

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 13, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to you today to urge further and immediate action to support the dairy industry that is suffering as a result of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Dairy farms are the backbone of Vermont's rural economy and offer critical nutrition and high-quality products to individuals across the country. Our dairy farmers face unprecedented challenges and have received little of the support that Congress has provided. While we appreciate the recent Farmers to Families Food Box contracts awarded for Vermont, we urge you to act immediately to use all available programs to support the struggling dairy industry, including the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) to provide direct relief to farmers in need.

Since the CARES Act was signed into law on March 27, Vermont's dairy farmers have yet to receive any of the \$23.5 billion authorized in the bill for assistance to farmers. As you implement the CFAP payments to producers, dairy farmers must be compensated for the months they will be impacted the most. Starting in April and continuing through this summer, they face disastrously low milk prices with no certainty as to when product demand will recover. Initial reports suggested that the CFAP would compensate farmers at a very low rate for the months when prices are projected to be lowest. We urge you to correct this.

We respectfully request that you use the many tools at your disposal to alleviate the pain being felt by this industry, including: implementing a program to manage oversupply, compensating producers for milk that has been dumped, reopening the Dairy Margin Coverage Program for 2020 enrollment, and convening an emergency hearing to establish a temporary price floor for Class I fluid milk to stop the cratering of prices. These actions would make a real difference to farmers immediately and provide them with desperately needed cash.

Our dairy farmers, who provide Americans with essential nutrition every day, are in crisis and we need you to help. We urge you take immediate action to ensure our dairy farmers and rural communities survive this unprecedented time.

Sincerely,


PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator


BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator


PETER WELCH
United States Representative