

Dalziel Lewis  
South China,  
LD 568

Good afternoon members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Dalziel Lewis of South China, ME. I am a mixed organic vegetable farmer here to express my support of LD5688 - An Act to provide funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives.

I sell year-round at the Farmer's Market at Mill Park in Augusta, the Skowhegan Farmers Market, the Hallowell Farmers Market, and the Islesboro Farmers Market. All of these markets have a combo of paid and volunteer staff, including the vendors to help them run.

I have participated in the Farmer's Market at Mill Park since 2009. I started serving that market as a beginning woman farmer. In 2015, when the Maine Harvest Bucks program began. The Mill Park Market, which is situated in a low-income neighborhood in Augusta, began to blossom from accepting and boosting SNAP benefits.

In 2022, the Mill Park Market processed over \$26,000 in SNAP benefits and redeemed over \$13,000 in Maine Harvest Bucks - reaching nearly 150 individuals and households. Mill Park has one of the highest redemption rates of the Maine Harvest Bucks in the state of Maine.

The Maine Harvest Bucks Program has transformed the way customers feel about receiving food assistance. The farmer's markets are empowering customers to choose what is healthy to put in their body and it grounds them in a personal relationship in the community. The Maine Harvest Bucks program feeds the body, mind, and soul for people.

The Maine Harvest Bucks program is helping keep Maine a vibrant agricultural state and keeps our state on track for food sovereignty. Please help sustain this program with continuous funding of \$600,000 year so that we will have no interruptions in the important responsibility of feeding our state and keeping Mainer's from 0 to 102 healthy.