

Lorelei Cimeno
Orland, ME
LD 568

My name is Lorelei Cimeno, and I am a resident and farmer in Orland. I urge you to support LD 5688 - An Act to Provide Funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives. I organize the Blue Hill Farmers' market. In 2022, our market started accepting SNAP and implemented the Maine Harvest Bucks (MHB) program. We were astounded at our success in the first year. The market accepted nearly \$5,000 in SNAP and redeemed over \$2,300 in MHB. This extra revenue was very beneficial to my farm. Our success also showed a significant need for MHB in our community, and great potential for growth of the program. I met new customers in 2022 that did not have access to our farmers' market before we implemented the MHB program. We can never let those customers lose access to our farmers' market. Without state funding, the MHB program would not be sustainable at the Blue Hill Farmers' market. In 2023, our market needs to fundraise for over \$2,000 for the MHB program. That doesn't cover labor costs. The info booth at our market, where SNAP payments and MHB is processed, is volunteer run. We are already running into issues around staffing the info booth. Fundraising for the MHB program is a substantial burden for me. The Blue Hill Farmers' market, our community, and our state needs continuous funding for the MHB program at \$600,000 per year. We need to ensure that all Mainers can access nutritious, local produce and support their local farmers.