

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 7, 2017

Mrs. Erin Morris
Acting Deputy Administrator
Specialty Crops Program
Agricultural Marketing Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Deputy Administrator Morris:

We write to express our strong support for the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine's request for a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) surplus commodity purchase of frozen Maine wild blueberries. We appreciate the critical assistance offered by USDA last year and hope you will carefully consider the Commission's request for assistance in 2017. A surplus commodity purchase would provide much needed relief to Maine's wild blueberry growers as well as benefit domestic food assistance programs.

The purchase of Maine wild blueberries would provide a highly nutritious and easily stored commodity for domestic food assistance programs. Wild blueberries are a delicious source of antioxidants, which help reduce the risk of chronic diseases, and frozen berries also represent a convenient way for families to add important nutrients to their diets.

According to the Commission, current market conditions necessitate a bonus buy of 50 million pounds of frozen Maine wild blueberries. The wild blueberry industry has been a part of Maine's agricultural heritage since the mid-1800s. Some Maine growers, however, are facing extremely difficult conditions, including: a critical oversupply following three years of near-record crop sizes, large carry-over inventory, steeply declining prices paired with steady production costs, and global competition due in large measure to increased cultivated blueberry production as well as favorable market and farming conditions for wild blueberries in Canada.

Maine wild blueberries have not been bred to withstand the demands of being shipped long distances, meaning Maine's growers rely on the vitality of the frozen blueberry market, which is currently vastly oversupplied. The Commission notes that prices for frozen wild blueberries have now dropped below the cost of production by as much as 60 percent in the last five years. The current situation is not sustainable for Maine growers, and a bonus buy of Maine wild blueberries would help stabilize the future market and alleviate the disparity between supply and demand.

We request that you give the Commission's request every appropriate consideration, in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations, and ask that your staff notify Mary Grace Schley with Senator Collins ([202-224-1355](tel:202-224-1355)), Marge Kilkelly with Senator King ([PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER](tel:202-228-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

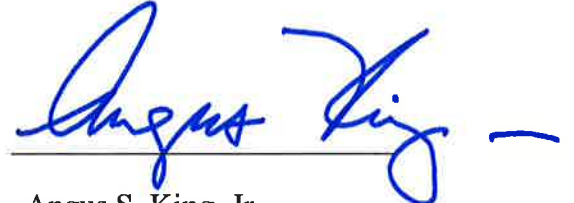
1467). Kelliann Blazek with Congresswoman Pingree (202-225-6116), and Philip Swartzfager with Congressman Poliquin (202-225-6306) when a final decision has been made.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



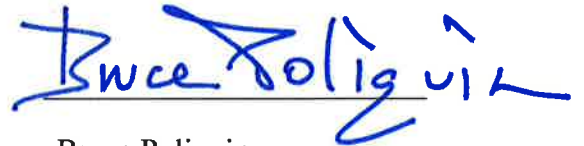
Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Bruce Poliquin
Member of Congress