



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative Arthur Mingo

L.D. 1386, "An Act to Provide Emergency One-Time Relief from the Wild Blueberry Tax for Sellers in Maine and Partial Relief for Processors and Shippers" *Before the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation*

April 23, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier, and distinguished members of the Committee on Taxation. My name is Arthur Mingo and I have the honor of representing House District 9, nine beautiful communities in Eastern Washington County.

I am here in support of LD 1386, "**An Act to Provide Emergency One-Time Relief from the Wild Blueberry Tax for Sellers in Maine and Partial Relief for Processors and Shippers**".

This Act could bring relief and financial assistance for many blueberry growers in the state.

I stand before you today as a long time blueberry grower. As we continue to seek long-term solutions to the growing challenges of farm profitability and the continued challenges of the economic conditions facing wild blueberry growers today.

Let's break down the field prices of berries for the past 40+ years.

In 1980, my first crop, at the age of 16, the field price was \$0.37. The cost per acre of growing blueberries was just a fraction of what it is today, and at \$0.37, I was able to buy needed equipment to expand my operation.

In 1989, I received a field price of \$0.40 for my crop. At \$0.40, again with the cost of growing an acre a fraction of today, I continued to increase my acreage and equipment.

We move to 2022, the field price of wild blueberries jumps to \$0.76. Your first thought is, that is a nice increase for a profitable year. When you consider the cost of input to grow an acre now compared to 1997 the margins can be small. Some cultural practices have seen an increase of 200% in the last 30 years and labor increase of 28% just from 2020 to 2023.

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Now let's move to 2023. The average field price drops to \$0.35 to many growers. When the price drops, nothing drops with it. The cost per acre continues to increase. In 2024 the field price increases to \$0.46. If you do not increase your yield, your profit margin continues to decrease.

As I read Title 36 and the explanation of the purpose of it, my first thought is how well it is written. What it does not take into account is the number of blueberry growers that have disappeared. I would like to think the smaller grower still has an important role in the blueberry industry, but you drive around Washington County and you will drive past abandoned blueberry fields. A report that came out in 2023 said that Maine has seen a reduction in harvested acres from 250,000 acres to just over 46,000.

For many growers, eliminating the blueberry tax could simply mean helping pay their property tax.

The work the Blueberry Commission and the work the Universities do for continuing research and marketing is important, but without the farmers, the wild blueberry industry will not be the fruit commodity it once was.

Please consider supporting LD 1386.

I would be happy to answer any questions.

Arthur Mingo
State Representative

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