



March 6, 2025

Senator Talbot-Ross, Representative Pluecker, and Honorable Members of the Agricultural, Conservation, and Forestry Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee and share my support for LD468.

My name is Sarah Shepro, I'm here today on behalf of Cultivating Community, a nonprofit food justice organization based in Southern Maine.

Our organization leads farmer training, land access, and market development programs all with the goal of increasing local food access. Since 2011, we have supported beginning farmers, the majority coming from new immigrant backgrounds, to build their own successful farm businesses through independent mobile stands that match SNAP and WIC benefits dollar for dollar. We have worked with farmers and Maine Local Food Action Network Partners to increase the use of nutrition incentives on local food purchases, benefitting both Maine farmers and community members who are working hard to make ends meet.

In 2024, the farmers we work with reached \$238,568 in sales, totaling roughly 53,232 pounds of culturally important local produce sold to low-income families. 98% of those purchases were made using SNAP and WIC. The number of SNAP and WIC sales for Cultivating Community-affiliated farm stands alone has increased by over \$60,000 since 2023, and we expect that number to continue to grow.

Every year, programs like ours struggle to find funding, leaving us scrambling to fill gaps. With cuts to other federally funded food programs, this proposed legislation would not only fill an essential need for fresh food and benefit the local economy, but it would also allow us to scale our program in partnership with the Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets so that more local farmers and SNAP and WIC recipients can benefit. All of which helps the state to keep it's Maine Won't Wait commitments.

This bill is necessary to continue building a more resilient, self-sustaining food system; one where local, small farms thrive, and all Mainers are not only fed but have a real choice in how they put food on the table.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sarah Shepro
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