



**Written testimony of Abby Farnham, Senior Policy and Research Associate, Maine Farmland Trust, to the 131<sup>st</sup> Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry  
February 27, 2023**

Good afternoon Senator Ingwerson, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Abby Farnham and I am submitting testimony on behalf of Maine Farmland Trust (MFT) in support of LD 568, *An Act to Provide Funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives*.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect more than 330 farms and keep nearly 60,000 acres of farmland in farming. In 2022 alone, MFT supported 48 farm businesses with workshops, technical assistance, and grants – delivering over 680 hours of technical assistance and \$309,000 in business and seed grants to help businesses grow their profitability. Our main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Stewardship, Farm Business Planning, PFAS Support, Climate Resilience, and Policy and Research. MFT believes that to support Maine's rural economic development, farms must be economically viable.

Nutrition incentive programs like Maine Harvest Bucks and Farm Fresh Rewards contribute to the economic success of farms and local food businesses by helping them gain new customers, build sales, and keep more dollars in Maine's food economy. MFT first launched the Farm Fresh Rewards nutrition incentive program in 2016 and collaborated extensively over the years with partner organizations operating the Maine Harvest Bucks program to support the growth and reach of these programs across the state. We were thrilled to partner with Good Shepherd Food Bank to transition the Farm Fresh Rewards program to Good Shepherd in 2022.

MFT understands that although the tremendous growth in participation in Maine's nutrition incentive programs over the past several years is a win for low-income community members, farmers, and the state's local food economy, because available federal funding requires a dollar-for-dollar match, as participation in the program grows, so does the need to secure matching funds from non-federal sources. State funding for nutrition incentive programs would therefore not only provide a consistent source of support for the continued growth and expansion of nutrition incentive programs across the state, but would also allow these programs to leverage more federal dollars in support of Maine's local food economy.

We hope that you will support this bill and help strengthen food security in the state while simultaneously supporting Maine's food and farming businesses.