

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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June 12, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and
Forestry Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow,

Thank you for your hard work to draft a bipartisan Farm Bill. As you well know, this bill is of paramount importance to farmers and families across the country, including in my home state of Connecticut. In order to learn what was important to Connecticut farmers, I launched a campaign called "Our Farm Bill". As part of this campaign, I traveled to farms across Connecticut and heard concerns spanning the broad array of topics covered in the Farm Bill. I am thankful that the committee draft of the Agriculture Improvement Act (draft bill) addresses many of those concerns. This letter will outline some of the concerns I heard from Connecticut farmers and express my hope that further improvements can be made so the bill better addresses the needs of Connecticut farmers.

With milk prices projected to remain low through 2018, dairy farmers repeatedly spoke to me about the need to improve dairy safety net programs. As you both well know, dairy farmers have struggled for years to make ends meet and face numerous hurdles to keeping their business afloat. I was proud to support the changes made to the Margin Protection Program (MPP) as part of the two-year budget deal, but have always believed Congress needed to do more to for our dairy farmers. I am grateful the draft bill includes further changes to MPP that allow farmers to ensure margins up to \$9 and provide discounts for small and medium sized farmers. I look forward to working with you as this bill advances to further strengthen the dairy safety net.

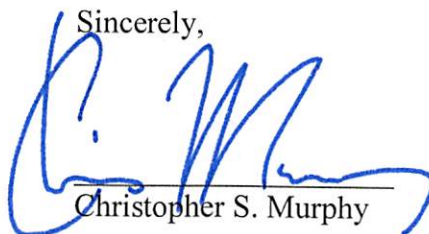
Many of my constituents were concerned about the needs of new and beginning farmers. Although one-quarter of Connecticut's farmers are new to farming, many still struggle to start their own farms and grow their businesses. With the average age of farmers on the rise in Connecticut, ensuring that beginning farmers can access the programs, services, and supports needed to thrive is vital to the future of farming and the local food system in my state. I am thankful the draft bill included numerous changes to help beginning farmers, including a permanent reauthorization of both the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program and the Outreach and Assistance to Socially Disadvantaged and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers Program through the creation of the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach program. With mandatory funding of \$50 million per year, this new program will be able to help more beginning farmers in my state.

In addition, I had many conversations with people who benefited from the numerous programs in the conservation title. Whether I was speaking with a farmer or an environmental group, people wanted to see conservation programs protected and expanded. One program that came up time and time again was the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). I am disappointed that the draft bill makes cuts to the EQIP program and urge you to reverse this cut in a committee markup. However, I am encouraged that the bill increases baseline funding for both the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP).

I also heard from many Connecticut farmers about support for organic agriculture and local food systems. Nationally, consumer demand for local and organic products continues to increase. Consumers in my state want easy access to locally grown and locally made products and value the increasing number of organic products that are entering the marketplace. Already, numerous organizations across Connecticut have begun projects to open new farmers markets and food processing centers to better serve farmers and meet consumer demand. As Connecticut farmers work hard to respond to this demand, a new farm bill must support local food systems and organic farmers. I am thankful the draft bill includes a new Local Agricultural Market Program to support local food programs and value-added processing and makes strong investments in programs like the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, the National Organic Cost Share Program, and the Organic Production and Market Data Initiatives.

Finally, I appreciate that the bill maintained a commitment to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) as well as other hunger programs. SNAP reaches 246,000 households with 437,000 individuals across Connecticut. As the 2018 Farm Bill advances, it must continue to maintain a robust commitment to these families and ensure access to SNAP benefits are not rolled back.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "C. Murphy", is written over a horizontal line. Below the line, the name "Christopher S. Murphy" is printed in a standard black font.

Christopher S. Murphy