



Testimony for the Record

*LD 1605: An Act to Support Farmers and Food Banks Affected by Federal Funding Cuts to Their Existing Contracts*

**Submitted by the Maine Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics  
to the  
Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry  
April 24, 2025**

Chairman Representative Bill Pluecker, Ranking member Representative Timothy Guerrette, and the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, thank you for your attention to this topic of critical importance to the citizens of Maine.

We are the Maine Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (MAND), a state affiliate of the nation's largest organization of credentialed nutrition professionals, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Our membership consists of over 260 dietetic professionals across the state of Maine.

Registered dietitians are the leading experts in food and nutrition, recognizing the profound influence of diet on all areas of life. Our operating principles include the belief that every Maine citizen has the right to a healthy future and to that end, we strive to improve the nutritional health and well-being of our citizens.

**We support the passage of LD 1605 “An Act to Support Farmers and Food Banks Affected by Federal Funding Cuts to Their Existing Contracts.” This legislation provides interest-free loans to help increase food security in Maine, supporting those impacted by recent federal funding cuts and changes to contracts and programs.**

Despite having lawful, signed contracts, farmers and organizations that serve farmers have recently had federal payments frozen and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) contracts canceled. The negative effect of these cuts and cancellations is reverberating through the state, not only placing Maine farm operations, local food programs and Maine citizen food security in jeopardy, but impacting the Maine economy and state agriculture supply chain as well. Our state already experiences the highest percentage of food insecure households among the New England states, according to USDA figures. Simply put, it's not a question of *if* our fellow citizens will suffer from the recent funding cuts and program cancellations, it's a matter of *when*—and to what degree.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/interactive-charts-and-highlights/trends>



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**Food Insecurity in Maine**

In 2023, the USDA found that nearly 11% of Maine's households fell into the "low food security" and "very low food security" categories. And according to Feeding America, the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization, in 2022 there were 179,680 Mainers living with food insecurity.<sup>2</sup> That's about 1 in 8 people going hungry in our state (and 1 in 5 children). With increased food costs since then, the situation is likely more dire now.

What exactly is a *food insecure household*?<sup>3</sup> According to the USDA, it's a household that is "uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, at some time during the year, enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they had insufficient money or other resources for food." Households with *very low food security* experience food insecurity "to the extent that normal eating patterns of some household members are disrupted at times during the year, with self-reported food intake below levels considered adequate," according to the USDA. According to Feeding America, 100% of US counties have food insecurity, and hungry citizens are found in every congressional district.<sup>4</sup> These federal funding cuts and discontinued contracts affect the most vulnerable of Maine citizens – the people who rely on food banks to feed themselves and their families.

**Cancelled Food Programs Impact Maine Food Security**

The Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) Cooperative Agreements and the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program (LFS) extension have both been cancelled. The LFPA program provided funding to purchase locally and regionally sourced foods to maintain and improve agricultural supply chain resiliency. Food purchased through this program supported feeding programs, including food banks. The LFS provided funds to support the purchase of local food for schools and childcare facilities. Without these programs, fewer healthy, locally-grown foods will land on the plates of Maine's hungry residents.

**Economic Impact of LFPA and LFS Program Cancellations**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2022/overall/maine>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/interactive-charts-and-highlights#trends>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america>



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According to the Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine, our state will lose \$1.25 million in funding over the next three years due to the cancellation of LFPA alone.<sup>5</sup> Aside from the loss of direct funding for the LFPA and LFS programs, both programs were considered “multipliers,” so that every dollar of federal funding generated additional economic activity.<sup>6</sup> Both programs supported the Maine economy, our farmers, and crucial food and nutrition security initiatives here in Maine.

