

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

August 23, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write today to urge the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to use its existing authority to provide relief to dairy farmers in New England and across the country. Specifically, we request you take necessary steps to make milk an agricultural commodity eligible for Federal Crop Insurance and ask that you work with the Risk Management Agency (RMA) to develop additional insurance products for dairy farmers.

While New England dairy farms tend to be smaller, our dairy community is doing its best to run productive operations that turn a profit. New England's nearly 1,500 dairy farms are almost all family owned and operated. These dairy farms produced 4.25 billion pounds of milk in 2016, an increase of 68 million pounds from 2014. Despite this growth and efficiency, dairy farmers have had to cope with double-digit price declines year over year since 2014.

These struggles are amplified by ongoing difficulties with the Margin Protection Program (MPP) and a lack of other risk management options. In 2015, over 700 New England farms enrolled in MPP buy-up coverage. The program's failure contributed to its dramatic decline in participation. In 2017, enrollment in this buy-up coverage plummeted by 96 percent, with fewer than 30 New England farms purchasing buy-up coverage. Low signup is clear evidence that MPP isn't providing farmers the needed risk protection. As Congress begins work to reauthorize the Farm Bill, we intend to make necessary reforms to this program.

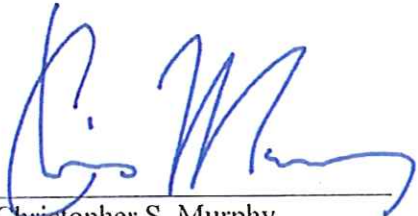
In the meantime, we believe it's imperative that the USDA take action to address issues created by MPP's failure. We urge you to utilize existing authorities to expand and enhance insurance products for dairy farmers. Milk, a commodity by any measure, must be eligible for a range of policies through the Federal Crop Insurance Program.

Existing statute defines the term 'livestock' as the actual animal and not the product produced. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2017 included report language clarifying that Congress did not intend for livestock products to fall under the limitation of livestock insurance policies. Both existing statute and follow-on clarification illustrates USDA has the authority to determine livestock and livestock products are distinct commodities. We request that RMA work with the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation to determine milk as a distinct agricultural

commodity eligible for Federal Crop Insurance coverage. Additionally, we would urge the RMA to use existing authorities to develop additional dairy insurance products.

Thank you for considering these concerns, and we look forward to working with you in your new role.

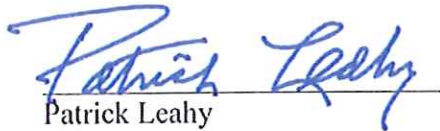
Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senate



Joe Courtney
Member of Congress



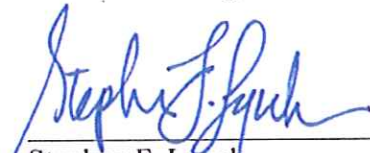
Patrick Leahy
United States Senate



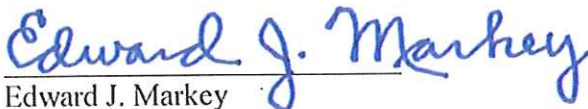
Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress



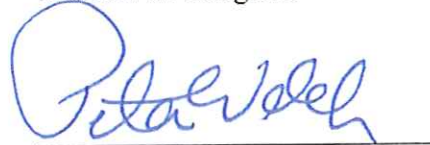
Susan M. Collins
United States Senate



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



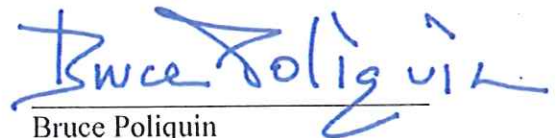
Edward J. Markey
United States Senate



Peter Welch
Member of Congress



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senate




Bruce Poliquin
Member of Congress



Jack Reed
United States Senate




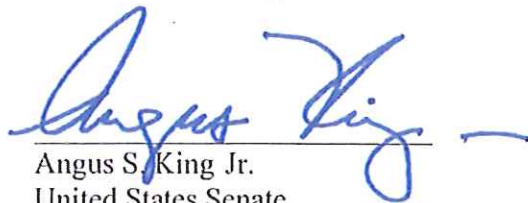
James R. Langevin
Member of Congress


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senate


Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate


Bernard Sanders
United States Senate

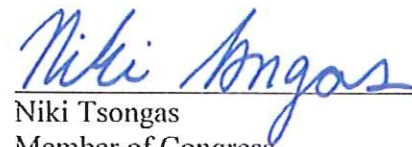

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senate



Angus S. King Jr.
United States Senate

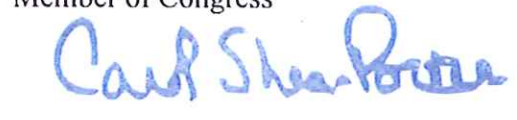

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senate



Elizabeth H. Esty
Member of Congress


David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress

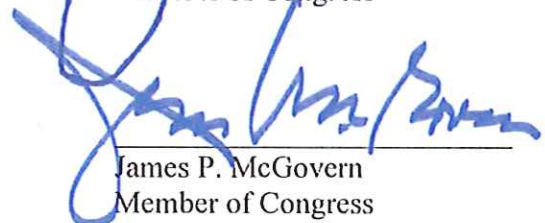

Niki Tsongas
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
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