



Maine Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee

Testimony for LD 1565

May 4, 2021

Dear Chairs and Members of the Ag, Conservation and Forestry Committee,

I am writing to submit testimony in favor of LD 1565, *An Act to Strengthen Maine's Agriculture, Food and Forest Economy*.

For the past several years, I have worked as project director for the Maine Food Strategy initiative which has sought to encourage the many diverse groups interested in developing Maine agriculture to identify shared priority areas where energy, expertise and resources can be coordinated across organizations to maximize impact. We work with similar initiatives in all the other New England states. Those initiatives with state leadership (where state government is engaged in setting priorities or getting behind a priority setting process), have had the most measurable impacts in terms of economic development. Examples include Vermont Farm to Plate and the Massachusetts Food Collaborative. LD 1565 directs the state to play this type of leadership role and we believe will support overall economic development in the food economy as a result.

Importantly, this legislation will also prepare Maine for discussions developing at the regional and national level. The importance of local and regional food supply chains to food security has been highlighted through the experiences of the pandemic this past year. Within the New England region and nationally, we are seeing increased interest in policies and investments aimed at building shorter food supply chains. This past year has also focused attention on historical and ongoing prejudice and discrimination in many areas, including agriculture and the food economy. By creating a diverse advisory board and prioritizing investments in underserved communities, this legislation is timely in its goal of ensuring that all types of businesses in Maine have access to resources, including those in low income and rural areas.

Today we learned of federal funding coming to state health departments that may support community food supply planning. By directing a process that sets investment and policy priorities informed by other departments in addition to DACF, LD 1565 prepares Maine to maximize its own resources and its ability to leverage other federal investments and opportunities that can benefit our farms and food businesses.

This bill at this moment in time presents a unique opportunity. LD 1565 invests in a part of the Maine economy that can benefit diverse communities; it will strengthen an economic sector identified in numerous past reports and strategies for its growth potential; it supports Maine's food businesses to get a toehold in a system dominated by global companies; and it will help fortify food supply chains to ensure Maine's food security.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

Tanya Swain, Project Director, Maine Food Strategy
(207) 592-4369 / tswain@mainefoodstrategy.org