

Laura Flannery
Charlotte
LD 1670

To the Agriculture Committee:

Please accept this letter in support of LD 1670 - An Act to Strengthen Maine's Agriculture, Food and Forest Economy by Funding the Maine Agriculture, Food and Forest Products Investment Fund and Amending Related Provisions of Law.

My name is Laura Flannery. I own and operate Blue Ox Blueberries, a 140 acre certified-organic wild blueberry farm located in Charlotte (eastern Washington County). I'm a first generation farmer who got my start in 2012. Building a farm business from scratch has been quite a challenge.

Despite successful harvests and lucrative direct marketing, we have struggled to make infrastructure and equipment investments to help us meet the growing demand for organic Maine wild blueberries. Last year, we were awarded funding through the AIP grant and it has been completely life changing. We were able to invest in new harvesters and processing equipment that will allow us to more than double our current capacity and help meet the ever-growing demand for organic Maine wild blueberries.

Out of the hundreds of Maine farms that applied for the AIP Grant, only 84 were awarded funding. There is still huge need amongst Maine farmers. We must make an AIP-style grant permanent to support the hardworking small farms of Maine. The grant should be simple, straightforward, and geared specifically for farms, not larger processing companies.

Thank you,
Laura Flannery