

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

January 20, 2016

Mr. Charles Parrott
Deputy Administrator
Fruit and Vegetable Programs
USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Deputy Administrator Parrott:

We write to express our strong support for the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine's request for a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) purchase of 30 million pounds of frozen Maine wild blueberries. A surplus commodity purchase would provide much needed relief to Maine's wild blueberry growers as well as benefit domestic food assistance programs.

According to the Commission, current market conditions are driving the need for this bonus buy. Growers in Maine are faced with steeply declining prices, a critical oversupply issue triggered by near-record crop sizes in 2014 and 2015, carry-over inventory, increased competition due in large measure to a rapid increase in cultivated blueberry production.

Maine wild blueberries are not genetically improved to help them withstand the demands of shipping fresh berries across the United States and internationally. For this reason, Maine's growers rely on the vitality of the frozen blueberry market, which is currently oversupplied. Moreover, the Commission notes that prices for frozen wild blueberries have dropped significantly, by as much as 50 percent in less than five years, and are now estimated to be less than the cost of production. This situation is not sustainable for Maine growers, and the purchase of 30 million pounds of Maine wild blueberries would help stabilize falling prices and farm income.

The purchase of Maine wild blueberries would also provide a highly nutritious and easily stored commodity for domestic food assistance programs. Wild blueberries are rich in antioxidants, which help reduce the risk of chronic diseases. Frozen wild blueberries are a convenient and delicious way for families to add nutritional value to their diets.

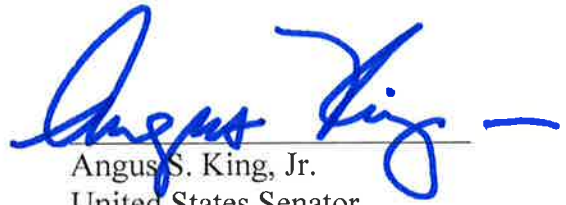
We request that you give the Commission's request every appropriate consideration in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. We also ask that your staff notify Jill Carney with Senator Collins (202-224-3913), Marge Kil Kelly with Senator King (202-228-1467), Kelliann Blazek with Congresswoman Pingree (202-225-6116), and Michael Sinacore with Congressman Poliquin (202-225-6306) when a final decision has been made.

Thank you for your consideration of 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