

February 11 2025, LD 124 An Act to Protect the Right to Food

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, my name is Jean Koons and I am owner and operator with my husband, Peter, of Kennebec Cheesery, a goat dairy farm in Sidney, licensed in 2008. I am also the current president of the Maine Cheese Guild which was formed in 2003.

The Guild's Quality statement-published in 2009- which is a fundamental tenant of our group states:

*"The Maine Cheese Guild believes that cheese of the highest quality can only be made with a thorough and regularly refreshed knowledge of food safety".*

Without testing and licensing there can be no confidence in food safety and no recall procedure when inevitable threats of contamination occur. (And they do occur!)

For \$35/year, our dairy inspectors test our water and our products and consult and advise if a problem arises. We appreciate having someone with professional expertise looking over our operations.

I have testified to this committee whenever an expansion of Food Sovereignty bills has been proposed because the farmers and cheese makers that constitute the Guild see removal of inspection as a real threat to our industry. To us, Food Sovereignty is basically the removal of all safety regulations and oversight of dairy products, leading to the sale of unlicensed foods and we are therefore concerned that the public trust in local food that we have worked so hard for over the past 20 years can be destroyed and our expanding industry severely damaged.

We wish that dairy products had been excluded from the first Food Sovereignty law, LD 725 passed in 2017 just as Meat and Poultry were removed.

LD 124 is a shortened version of LD 1823 which the Guild testified against in 2023 and 2024.

Why does Maine need an expansion of Food Sovereignty? Who carries the liability of a food-borne illness? Are the Home Kitchen required regulations (which are minimal), not applicable in a Food Sovereignty "kitchen"?

We request the committee vote "Ought not to Pass" on LD 124, or any other expansion of food sovereignty related bills, until the issue of food safety is fully addressed to ensure an even playing field for all food producers in Maine.

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