

Good afternoon, members of the Committee,

My name is Wayne E. Hanscom, and I'm 76 years old. I'm the owner of Welch Farm in Roque Bluffs, and I've been a wild blueberry grower my entire life.

As a young boy, I followed my grandfather, Frank, through the fields, learning at his heels. When he passed away, I was just 16 years old. There was no one else to take over, so I stepped in—not because I knew everything, but because I knew it mattered. It mattered to my family, to our land, and to our community.

Over the past seven decades, I've seen it all—good seasons and hard ones. Years with too much rain, not enough bees, or prices so low we could barely make ends meet. But I've stayed with it, because this land is a part of me. And wild blueberries—they're a part of what makes Maine truly special.

That's why I'm speaking up today. There's been talk of eliminating the growers' portion of the wild blueberry tax, even if only for one year. I believe that would be a serious mistake—especially for small growers like myself, and for the next generation coming up behind us.

This tax doesn't disappear into some distant office—it works right here at home. It funds the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine, which supports all of us. It supports research to help us manage pests, adapt to climate change, and keep our yields strong. It funds marketing efforts that set us apart from the rest of the world—reminding buyers that wild Maine blueberries aren't just any berries. They're unique, flavorful, and native to this land.

And maybe most importantly—it ensures that small and mid-size growers have a voice. When we contribute, we stay at the table. We help guide the future of this industry. Without that grower contribution, that voice weakens. The balance shifts. And those who've worked these wild blueberry fields for generations—along with those just starting out—risk being left behind.

I've seen this industry evolve, and I've weathered the changes. But I want the next generation to do more than just survive. I want them to thrive. I want them to carry on a tradition that's been alive in my family for over a century.

So, I respectfully ask you: *Don't remove the growers' portion of the wild blueberry tax.* Don't take away a tool that helps keep us strong. We're not asking for a handout—we're asking to keep contributing. To stay invested. To keep this land, and this way of life, going strong.

Thank you for your time and for listening—from a grower who's spent a lifetime in the fields, and who still believes in the future of Maine wild blueberries.

Sincerely,

Wayne E. Hanscom

Wild Blueberry Grower

Welch Farm, Roque Bluffs