



April 1, 2020

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

Secretary Perdue:

We write to you urging immediate action by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to use the extensive purchasing power afforded it via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to bring much-needed relief to the stressed American dairy industry.

With 80 percent of Americans under order to shelter in their homes, hundreds of thousands of restaurants, schools, and other food service outlets have closed or significantly reduced offerings, which means cheese and butter manufacturers have lost their largest market. While retail sales have increased in past weeks, they are now leveling, and orders are slowing. Dairy manufacturers and processors also have seen their export markets decimated.

Dairy processors and farmers are working in cooperation and with open lines of communication, but these circumstances, far beyond their control, are beginning to result in fresh farm milk finding no available market for processing. Commodity dairy prices have plummeted and will result in milk prices lower than many farms can handle to sustain long-term viability.

Direct relief to dairy farmers and a substantial purchase of dairy commodities by USDA can ensure our industry will remain fiscally able to function in its primary role of feeding the nation and the world. Specifically, we ask USDA to focus on purchases of nonfat dry milk, butter, cheddar styles, mozzarella, and other Italian-styles of cheese, both in bulk formats and in formats purposed for use by restaurants and food service vendors. We are also asking USDA to look at the different means available to the department to make farmers whole for the milk they have produced, but needed to dispose, or for which they received drastically reduced payments.

The CARES Act directs \$14 billion to the Commodity Credit Corporation, \$9.5 billion to a dedicated disaster relief fund for agriculture, \$25 billion for SNAP programs, and \$450 million to support food banks serving the food insecure. This bill enables unprecedented support for farmers and unprecedented commodity purchases, and we need USDA to bring these forms of aid to bear immediately.

We thank you for the important work you are doing for our country, and want to make clear that we stand ready to support and assist you in expediting aid programs.

Sincerely,

Dave Buholzer, President of Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association

Brody Stapel, President of Edge Dairy Farmer Cooperative

Tom Crave, President of Dairy Business Association

Dan Smith, President and CEO of Cooperative Network

Joe Bragger, President of Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation

Jay Heeg, President of Professional Dairy Producers of Wisconsin

Darin Von Ruden, President of Wisconsin Farmers Union