



TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN,

Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and esteemed members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, my name is Ron Howard and I manage Brodis Wild Blueberries in Hope Maine.

My grandchildren are the 7th generation of our family to have worked on our land. The 160 acres of wild blueberries on our farm are harvested and sold to a wholesale processor, to wine and spirits makers and directly to consumers. For a number of years now, the wholesale market prices have been below our costs as domestic high bush cultivated blueberries and in particular imported ones have flooded the market. To survive, we have had to attempt to increase our direct-to-consumer sales of fresh and frozen berries and a variety of value-added products.

Given our very short harvest window of approximately 2-3 weeks, we do everything possible to sell as much of our fresh product as possible during that time. There is no way however, that that we can market all of our crop as fresh and thus expanding our ability to freeze berries is crucial to our survival. We need to not only sell the frozen berries themselves, but many if not all of our value-added products must come from our frozen berries as we have no time to process them during the intense short harvest window.

I take very seriously the crisis we face due to current and future climate change issues. We have found a need to adjust our own farming practices as a result of change and of course, those changes like the necessity of adding irrigation are very costly to our operation. We recognize the importance of fighting climate change and thank the Governor, Representative Tucker, and others on their efforts both last year and again this year to develop this bill.

We are concerned, however, about several aspects of the LD 226. Recognizing the need to increase our frozen berry production is a necessity for us as I have explained. The costs of the equipment is nearly prohibitive as it stands now and the only way to make it work will be to continue to maintain our current equipment and add on in a cost efficient manner. The wording in this bill could require us to completely dismantle our current system and replace it with new under some circumstances. This must not be allowed to pass with this wording. There are farmers throughout Maine who utilize freezers and they would be devastated to face such expenses.

While I support new equipment to be manufactured utilizing cutting edge environmentally friendly methods, putting our iconic wild blueberry farms (along with all farms) at such risk would be wrong. I believe responsible legislation would only include such language as is in the bill now IF it ALSO included funding to support Maine's farmers who would end up shouldering much of the burden this legislation would create. I hear from others that California understood that responsibility and provided help to farmers and that model could be investigated.

Without some financial support, I highly recommend that the legislation be limited to future manufactured equipment and not impact current systems. I also encourage you to consider giving Maine farms at least a couple year notice before ANY changes take affect so that they might plan accordingly, including having the time to seek both private and public funding to subsidize any additional new expenses.

Thank you, Senator Brenner, Representative Tucker, and all members of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources for hearing my concerns, for tackling these VERY important issues impacting our climate and I hope, completing legislation that will enhance and not further devastate our struggling agricultural community.

Ron Howard

BRODIS BLUEBERRIES

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