

Testimony of Erin Donahue of Montville before the 132st Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Dear members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry.

My name is Erin Donahue, I am a resident of Montville, and I am here today as a farmer to express my support of LD 468 – An Act to Address Food Insecurity by Helping Maine Residents Access Locally Produced Food.

Our small scale vegetable and mushroom farm relies primarily on direct to consumer sales throughout the year. We sell our produce at the summer Portland Farmers' Market on Wednesday and Saturday at the Bangor Farmers' Market year round. We see first hand the positive ripples of food access programs like SNAP and Maine Harvest Bucks at the markets every week.

At the Bangor Farmers' Market we have a steady stream of new customers to the market, thanks to programs like SNAP and MHB. This helps bolster market traffic, broaden community engagement, increase market sales, and most importantly- put fresh Maine grown food into the hands of people who wouldn't otherwise been able to afford it. When chatting with customers new to the market there is often a tone of excitement and confidence when they have MHB to spend. The Bangor Farmers Market redeemed over \$20,000 in Maine Harvest Bucks in 2024. That money fed Mainers and paid Maine farmers. As farmers we try to sell our products for reasonable prices, but the reality is that many of us are farming in poverty. I know many farmers who rely on SNAP and WIC to feed themselves and their families. I have personally used the SNAP program when not able to afford to feed myself. These food access programs feed the people who need assistance the most and the Maine Harvest Bucks program ensures that money is spent with local producers and farmers. Continuous funding of \$1.2 million a year for these programs would ensure their stability and allow markets and organizations like MFFM to expand without uncertainty.