

LD 2094 An Act to Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue to Support Maine's Agricultural and Forestry Sectors

Testimony in Favor Seth Kroeck, Brunswick

Good afternoon honorable members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, attending representatives and staff.

My name is Seth Kroeck and I have been a full time farmer in Brunswick for the last 22 years. I manage more than 100 acres of crop land and produce somewhere just shy of 200,000 lbs combined of wild blueberries, vegetables and grain during an average season. My wife Maura and I have raised a family here combining income from the farm with her work in a local school, which secures us health coverage.

Agriculture is a high risk/low margin business. Crops sold this year began as expenses more than two years ago. Soil amendments, sowing green manure crops, burning and mulching blueberries, putting fuel in the tractors and meeting payroll all cost hundreds (or sometimes thousands) of dollars per acre long before any invoice is sent. The constant unknowns of weather, disease and pests have been amplified the past 5 years by wild swings in fuel prices, double digit increases in input costs and scarce or unavailable production materials. At the end of most years there is little left for improvements, new equipment or the hiring of additional high skilled employees all of which are the drivers of efficiency, profitability and ultimately our ability to grow more food in Maine for Mainers.

Over the years we have looked to borrowing to help with improvements and have had loans with commercial lenders, non-profits and the Farm Service Agency. Banks look at specialized equipment that harvest brussels sprouts or packing lines for grading carrots by size and question their value as collateral. Non-profits have simplified the application process but the lending rate offered is not much better than the commercial sector. Our application with the FSA took more than 2 months to complete and the interest rate, while better than the other 2 options was still more than a percentage point higher than our profit margin for the year.

LD2094 represents a commitment from the state to build up our native industries, allowing them to make shovel ready improvements. This bond supports those of us that have chosen to raise crops, dairy and timber for our communities. Working farms are forests are the backbone of this state. Please support this bond effort and protect the future of Maine food and forests.