



# *Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association*

## *Common Ground Country Fair*

MOFGA Testimony In Support Of  
LD 174 - An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the  
Ending Hunger by 2030 Advisory Group  
January 18, 2022

Good morning Senator Dill, Representative O'Neil and members of the Committee On Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Heather Spalding and I am the deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). MOFGA supports LD 174 – An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Ending Hunger by 2030 Advisory Group.

MOFGA is creating a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us. Through education, training and advocacy, we are helping farmers thrive, making more local, organic food available and building sustainable communities. We envision a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture. This is vision of an agriculture that generates the vast majority of the state's food supply with locally, organically grown produce. Our vision relates directly to the report, [\*Everyone at the Table: Maine's Plan to End Hunger by 2030\*](#).

In order to achieve a goal of healthy food access for all, Maine needs to ensure that policy incentives, and some safety nets, are in place at local, county, state, federal, and increasingly, international levels. One successful incentive initiative that we have provided administrative support for is the Maine Harvest Bucks program, which helps people on SNAP/EBT benefits double their purchasing power for fresh, local foods, while ensuring that farmers earn a fair price for their produce.

It is shocking that one in eight Mainers and one in five of our precious Maine children lives with food insecurity and we appreciate that we now have a roadmap to create opportunities for all of us to collaborate and ensure that all Maine people have the fresh, healthful food they want and need to live productive lives while supporting Maine's agricultural economy. We appreciate the report's emphasis on ensuring that the state maximizes the use of federal nutrition programs, and we feel fortunate that we have a congressional delegation that cares deeply about Maine's food and agriculture system. We also appreciate that the report stresses the need for addressing "economic and cultural conditions" that sometimes trap people in poverty. There is no shortage of food. We need to make it possible for everyone to get enough to eat.

We appreciate that this report highlights the need to address structural racism as an underlying force for the experience of food insecurity that "Black, indigenous, and people of color in Maine are experiencing at a rate two to nearly four times higher than the state average."

Food insecurity is a drag on Maine's economy and this report will help address that challenge. Food insecurity costs Maine \$709 million annually which is far more than the appropriated funding of more than \$364 million each year for food and private relief for those who are hungry.

The report affirms that hunger is a symptom of poverty and lays out that the key drivers of food insecurity are economic insecurity, education, health access, homeownership and involvement with the criminal justice system. It is wonderful that so many state advocacy organizations and professionals across the spectrum of Maine's state government are highly engaged in addressing food hunger in Maine. The collaboration is absolutely wonderful and MOFGA is glad to be part of that effort. Investing in Maine's food system and working across economic, academic and government sectors we can identify and create a local food system that is not only safe, abundant and accessible, but also allows farmers to meet the demand for local foods.

We thank all members of this committee for your work to create a healthy and vibrant Maine agriculture. We thank Representative Bill Pluecker for his sponsorship of this bill and for all the work that he and his family do to address food security in Maine, not just by providing calories but by growing and distributing healthy, organic food to people most in need. We thank DACF Commissioner Amanda Beal and her special assistant Craig Lapine for their vision and their informed input, for shepherding the details of this report and for juggling the logistics of producing it. We also commend Senator Craig Hickman for his vision and determination to raise awareness about the hunger in Maine through his continuing efforts in the Legislature and, most recently, his work to amend Maine's Constitution guaranteeing citizens a right to food.

MOFGA looks forward to more discussions and creative solutions to these critical challenges. Thank you for your consideration.

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*The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) started in 1971 and is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. We're a broad-based community that educates about and advocates for organic agriculture, illuminating its interdependence with a healthy environment, local food production, and thriving communities. We have 11,000 members, we certify more than 500 organic farms and processing facilities representing \$90 million in sales, and we are working hard to provide training and create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum.*