

1/22/24

Dear Legislators,

I am writing in support of the continuous funding of Senator Ingwersen's bill "Fund to Address Food Insecurity/Provide Nutrition Incentives". Supporting the Nutrition Incentive Fund long term is essential for this program to continue to flourish and support the many families and farms that have come to depend on them. Knowing the funding is there will greatly help expand and improve efficiencies, outreach, and utilization of a program that has proven its success year after year.

For 3 decades, we have accepted food assistance dollars in paper and electronic form. Initially just at our farmstand but then, through volunteer help or farmer market administrators, were able to accept food stamp/SNAP payments at all markets.

Through the years we have increased our farm's income viability by selling directly to our community at local Farmer Markets and to health food stores. With the SNAP & Maine Harvest Bucks programs, we have been able to expand affordable food access to our community at the farmer's markets in Boothbay, Damariscotta, Bath, Brunswick, and Portland.

Every Week we witness the good, nutritious food people are buying year round with the SNAP/Maine Harvest Bucks benefits at our farmstand and farmers market. With help from MOFGA, some will use their bonus bucks to participate in our Community Supported Agriculture program. This money spent, *you can be certain*, is for the better nutrition of those in need or who might not be able to afford farm fresh produce grown by their neighbor. Those who face the challenging decision between fresh, healthy, food over that shipped across the country or from outside the US.

The individuals who use this program know good food is one of the best medicines. This is a sure investment in the health of our Maine community. The individuals who utilize this program are from a diversity of backgrounds. They are fresh faces, young parents with kids who shop and buy fresh veggie snacks instead of a cookie. They are market regulars, that religiously purchase their weekly staples for their tables. They are the middle aged and elderly that grew up sourcing food from their farmer down the road and know what a Maine grown tomato tastes like.

We donate about 20,000 pounds a year to local foodbanks and soup kitchens. But having the Maine Harvest Bucks incentive programs translates into income for our farm to support the wages and benefits needed to keep our staff here in Maine. This program gives our community a greater choice and access to higher quality and diversity of food. It bridges the gap. Most importantly, this money goes directly to a community of hard working farmers, their employees, and to people who are food insecure. This is a win win funding need. Let's build a strong program with continuous funding.

Thank you for your time!,
Jan Goranson
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