

April 8, 2020

Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We would like to thank you for all your and USDA's efforts on behalf of agriculture during this COVID-19 pandemic. USDA along with States and farmers are keeping America fed as we navigate this uncharted territory. After some discussion, we would like you to give strong consideration to assisting the dairy industry as we recover from this pandemic.

Additionally, we ask that you give every consideration to the dairy farm families of the United States as you work to distribute the \$9.5 billion and the additional \$14 billion at the Commodity Credit Corporation within the CARES Act. Some possible methods of assistance include:

- Direct payments to dairy farmers like the Market Facilitation Program of at least \$0.50/cwt.
- Utilize USDA Section 32 authority to purchase additional dairy products for emergency distribution through The Emergency Food Assistance Program
- If Congress were to reopen and make the Dairy Margin Coverage retroactive, consider lowering the premium levels and allowing a buy up for farms that did register for the program at the end of 2019
- Consider setting a floor for the Statistical Uniform Price in Federal Order Number 1 at \$19.50 /cwt. for the months of April, May, June and July. This is the difference in federal order price versus \$19.50 made in direct payments to dairy farmers. Dairy farm attrition is predicted to be enormous across the country – floor price needed to secure the food chain for dairy farms and dairy products. Consider a floor for Organic Dairy Pricing of \$35.00/cwt.
- Consider setting a floor for the dairy commodity prices (butter, nonfat dry milk, cheddar blocks and barrels, dry whey) to ensure a sufficient return to dairy coops/processors who are taking additional financial burden when spending increasing amount of money (wages, prevention, transportation) on getting product to consumers.

Many of our states are heavily reliant on dairy as the largest part of the agricultural sector, as well as a multitude of dairy processing facilities and a large population center to consume those dairy products. As you well know, the dairy industry has endured 4 years of low milk prices offset somewhat by the Market Facilitation Program. Milk price projections were strong at the end of 2019 showing light at the end of the tunnel for many of our dairy farm families. With the onset of COVID19 globally, the light has dimmed and may go out for many of our dairy farm families.

On March 24, 2020, National Milk Producers Federation predicted the loss for the dairy from COVID19 milk price drop to exceed \$2.85 billion at the farm level. The milk price predictions continue to drop now even a few days later. Farmers have been deemed essential businesses during the COVID19 pandemic and we must do everything we can to ensure that our dairy farms continue to produce the milk needed to feed our Nation.

All of these methods would be extremely helpful to our dairy farm families. Thank you for your consideration and, please feel free to contact us on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Bryan Hurlburt
Commissioner
Connecticut Dept of Agriculture



Amanda Beal
Commissioner
Maine Dept of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry



Joseph Bartenfelder
Secretary
Maryland Dept of Agriculture



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Anson Tebbetts
Secretary
Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets
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cc: Dr. Barb Glenn, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture