to cook new food items.
- **Dignity** - 12%+ of Mainers use SNAP to buy food. When farmers' markets offer Maine Harvest Bucks, they're welcoming these families, seniors, people with disabilities, and other people facing disadvantages. These shoppers have the dignity to enjoy the farmers' markets and use their food budget there. This also helps foster community connection and fight isolation and loneliness that challenges many rural Maine communities.
- **Health Outcomes** - People with low incomes are more likely to experience diet-related, preventable illnesses. We're saving money and resources on downstream healthcare costs when people eat healthier diets. 90% of recipients report feeling healthier.

4. Climate Change Goals & Community Resiliency:

- LD 468 is an investment in community resilience in the face of climate change and economic uncertainty. Maine is at the end of the distribution chain for many big box grocers. Any disturbance in the global food economy will be felt harder here, as was demonstrated by the pandemic.
- Maine farmers' markets create local food access points in over 90 communities across Maine. These markets support the livelihoods of over 400 farms and food businesses and the thousands of Mainers they employ.
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- Farmers' markets are an important part of Maine's local food system. They help cultivate new farm & food businesses. Many farms rely on farmers' markets for the majority of their income.
- Maine's Climate Action Plan (Strategy D) aims for 30% local food being consumed in Maine by 2030. Ongoing funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives will help us to meet this goal.

As you can see from the many benefits, ongoing funding for this program is important: important for Maine farmers, food producers, and vendors; important for low-income Maine families and seniors; and important in helping to meet our Maine climate goals.

I am extremely grateful to the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry and Governor Mills for proposing \$ 600,000 per year in ongoing funding in the biennial budget to support the Maine Nutrition Incentive Programs. However, more is needed. In 2025, Maine's Nutrition Incentive Programs face a funding gap of more than \$1.2 million annually.

I hope you will join me in supporting LD 468. I'm happy to try to answer your questions, but there are folks coming after me that may be better qualified to do that.

Thank you.