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October 11, 2018

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

I am writing to request that USDA use all existing authority under Section 32 of the Agricultural Adjustment Act to make regular purchases of dairy products to be distributed through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). Thank you for the agency's recent purchases of milk and cheese through TEFAP, and I ask that going forward USDA work with states to identify appropriate volumes and types of dairy products that are most suitable to meet the needs of their residents.

Dairy is the backbone of the rural economy in Vermont and many other states across the country. Less than a decade ago, over 1000 Vermont dairies supported our rural economy. Today it is a little more than 700. Right now, we are losing thousands of dairies each year. Over the last ten years, the nation lost 17,000 dairy farms. This year, the total number of dairies in the U.S. is projected to drop below 40,000. That's a 70 percent plummet since 1992.

At the same time, when more than 40 million Americans are living in poverty, hunger remains a daily reality for millions of families. Right now, 46 million people – more than one in seven Americans – rely on food banks to feed themselves and their families. According to analysis, TEFAP supplied one in five of all meals distributed by hunger-relief organizations in 2016 alone. TEFAP meals are more nutritious than the food consumed by the general U.S. population, and dairy products are one of the most requested items at food banks.

In order to provide the assistance needed for food banks to meet the needs of their communities, as well as to help support our struggling domestic dairy industry, I request that USDA expand its current use of authority under Section 32 to purchase additional dairy products. Moreover, because hunger and low-milk prices are persistent issues, I respectfully request that USDA make purchases at regular intervals throughout the year, so that food banks and processors alike can better accommodate and plan for these purchases. Finally, I ask that you work with states to

determine which dairy products would be most suitable to address their needs and offer flexibility in terms of volume of products states can accept. This will not only help food banks, it will also help farmers as we work to find a long-term solution to the current dairy crisis.

Sincerely,



BERNARD SANDERS
UNITED STATES SENATOR