

Jennifer Gogan  
Miller Farms, Houlton

Locally owned businesses are important to the community for several reasons. Local businesses invest in the community and funnel revenue back into the local economy. They support fund raisers, civic and public events; create jobs and support the infrastructure of area businesses thru purchase of supplies, electricity, fuel, etcetera. Agriculture in particular is an important part of our community's heritage and culture. Aroostook county has a reputation for its people's good work ethic and that is due to generations of work on the farm. Farming requires a considerable amount of resources, hard work and assumption of risk but it is all worth it when a farming operation succeeds and the sustainable livelihood fosters the younger generation to continue in agriculture in spite of competition from standard business' security, salaries and benefits. Land is an important resource cared for by conscientious farmers who build up nutrients in the soil thru rotation crops, prevent erosion with cover crops and help the environment thru other green practices too lengthy to list here. Continued improvement in agricultural practices ensure quality air, water and soil for succeeding generations. The agricultural industry represents a large percent of Maine's economy and it remains the heart and soul of Aroostook County. We support local agriculture, we hope you do as well.

My business partners and I wrote the above statement a couple years ago in support of harvest break at high schools. As the years have gone by and harvest break has diminished more and more it has become increasingly difficult to find consistent reliable help not only at harvest time but for the rest of the year as well. A person with farming experience, knowledge and skill is a dwindling resource. When a farm closes or changes direction that farm's employees are quickly scooped up by the other farms, within days. That supply and demand dynamic puts the capable and reliable employee at an advantage. Farms naturally do their best to offer a competitive wage and benefits to attract good help.

Our farm employs about 10 people year round and about 20 at harvest time. The above letter of support mentions the farming culture. Our employees are not just a number, we want to do right by them, help them develop skill set and see them succeed and grow with our business. Wage negotiations are informal, respectful and fair with results that are in both party's best interest. We strive to be a good place to work with low turnover, where employees are valued and have a promising future. That mentality is not unique to our farm but is pervasive throughout the state. The union culture however appears to pit the employee and employer against each other. LD151 and LD1022 endeavors to cause a divide where there wasn't one before. Please vote no on LD151 and LD1022. Thank you for your consideration

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