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November 19, 2018

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States of America  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington D.C. 20500

Mr. President:

As the principals of the 2018 Farm Bill Conference Committee resume their work in the waning days of the current Congress, I write to urge you to support a Farm Bill only if it has at its core the interests of the American dairy farmer. Now is a time of unprecedented distress on dairy farms in every state and a failure to take meaningful action may condemn hundreds of dairy farms and farm families to financial ruin. As a fellow New Yorker, you know the important role that dairy plays in our state and you have spoken frequently in support of dairy farmers and their rural communities. Therefore, I urge you to keep your word and sign a Farm Bill that ensures our dairy farmers will have the tools and resources they need to succeed.

By every measure and across every product class, milk prices remain well below historic averages and, for many farmers, below the cost of production that means they lose money on every pound of milk they produce. In this fourth year of declining milk prices and farm incomes, farmers face additional challenges caused by shrinking access to foreign markets and uncertain commodity prices.

The Senate version of the Farm Bill contains several unique provisions that will assist dairy farmers including one to refund the premiums paid by producers for a previous version of the Dairy Margin Protection Program.

The 'Repayment of Premiums' in Section 1403(g) would compel USDA to return the premiums dairy producers paid to purchase coverage under the Dairy Margin Protection Program (MPP), a risk management tool specifically designed to protect dairy farmers from loss. MPP was not effective and many farmers paid millions of dollars in premiums for a program that never paid out even while milk prices fell 50 percent in three years (2014 – 2017). Returning these premiums to farmers is fair, simple, and can be accomplished quickly with existing mechanisms if this provision is retained in the final Farm Bill. This provision has strong support from dairy producers and farm advocacy organizations.

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While there are many issues on which we disagree, I hope that we can find common purpose to assist the American dairy farmer by passing and signing into law a Farm Bill that will treat them fairly and give them the support they deserve. We owe them nothing less.

Sincerely,



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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator

Ernest Hilborn