



Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Michael Goss and I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> generation farmer and farm manager at Goss Berry Farm in Mechanic Falls. I am writing to testify against LD1022 and LD151, An Act to Make Agricultural Workers and Other Workers Employees Under the Wage and Hour Laws and An Act to Protect Farm Workers by Allowing Them to Organize for the Purpose of Collective Bargaining.

We are a small family farm and we grow a variety of crops including raspberries, blueberries, strawberries, and peaches. We hire about 30-40 workers every July for 6 weeks of harvest season. The majority of those workers are minors from surrounding middle schools and high schools that are on their summer vacation. We hire teens as young as 13, with most of our summer hires between the age of 13-17. They work a 4-hour morning shift about 3-5 days per week. Passing LD1022 would certainly limit or eliminate our ability to hire local youth. For harvest we pay piece rate and guarantee the federal minimum wage. Our returning adult workers have no problem making \$14-\$18/hr during the harvest. This past season we had a first year 14 year old worker who averaged \$14.98/hr over the harvest season. In contrast, about one third of our minors do not work fast enough to meet the state minimum wage that has been rapidly increasing each year since 2017. In our experience, we have generally found younger employees to be slower workers. This is because we are their first job and we are teaching them how to work. Eliminating the agricultural exemption from minimum wage would not allow us to hire inexperienced, young workers. In 2017 we eliminated piece rate and switched all the pay to hourly equal to the state minimum wage at the time (\$9/hr). It was a nightmare for our supervisors trying to get kids to work fast enough to be economically sustainable. That year our harvest cost increased and my field supervisor threatened to quit because she felt like she was babysitting a bunch of kids. By taking away piece rate we took away their incentive to work hard and stay self motivated. Instead, work became a place for them to come hang out with their friends during summer. We believe that paying piece rate helps to establish a work ethic from an early age that will benefit our young workers for years to come even after they leave us and enter into college or a career.

Passing these bills will put Maine farmers at a disadvantage and we will not be able to compete economically against surrounding regions. Many farms that ship to grocery retailers are not able to set their prices. The grocery chain sets the prices, and the farmer has to take it or leave it. When you increase the farmers' cost, they have no way to pass that cost to the consumer, unless that farm has a direct to consumer sales outlet.

Please support your local farmers and opposed LD1022 and LD151.