



# **Permanent Commission RACIAL, INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL POPULATIONS**

## **LD 124 “An Act to Protect the Right to Food”**

**February 11, 2025**

Senator Talbot Ross , Representative Pluecker, and Honorable Members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee.

My name is Rae Sage, and I am the Policy Coordinator for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. The Permanent Commission’s role is to examine racial disparities across all systems and advise Maine State Government on ways to improve the status and outcomes of historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations.

The Policy Committee of the Permanent Commission supports legislation that advances food sovereignty as it impacts not only historically marginalized communities but our collective ability to address food insecurity as a state by cultivating local food systems less susceptible to external fluctuations. In this, a time of uncertainty in terms of federal funding and ever rising national food prices, it is imperative we broaden the scope of what we can do to assist those already feeling the weight of compounding systemic disparities.

The rate of food insecurity in households of color in Maine is 28%, and in Black households is 40%<sup>1</sup>, both many times the rate of food insecurity rate in white households (13%).<sup>2</sup> These rates of food insecurity are particularly high among Maine’s migrant farmworker populations, where national

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<sup>1</sup> Graham, G. (2021, March 28). Pandemic reveals race disparities around hunger in Maine. Portland Press Herald. <https://www.pressherald.com/2021/03/28/pandemic-reveals-r>

<sup>2</sup> Myall, J. (2019). Issue Brief: Food Insecurity in Maine. Maine Center for Economic Policy. <https://www.mecp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/MECEP-Hunger-Issue-Brief-2019.pdf>

studies suggest food insecurity ranges from 37% to 64%.<sup>3 4 5</sup> These disparities are rooted in multiple factors including land access, job access, and availability of culturally appropriated foods. By centering our collective right to food, LD124 addresses these factors and offers expansive and sustainable solutions.

Emphasis on defining, advancing, and implementing food sovereignty principles provides an avenue to produce food outside of corporate and federally controlled U.S food systems. In my work supporting farmers of color through MOFGA's affinity space programming, the desire to divest from traditional industrial large-scale farming ventures in favor of food projects rooted in community, mutual aid, local sustainability, and the right relationship with land is a common and constant sentiment. This is not simply about increasing our local autonomy over what food we grow, eat, and share - it is also about creating food systems that are resilient in the face of disease outbreaks, supply-chain disruptions, and climate change. By increasing the ability of Maine communities to be responsive to food insecurity on the local level, we offer the flexibility necessary to ensure all who call Maine home may nourish themselves and their families.

Ending hunger in Maine will require a dynamic and ecologically sensitive multifaceted approach. It will require policy change that not only expands and sustains the availability and accessibility of food assistance programs-but empowers communities throughout the state to build and maintain their own locally sustainable food systems. Communities are most vulnerable to systemic forms of oppression when they are solely reliant on the same systems perpetuating the harm. In this way, advancing food sovereignty strikes at the heart of combating systemic racism.

For more information on how food insecurity impacts racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations in Maine please see the Permanent Commission's [State of Racial Disparities Report](#) available on our website and in print.

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<sup>3</sup> Mora, A. M., et al. (2022). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on California farmworkers' mental health and food security. *Journal of Agromedicine*. 27(3). 303-314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1059924X.2022.2058664>

<sup>4</sup> Borre, K., Ertle, L. and Graff, M. (2010). Working to eat: Vulnerability, food insecurity, and obesity among migrant and seasonal farmworker families. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*. 53. 443-462.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, J. & Cuesta, G. (2018). Hunger in the fields: Food insecurity and food access among farmworker families in Migrant and Seasonal Head Start. *Journal of Latinos and Education*. 19(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2018.1500291>