

## 132nd Maine Legislature's Committee on Labor & Housing

### LD357: An Act to Establish a State Minimum Hourly Wage for Agricultural Workers

#### *Testimony in Favour of LD 357*

Chair Tipping, Chair Roeder and esteemed members of the Labor and Housing Committee:

My name is Jenni Tilton-Flood and I am an owner and manger at Flood Brothers, LLC in Clinton, Maine, as well as a Mainer and Mum. Our family dairy farm is operated and owned by a 3 generation family that represents 15 family members, and 5 households. Our operation is home to 4,200 animals, 2,200 of which we milk everyday and produce 18,000 gallons of milk which finds it way onto our neighbours' tables within 24-48 hours after it leaves our farm. As a part of Maine agriculture our farm provides more than just an economic impact for our State-we are an integral part of the food system providing fresh, high quality food and sustainable nutrition and truly impacting the triple bottom line of sustainability. Minimum wage is an important opportunity to further invest in the sustainability of Maine Agriculture and the equity and justice of our food system and on our farm we meet and oftentimes exceed the minimum wage and offer other benefits necessary to be an employer of choice.

I have appeared before you in the past and I wish I could appear in front of you today to once again advocate not just on behalf of the people who work on our farms and ensure our food system, economy and community are robust and sustainable, but also on behalf of our farms and the farmers who are elevated, improved, and fortified by a just and secure workforce. **I wish I could be in front of you today to provide my support for LD 357 and urge you to vote in favour of this Act to Establish a State Minimum Hourly Wage for Agricultural Workers. I wish I could be in front of you today to remind you that it's about damn time that we provide our highly skilled and dedicated workforce the legal recognition of their right to minimum wage.** Much of my testimony has been said before, but I am more than happy to keep repeating it until such time that this State recognizes and provides for the workforce of Maine's proud and historic Agricultural sector a minimum wage.

On our farm we employ, on average, 47 FT people a week. (1 of which is a family member receiving a paycheck based upon the same scale and rate of their coworkers, 4 additional family members not included in the number of employees but are daily participants in the operation, work and management of the farm and are not on the weekly payroll). Our wage paid is currently at the Maine state minimum or higher, depending upon role and length of employment, (through the years our average wage has, at times, been more than twice than the Maine minimum) and has applied to all employees, regardless as to whether they are students or adults, full time or part time. At the height of our crop season our payroll can increase to more than 50 employees, many of those additional employees are retirees or high school students and they are also paid the Maine minimum or above.

**For our eligible full time employees we offer, above their hourly wage:**

Health Insurance

Cost sharing of health insurance for the employee's family members

HRA Flexibility in scheduling

PTO Bonuses

**For many of our employees we also offer, above their hourly wage and the above:**

Housing(both reimbursement of rent as well as a few homes we have ended up purchasing)

Utilities

Heating fuel

Most of our employees receive all or 98-99% of the above benefits. Our workforce is diverse and includes men, women, foreign born employees and those born in US. We measure our job retention, for all employees, in years and decades, not months; we have multiple generations of families working with us; we have seen the retirement of employees that have outlasted our own family members' lifetimes; we have seen romances begin and new families start on the farm (we've seen some of the more not so fairy tale romances too-but, that's life); and most importantly we have seen the dream of home ownership and the building of dream homes right here in Maine by employees and co-workers happen, as well as those who have started their own businesses. I firmly believe that it is due, in part, to the benefits above hourly wage that we are able to provide the folks who work so hard to help us care for our animals and land and produce high quality, fresh, local milk. But I am also firmly convinced that the root of it all is due to the fact that we have always been ahead of the minimum wage and that our team members have not had to chase what other employees in other sectors are guaranteed.

We may be an outlier but that is beside the point. What is more imperative is that the Maine dairy industry should be firmly, solidly, and on record as being in support of the minimum wage on our dairy farms regardless of size and number of employees and supportive as well of the requirement of the accompanying record keeping. Minimum wage on Maine dairy farms and year round farms, regardless of size and number of employees, should be required by law, regardless as to whether anecdotal evidence says that most do pay minimum wage. Dairy farms and other year round agricultural employers, regardless of size and number of employees, should be required to keep accurate records and provide employees with a pay statement. It is that simple.

**I would be remiss if I did not also take this opportunity to also point out the following: our legislators, farmer and farm worker organizations, processors, retailers, and the Governor's office should be actively engaged in dismantling the barriers and legal confines that enable marginalization of ag workers, especially those who are foreign born and come to the US, and to Maine to work. We need to ensure that those working in ag, *all of those working in ag*, are safe, secure and protected not just on a farm but where they live, pay taxes, invest their money, worship, contribute to their communities and raise their families-including the next generation of Americans. Providing these securities and rights would level the playing field and the growing fields far more equitably and justly than by trying to due so solely in a Subchapter of labour law.**

In the meantime I urge you to do the right thing and vote OTP on this bill, LD357.

As always, I welcome any of you to contact me to ask me questions, visit our family farm, and of course enjoy as much Maine dairy as you possibly can . Thank you for your time and attention and your continued work as citizen legislators.

Sincerely and with Gratitude,

Jenni Tilton-Flood  
[jtiltonflood@me.com](mailto:jtiltonflood@me.com)  
207.313.3531  
Flood Brothers, LLC  
Clinton, Maine