

# Brodis *Wild* Blueberries

January 20, 2026

Senator Torundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Ron Howard and I represent our family from Brodis Wild Blueberries in Hope Maine.

I am testifying in support of LD 2094 and not so much for what I think it can do for our nine generation family farm, but for what it can do for others. In 2016 my father-in-law passed away and Brodis Blueberries for a number of years, like all wild blueberry growers, were paid prices by the wholesale processors that did not meet our cost to grow and harvest. 99% of the Maine wild blueberries grown enter this market and increasingly we were losing growers and land as it became not feasible to continue.

Our Brodis family realized that selling house lots on our 800 acre property in midcoast Maine had by far and away the highest value economic decision but our family history and the iconic heritage of wild blueberries in Maine led to our decision to push on. We invested in a new structure and established a packing operation allowing us to sell fresh and frozen wild blueberries along with other value added goods but we quickly ran out of space to do more and had no more resources to invest.

About that time the Agricultural Infrastructure Investment Plan or AIIP was offered to all Maine Farmers. Over 850 farmers like us applied but there were only funds for 64 farms. Fortunately for us, we were one of them and it without question not only saved our farm but more importantly helped us develop options that could save many more wild blueberry farms.

With the AIIP funds we expanded our facility and added equipment that in some cases were game changing for our industry. Prior to AIIP all the berries we picked for fresh sales had to be hand raked due to the damage to the berry machine harvesters would make but we were able to purchase a new DH harvester that replaced the very labor intensive hand raking.

With the AIIP funds we were the first grower to ever utilize an Optical Sorter in our packing line which allowed us to quadruple the volumes we could inspect and pack allowing us to enter markets for the first time providing retailers like Hannafords with our wild blueberries.

I am working with an economic consultant to document how other wild blueberry growers like us can turn their businesses around. While I have a broker able to distribute significantly more fresh wild blueberries throughout New England and beyond, a group of us are working to have a market survey done to fully quantify volumes that could be distributed. The final missing piece will be to determine where growers will be able to access capital to make the necessary investments in their family farms.

Growers of our iconic Maine Wild Blueberries are quite possibly struggling more than any other Maine agricultural commodity but there is a clear path for them to turn that around if you support passing LD 2094 and help preserve as many of them as possible, just like you did for Brodis Wild Blueberries.