

Bill Bamford
Maxwell's Farm/ME Vegetable Growers

Testimony re: LD 1022
April 6, 2021

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and members of the Joint Standing committee on Labor and Housing:

I am writing today to today to testify against LD1022.

My name is Bill Bamford. My wife Lois and I own Maxwell's Farm in Cape Elizabeth. We grow 12-14 acres of strawberries and a few acres of mixed vegetables. At the height of harvest season last year, we employed 23 people. We are a 6th generation farm that is in the process of transitioning to the 7th generation.

There is a saying at our place: "This is a farm, not a factory." It has always been applied to the production end of things in that, unlike a factory, we have a lot of factors in farming that are outside our control (ie, weather, bugs and disease, etc.) that often negatively affect the final outcome of all of our efforts.

I would like to apply that saying today in a new way. I want to apply it to the people that we work with (in a factory you would call them employees) and the relationships we share.

I remember when I started working for Lois' Dad in 1975. One evening we got in his car to go to Logan Airport to pick up several men who were arriving from Puerto Rico to work for the summer. One man who arrived that night was Ismael Rodriguez. He was the Dad of a large family and in all likelihood would have another mouth to feed when he returned home after the season was over. He continued to work with us seasonally for years and soon his older sons were coming to our farm to work with him. Probably 6 or 7 of his sons have worked at our farm over the years. Next month my first 2 men (Cano and Gerardo) will arrive from Puerto Rico to begin work for the summer. They are 2 of Ismael's sons and have worked at Maxwell's for 23 and 24 years respectively. Cano has three children and all of them have worked at the farm at some point in time. That's three generations of the Rodriguez family working alongside of the Maxwell family for 2 generations. Now, Cano and Gerardo, and some of their children, are beginning to work alongside my son.

I don't sit in my office and give these people a list of jobs to do. Farming doesn't work that way. We are all up early, spend time together in the field, and have personal relationships with each other. We celebrate their birthdays with cake and ice cream after lunch, we have a pig roast together to celebrate the end of berry harvest, we send each other texts and holiday greetings during the off season and, periodically we go to Puerto Rico to spend time with them at their homes. In short, these people are our second family.

In the last 5 years our labor costs for our field workers have risen over 30%! The market for our produce simply cannot support additional price increases to pay for additional wages. We cannot continue to operate if this proposed legislation is enacted. This is not an emotional response or ploy. The mathematical equation simply does not work!

If you pass LD 1022, I will be forced to hire additional workers, if I can find them, and limit current workers to 40 hours a week. This will remove most if not all of their incentive to come here to work. It will severely limit the amount of pay that they can make in a summer because we simply cannot afford to keep farming and pay overtime pay.

Remember, we are a farm and our workers are a second family to us. Please don't force factory rules onto family farms. Thank you for your time.