

February 27, 2023

Dear Members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry Committee,

My name is Reeve Wood and I'm a resident of Bowdoinham, where I operate Counterpoint Bread, a small bakery specializing in sourdough breads and croissants. I'm testifying in support of LD 568 – An Act to Provide Funding for the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives. I offer this testimony in my capacity as a small business owner and as a citizen who is concerned about the difficulties facing many of my fellow community members around adequate access to affordable, healthy food.

**SNAP is necessary, but insufficient, to keep thousands of Mainers from going hungry.**

As I'm sure you're aware, Mainers depend heavily on the SNAP program to meet their basic nutritional needs. According to the DHHS, even before the pandemic 12 percent of Maine households were food insecure, higher than the national average of 11 percent. Data collected in 2021 showed that "13 percent of children in Maine weren't eating enough because the household couldn't afford sufficient food." According to Feeding America, Maine was sixth in the nation for projected food insecurity in 2021.<sup>1</sup> Beginning March 1, 2023, expanded SNAP benefits provided by the federal government will end in Maine, meaning that vulnerable families will have less money for food.

**Incentives help support vulnerable families and local food producers.**

Incentive programs like Maine Harvest bucks are an important means of helping Mainers who receive SNAP benefits try to fill the gaps in their food budgets and source healthy, locally-produced food. This obviously also benefits the Maine food businesses that they patronize, including mine. While Maine Harvest Bucks can't be used to purchase my bread products, they serve to incentivize SNAP recipients to shop at the farmers' markets where I am a vendor. And since these customers are able to use market incentives for fruits and vegetables, they are more likely to have money to put toward a loaf or two of bread for the week. This helps my business directly, together with Maine Grains and the other Maine-based suppliers from whom I purchase ingredients. This dynamic helps federal and state funds invested in these programs stick to Maine communities and bolster our local economy.

**SNAP is not a snap to administer at Farmers' Markets.**

Accepting SNAP benefits at a farmers' market is not easy. SNAP benefits are generally conveyed through specific EBT processing equipment as opposed to the normal credit-card readers that market vendors are almost all equipped with now. While some vendors have their own EBT equipment, the burden of being approved to accept SNAP/EBT transactions means that

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/blog/maine-dhhs-extends-nutrition-support-88000-households-2021-08-02>

it generally falls to the market to deal with EBT transactions and administer a token or voucher system to account for transactions with individual vendors. This takes people and time.

I am a vendor at the Bowdoinham Farmers' Market, the Yarmouth Farmers' Market, and the Brunswick Winter Market. Each of these markets has a different approach to serving SNAP recipients, and all depend, in whole or in part, on volunteers to administer the collection of SNAP funds or, in the case of the Yarmouth Market, the administration of a market-specific voucher program that operates in place of accepting SNAP. While we have been blessed with a dedicated group of volunteers at the markets I attend, reliance on volunteers makes administration of these programs vulnerable to staffing shortages.

**Investment is needed to facilitate the use of SNAP and to bolster incentive programs at farmers' markets.**

A broad trend is clear at all of the markets at which I sell: the more effort that goes into publicizing and effectively administering the use of SNAP benefits and associated incentive programs like Maine Harvest Bucks, the more money is spent at the market that wouldn't otherwise be spent there. The proposed legislation will provide ongoing funding for incentive programs like Maine Harvest Bucks, and will help with the burdens of staffing and equipment necessary to accept SNAP benefits at farmers' markets as well as the education and promotion necessary to let people know they can use SNAP at their local market. With food insecurity on the increase in Maine, it is imperative that the legislature facilitate reliable support for efforts to support Maine families, and in doing so, also benefit our local food producers.

Thank you all for your work and your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,  
Reeve Wood  
Counterpoint Bread  
Bowdoinham, Maine