



MOFGA Testimony Neither For Nor Against
LD 24 - *An Act to Prohibit Open Burning Under a Red Flag Warning and Regulate Recreational Campfires*
January 30, 2023

Good morning Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. My name is Heather Spalding and I am deputy director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA). MOFGA is creating a food system that is healthy and fair for all of us. Through education, training and advocacy, we are helping farmers thrive, making more local, organic food available and building sustainable communities.

I am speaking neither for nor against LD 24 - *An Act to Prohibit Open Burning Under a Red Flag Warning and Regulate Recreational Campfires*. We absolutely respect the need for fire safety and appreciate the leadership of the Department and all of the fire departments to work so hard to keep us safe. We just would like to request that a special arrangement be made for blueberry growers who rely burning to manage their fields. I would like to read the remarks of one of my coworkers, Nicolas Lindholm, who, in addition to serving as MOFGA's Organic Marketing and Business Specialist, is a MOFGA-certified organic blueberry grower from the Blue Hill Peninsula. Here is what Nicolas has to say...

I am a certified organic wild blueberry farmer with 27 years' experience producing fresh and frozen fruit, as well as currently serving as a commissioner on the Wild Blueberry Commission, and work as a service provider for MOFGA. In all three of these capacities, I would like to advocate for a wild blueberry exemption to be included in LD 24.

The vast majority of organic wild blueberry growers burn at least some acreage each year, as it's an essential tool for pest and disease control. In practical terms, burning is the only tool for organic growers to control mummy berry disease and insect pests including flea beetles and thrips, all significant, economically damaging pests.

From my perspective, I tried cutting back on burning (for economic as well as ecological reasons) from about 2016-2020, and found sudden eruption of issues including mummy berry and flea beetles, so have moved back to burning more than half the time (my goal, at this moment, is to prune my fields with a burn two out of every three cycles). So with seven fields in my farm operation, every spring, I'm aiming to burn at least two, sometimes three, fields (average total of 20 acres each spring), thereby needing at least 2 if not 3 good burning days in April (and a good burning day is by my definition low wind and low humidity, which may or may not be a red flag day). This situation requires the prudence in having the option to burn even on a red flag day, and I want to emphasize the importance for a grower to have a good relationship with their local burn permitting person. The understanding would be that burning when the wind is above 10 mph would still remain non permissible, but otherwise low humidity and dry red flag days would be permissible. Again, having a good relationship with your local fire permit person is key, particularly having them know and trust your burning skills. And thereby having the possible exemption from any ban on open burning on red flag days.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposed special arrangement for blueberry growers.



The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) started in 1971 and is the oldest and largest state organic organization in the country. We're a broad-based community that educates about and advocates for organic agriculture, illuminating its interdependence with a healthy environment, local food production, and thriving communities. We have 15,000 members, we certify more than 500 organic farms and processing facilities representing \$90 million in sales, and we are working hard to provide training and create opportunities for Maine's next generation of farmers. Each of these farmers is a Maine businessperson for whom economic health and environmental health are interdependent. While MOFGA envisions a future of healthy ecosystems, communities, people and economies sustained by the practices of organic agriculture, we attribute our success to collaboration and outreach to growers across the management spectrum.