

Noami Brautigam
Second Frost Farm
LD 568

Testimony of Noami Brautigam of Monroe before the 131st Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

Good afternoon members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry.

My name is Noami Brautigam, I am a resident of Monroe, and I am writing you today as both a farmer and a farmers' market organizer to express my support of LD 5688 - An Act to Provide Funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives.

My partner, James Gagne, and I own and operate Second Frost Farm, an organic vegetable farm in Waldo County. Our farm participates in both the Belfast Farmers' Market and Rockland Farmers' Market. Both of these farmers' markets are solely organized by its membership of farmers and small business owners. This year members from each of these markets are volunteering their time to fundraise between \$6,000 and \$10,000 to bridge the gap in funds to support running the SNAP/ Maine Harvest Bucks program.

Our farm has the unique perspective of actively organizing the SNAP/Maine Harvest Bucks programs at both markets. The Rockland Farmers' Market, which runs May-October, has been running a SNAP/Maine Harvest Bucks program for less than five years where as the Belfast Farmers' Market, which runs year round, has been running a SNAP/Maine Harvest Bucks program for nearly ten years. Last year in Rockland shoppers spent a total of \$12,500 SNAP and Maine Harvest Bucks while Belfast shoppers spent \$55,000 SNAP and Maine Harvest Bucks. Year after year, we watch each program grow in both number of SNAP shoppers and dollars spent.

While running these food access programs at market is no small amount of extra work, we really value participating in farmers markets that are truly community spaces where locally produced food can be made more affordable. In addition to increasing market accessibility by creating an opportunity for community members from more income brackets to shop at the market and bring fresh food home to their kitchen table, hosting the SNAP/ Maine Harvest Bucks program also benefits the farmers and market members. At my own farm, as we go into our 9th season growing and selling at farmers' markets, SNAP and Maine Harvest Buck sales account for about 10% of our annual sales.

Continuous state funding for this program will make a huge difference to its sustainability by helping cover the costs of: the bonus bucks (Maine Harvest Bucks) for the fresh produce incentive, SNAP/EBT equipment, staffing the farmers' market info booths and promoting the program to increase the number of SNAP shoppers at market.

Both farmers' markets we participate in really value the Maine Harvest Bucks program and the way that it helps us create a market that can be a community experience for as many folks as possible. However, with the markets being solely organized by its members who each operate our own farms or other small businesses, annual fundraising to keep this program a float can feel like a lot of extra work that can be difficult to find time to accomplish. Continuous funding at the level of \$600,000 per year would not only ensure accessible markets around the state but also would allow each market to plan for program growth without funding uncertainties. From my vantage point where I see more SNAP shoppers and dollars spent at farmers' markets each year at two different markets, it is really exciting to think about how much more potential expansion there is if LD 5688 is supported and fully funded.

Thank you for your consideration,
Noami Brautigam