What will be the cost to Mainers if farmers and producers don't have access to these funds? And when demand falls for products that must be sold at higher costs due to the lack of market support, how will producers stay in business? In addition to decreases in the consumption of local, healthful foods, obtaining foods to support a healthy diet will ultimately cost more for households—disproportionately impacting nutrition-insecure households. For example, Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap calculator estimates the cost per meal in each state, along with the estimated food budget shortfalls, *defined as “the additional dollar amounts that food-insecure individuals report needing, on average, to purchase just enough food to meet their needs.”* The estimated cost per meal in Maine in 2022 was \$4.19 (higher than the national average of \$3.99), with an estimated food budget shortfall among the food insecure population in Maine of \$141,588,000 annually.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Food Insecurity Impacts Diet Quality, Quality of Life and Chronic Disease**

Food insecurity is associated with numerous adverse health effects including a greater likelihood of chronic medical conditions, psychological distress, underuse of medications and health care due to costs, and poor disease management.<sup>8</sup> Household budget constraints can directly harm health, and clearly can erode quality of life, too. Overall, the many effects of food insecurity are additive to the effects of low income alone.

- **Diet Quality is Damaged by Food Insecurity**
  - Decreases in diet quality are seen across all levels of food insecurity, and is associated with a less nutrient-dense diet overall.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gsfb.org/blog/2025/03/12/good-shepherd-food-bank-responds-to-federal-food-assistance-reductions/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/usda-programs-freeze-what-we-know/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://map.feedingamerica.org/country/2022/overall/maine>

<sup>8</sup> <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2022.306724>

<sup>9</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10897580/>



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- Lower intakes of calcium, magnesium, zinc, vitamins A and B6 are associated with food insecurity.
- Differences in diet quality among food insecure individuals is reflected in lower intakes of fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy products, meats, legumes and nuts, along with higher intakes of processed meats. seems to impact their intake of vegetables, fruits, and animal proteins the most, resulting in a less nutrient-dense diet<sup>10</sup>
- Parents in food-insecure households reduce their food portions and skip meals in order to help ensure their children have food to eat. They rely on food banks and free school meals to make up for food budget shortfalls. <sup>11</sup>
- According to an American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement, children and teens experiencing food insecurity are more likely to have iron deficiency, and children ages 3 and younger who live in food-insecure households have more hospitalizations and overall poorer health than those who live in food-secure households.<sup>12</sup>
- Chronic Disease and its Complications Are Augmented by Food Insecurity
  - There is strong evidence that food insecurity is associated with chronic diseases including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer, as well as obesity.<sup>1314</sup>
  - In fact, food insecurity is more strongly associated with chronic disease than income. <sup>15</sup>
  - Having to choose between food and medications or medical treatment can lead to serious complications for people with chronic diseases. For example, for food-insecure adults living with diabetes, the choice between buying food or controlling the disease may even lead to increased risks for kidney disease, eye disease, and nerve damage.
  - Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is still the number one chronic disease killer globally. Research shows that there is a “compelling association between each level of reduced food security and CVD risk.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup>

<https://jhp.bmedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s41043-024-00533-3#:~:text=Conclusions-,Overall%2C%20this%20study%20showed%20that%20food%20insecurity%20was%20associated%20with%20higher%20consumption%20of%20processed%20meats.>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0195666324000059?via%3DiHub>

<sup>12</sup> <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/136/5/e1431/33896/Promoting-Food-Security-for-All-Children?autologincheck=redirected>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/CIR.0000000000001072>

<sup>14</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38545669/>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.ajogmfm.org/article/S2589-9333\(21\)00073-2/fulltext](https://www.ajogmfm.org/article/S2589-9333(21)00073-2/fulltext)

<sup>16</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8000689/>



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- Quality of Life is Compromised by Food Insecurity
  - Among children of all ages, food insecurity is linked with lower cognitive indicators, dysregulated behavior and emotional stress.<sup>17</sup>
  - Not having enough food is a source of worry, shame and fear for children and teens.<sup>18</sup>
  - Food insecurity can be a source of chronic stress, and have adverse effects on mental health.<sup>19</sup>

**Closing Statement**

In conclusion, we urge you to support the Maine economy and antihunger measures impacted by Federal funding cuts and changes to contracts and programs by supporting LD 1605. We agree that a Food System Protection Program is needed to continue to reduce hunger and increase food security as the federal funding landscape continues to shift.

Thank you.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/136/5/e1431/33896/Promoting-Food-Security-for-All-Children?autologincheck=redirected>

<sup>18</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15987850/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28903785/>