

Marybeth Stocking
LEBANON

Hello,

My name is Marybeth Stocking, and I co-own Two Toad Farm in Lebanon, Maine, a small diversified vegetable and livestock operation. We are in our 13th year of farming full-time, and sell our products at several local farmers' markets, restaurants, and have an annual 60 family Community Supported Agriculture Share program.

I am writing to express my support for the proposed LD 574. The Food Sovereignty Ordinance we passed in Lebanon has helped springboard the creation and expansion of my dairy business. I was able to build a small herd of miniature Jersey cows (a great move as an organic farmer, creating a fertility source to benefit our soils) and get my feet wet in the dairy business. We have sixty families picking up vegetables at our farm every week, and I started selling yogurts and cheeses on Mondays to our members over the last two years. I learned how to manage cows, make cheese, and market it while building a small but loyal clientele. I also learned that it was something I enjoyed and wanted to pursue further. This year, I am leasing a dairy farm which includes a licensable dairy operation (milk rooms, parlors, and cheese making facility) and have had my first successful dairy inspection and milk samples taken. I will be licensed by the end of the month when my flock (now grown to include 30 dairy sheep) is tested. I would never have been able to afford to invest the kind of money or commit to this lease without trying the business first, and building a clientele in the process. It would have felt far too risky. LD 574 could give this opportunity to other new, small food businesses and producers. It could be extremely instrumental in supporting small businesses in our community, reviving our Main Streets, and building healthy and resilient communities. I am also the manager of the Sanford Farmers' Market in Sanford, ME. We are in our 12th year as a market. Every year I turn away several potential new vendors who lack proper licenses, mostly bakers and canned good producers, who aren't ready to commit to building the commercial kitchens necessary for licensing. Many want to try baking or canning as a career change, but can't afford to invest in the necessary infrastructure because they aren't sure if they can be successful, or content, in doing so. Farmers also approach me about canning and selling their surplus produce, but also can't afford a commercial kitchen either. They want to be able to preserve when necessary, part-time. I believe we should give these small businesses and farmers a chance to test the waters and build a business, and support these efforts by allowing and encouraging them to sell their products wherever they can. Farmers' markets are a great place to do so.

We all want to support our small businesses and local farmers. This piece of legislation, LD 574, does both.

Thank you for your time.

Kindly,

Marybeth Stocking
Two Toad Farm
Sanford Farmers' Market