

March 24, 2021

To the Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (ACF) Committee;

I am writing to express my strong support for LD 691 - An Act to Support Farms and Address Food Insecurity, as well as my support for the request that this bill be held over to the 2022 Legislative Session. I work with the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) where I coordinate our work supporting a group of farmers who offer nutrition incentives through the Maine Harvest Bucks (MHB) Program.

I work with a group of 15 farmers around the state who offer Maine Harvest Bucks to customers who are experiencing food insecurity and receive SNAP/EBT benefits. These farmers have established Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, meaning that they provide regular "shares" of fresh, locally grown produce to a group of committed customers throughout the growing season. Through the Maine Harvest Bucks program, SNAP recipients receive a half-priced CSA share (weekly food box) containing a variety of fruits and vegetables. (Nutrition incentive funding pays participating farmers 50% of the value of each CSA share.) This program makes high quality, healthy, and locally grown food accessible to participating Mainers.

This program supports low income consumers *and* local farmers striving to sustain viable farms in rural Maine, thereby contributing to economic development as well as playing a role in addressing the immediate need for food of many of our neighbors. Over the last year, we have nearly doubled the nutrition incentives distributed through this program and have had 5 new farms get set up to participate. Participating farms can be found in many of Maine's 16 counties, from Hancock to Penobscot to York.

Many SNAP customers deeply appreciate the opportunity to participate in a CSA, as is made clear by emails such as this one that a participating farmer (who offers a fall & winter CSA share) received this winter: "The veggies have really been a bright spot in my winter, and I've enjoyed some that I otherwise never would have tried (parsnips and turnips come to mind, along with the funky-looking squash that was so delicious). Thanks for making it possible for an EBT card user like me to enjoy fresh produce."

We believe a state fund is important because our current federal funding requires non-federal matching funds on a dollar-for-dollar basis. This means that as we strive to increase the number of participants in our programs each year, our need for non-federal funding sources continues to grow. We know that there are many more families in Maine who cannot access enough to eat - and that access to fresh, healthy food is particularly acute. We also feel confident that there is more interest among farmers and potential to expand to other parts of the state. A state fund would enable this program to expand its impact in the coming years.

We also support the request to hold the bill over to the 2022 Legislative session, in recognition this has been a tumultuous year and perhaps there will be favorable conditions for a state appropriation in 2022. The possibility of pursuing another private matching contribution (similar

to a \$100,000 matching contribution that was secured pre-COVID) is another factor motivating this request.

Thank you for your work and for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Hillary Barter
Educational Programs Coordinator, MOFGA