

Grower and Processor



of IQF Wild Blueberries

**Roy P. Allen II, President**

**Testimony in OPPOSITION to LD 1022**

**An Act To Make Agricultural Workers and Other Workers Employees under the Wage and Hour Laws**

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and esteemed members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Roy P Allen II and I, along with other members of my family, own Allen's Blueberry Freezer, Inc. in Ellsworth, Maine. We are growers and processors of wild blueberries. We are a family owned business, started in 1957. We have blueberry land in the Mid Coast region of Maine, in the Ellsworth/Surry/Orland/Stockton Springs/Franklin and Steuben area and in Downeast Maine. ^

Maine wild blueberry farmers cannot afford LD 1022. The wild blueberry industry has suffered low prices and weather related problems the past few years. The State of Maine minimum wage has already increased significantly, while the prices we have been receiving for our crop have been decreasing. It has been extremely challenging. If LD 1022 were to be passed, it could put Maine family farms out of business.

If passed, we will be forced to cut back on farm workers hours and move more quickly toward mechanization, to avoid the very high cost of labor. This will actually hurt the farm workers by taking away hours and jobs.

Wild blueberry rakers, who are paid by the box or pound, can earn \$500 or more per day, well above minimum wage. Hand raking wild blueberries has traditionally been one of the best paying farm worker jobs around.

Due to the already high labor costs in Maine, we have been exploring and implementing methods of mechanization to reduce our workforce, to try and save money. The passing of LD 1022 will just speed up this process, and take away more jobs.

We have a stable returning workforce that counts on these seasonal agricultural jobs and returns year after year. They will not return if they know they will be working only 40 hours per week.

If you pass this legislation, you will directly responsible for reducing the number of wild blueberry farms in Maine.

If passed, farmers will cap their workers at 40 hours per week, decreasing the per capita earnings of the worker.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this very important matter.