

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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October 18, 2017

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairmen
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee
on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration,
and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Cochran and Hoeven, Vice Chairman Leahy, and Ranking Member Merkley,

I write today in support of the changes to the Margin Protect Program (MPP) that were included in the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies appropriations bill that passed out of the Senate Appropriations Committee in July. While there is more work to be done to make MPP function better for Connecticut farmers, these changes provide some urgently needed assistance and I urge you to include them in any final Fiscal Year 2018 appropriations package.

Connecticut dairy farmers have been struggling to cope with double-digit milk price declines since 2014, and MPP, which was designed to help farmers in times of market downturn, is not adequately meeting the needs of these struggling farmers. In 2015, over 80% of Connecticut farms enrolled in MPP buy-up coverage. The program's failure contributed to its dramatic decline in participation. In 2017, 96% of Connecticut farms did not purchase buy-up coverage. Low signup is clear evidence that MPP needs to be improved, since it isn't providing farmers the risk protection they need.

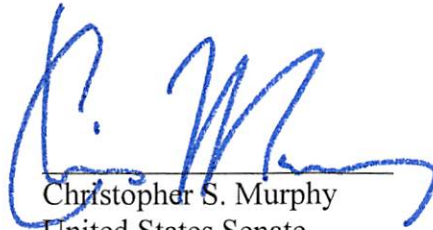
Milk production is on the rise in Connecticut. In 2016, Connecticut dairy farms produced 408 million pounds of milk, up from 373 million pounds in 2015. Connecticut farmers have clearly worked hard to build efficient and profitable operations even in tough economic times.

Broader reforms to MPP are necessary to make the program actually work for Connecticut farmers, but until such reforms are undertaken, we at least need to ensure that the modest improvements that were included in the Senate's FY 2018 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies appropriations bill are enacted into law. For example, reducing the costs for Tier 1 enrollment and adjusting the Tier I

threshold level make the program more cost-effective and accessible to small and medium-sized dairy farms in Connecticut. While there is more we must do in the next Farm Bill, these changes are a move in the right direction and would provide some immediate relief to farmers in my state.

Thank you for your ongoing work to finalize and pass a Fiscal Year 2018 spending bill. On behalf of Connecticut dairy farmers, I appreciate your leadership and hard work to include changes to the MPP program in this bill.

Sincerely,



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senate