



JANET T. MILLS  
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY  
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER  
22 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

AMANDA E. BEAL  
COMMISSIONER

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE,  
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST LD 468

*An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access  
Locally Produced Food*

March 6, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Craig Lapine, Director of the Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources. I am speaking on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF) neither for nor against LD 468, "*An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food.*"

Two years ago, the Department came before you in support of LD 568, the bill that established a \$600,000 appropriation to Maine's Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives. Since then, Governor Mills has proposed in her budget that this funding be made ongoing. LD 468 would double that ongoing funding to \$1.2 million annually.

We recognize the budget constraints facing the State of Maine's biennial budget and the budgetary realities facing many of our statewide partners. While we will not weigh in on funding levels, I can speak to the value of the type of incentive programs that both the Governor's initiative and LD 468 would support.

Programs exist both within private philanthropy and within the USDA that fund efforts to encourage people who use nutrition benefits like SNAP and WIC to spend their benefits on local foods. For over a dozen years, Maine organizations have been successful in leveraging these resources to create programs like Farm Fresh Rewards, which incentivizes purchases at retail outlets such as grocery stores, and Maine Harvest Bucks, which incentivizes purchases in direct-to-consumer settings like CSAs and farmers' markets. Currently state funds leverage \$560,000 in federal funding and \$300,000 in philanthropic funding. In 2024, together these programs generated over \$1.5 million in high-value sales for Maine farms,

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while efficiently utilizing existing market channels and infrastructure. Programs that encourage Maine SNAP recipients—who are overwhelmingly comprised of seniors, the disabled, and working families with children—to spend more of their benefits on healthy, local food have immense, positive impacts on our farms and our communities. These incentive programs are about maintaining and supporting programs that are textbook “win-win” situations for Maine people experiencing food insecurity and Maine farmers and food producers, two of the Department’s most important constituencies. We are supportive of the State partnering in these efforts.

In addition to the economic benefit to farmers and the health benefits for consumers, there is another important reason to support initiatives that increase the consumption of local produce. Strategy E.3 in Maine’s Climate Action Plan *Maine Won’t Wait* is “Increase the amount of food consumed in Maine from state food producers to 30 percent by 2030.” Right now, the overwhelming majority of food purchased with federal food benefits is not grown in Maine. In addition to its other positive impacts, we view the kinds of programs that would benefit from LD 468 as providing a boost to the state’s broader efforts to increase local food consumption, as well as enhance access to Maine-grown foods through various market channels, without requiring additional investment to fund overhead costs for storage or distribution of this food.

Thank you for your time. I would happily answer any questions now or at the work session.



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