

April 30, 2015

Senator Edgecomb, Representative Hickman and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee:

My name is Jon Olson. I am the Executive Secretary of Maine Farm Bureau, the state's largest general farm organization.

Maine Farm Bureau opposes LD 783 – RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Establish the Right to Food.

As some of you perhaps know, I'm an ordained minister and serve at the North Wayne Church. Each year during the Christmas Eve Service there is a special offering taken for the Pastor's Discretionary Fund to be used to help people in need. I also volunteer at the local food pantry in Mt. Vernon each Saturday. I've seen many people who are hungry and concerned that there isn't enough food to feed their families. I've given money to people to buy groceries and money for gasoline so they can drive to the grocery store.

I do not know how the enactment of this bill will help the many poor people I deal with. What they need is food, and not necessarily a statement that they have a natural and unalienable right to food. In this bill, individuals will have the right to acquire food by, among other things, "gathering and foraging." These terms are ambiguous. Does this mean that hungry people can go to a farm or garden and gather vegetables to satisfy their hunger? I can't imagine any of the people I minister to will do this. Their pride will not allow it.

I'm pleased what Maine farmers are doing to help alleviate hunger. Many farmers donate produce they grow to their local food banks and the Good Shepherd Food Bank. Others will give their produce to their neighbors who are hungry and in need. These efforts, I feel, will do more to satisfy hunger than a constitutional amendment will.

Thank you for your attention to the above. I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.