



TESTIMONY 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

Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier, and honorable members of the Committee on Taxation:

I'm Julie Ann Smith, the Executive Director of the Maine Farmers Coalition. We are a dedicated group of progressive farmers, focused on promoting sustainable growth and safeguarding the future of Maine's vital farming industry. Our mission is to ensure that our agricultural practices not only thrive but also protect the rich resources and heritage of our beautiful state.

Maine farmers have faced relentless hardships for years, placing our wild blueberry industry on the brink of extinction. Despite the dedication and hard work of our growers to boost harvests and cut production costs, the price for the 2023 crop has plummeted alarmingly.

When we compare the figures from 2023 to 2021, we see that although more acres were harvested this year, total wild blueberry production has actually declined. This unfortunate trend has resulted in a staggering 30% drop in the prices paid to growers. Sadly, preliminary indicators suggest that the situation for 2024 may be even more dire.

With input costs skyrocketing—covering everything from fertilizer to crop protectants and labor—many growers feel they have no choice but to declare 2024 their final year in production after enduring years of significant financial losses.

It is crucial that we unite now to protect this invaluable part of our heritage and culture. Enacting LD 1386 is one solution that will ensure the survival of our wild blueberry industry and support the livelihoods of those who proudly cultivate this exceptional fruit.

Maine proudly stands as the only state in the nation that commercially produces wild blueberries. However, if our growers continue to suffer devastating financial losses, we



risk losing this vital industry to Canada, which may become the exclusive source of commercially available wild blueberries. LD 1386 is a crucial and urgent step toward helping our wild blueberry growers recover from substantial financial setbacks and invest in the future of their crops. By temporarily eliminating the taxes paid on crops that returned no income, this initiative offers essential relief.

Just as the dairy industry has benefited from financial support and stabilization programs in Maine, it is imperative that we take action to safeguard our wild blueberry industry. We earnestly appeal to the committee to support this one-time tax relief for Maine's wild blueberry growers. This support will not only aid in their recovery but also ensure the sustainability of a cornerstone of our state's agricultural heritage.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important opportunity for Maine. I would be happy to answer any questions.

