



State of Wisconsin  
Governor Tony Evers

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## Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

April 1, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue,

During this unprecedented national emergency, we must all work together to ensure families across the country have access to safe and nutritious food. At the direction of Governor Tony Evers, I write today asking your support for our Wisconsin farmers by purchasing surplus commodities and by re-opening enrollment in the Dairy Margin Coverage program.

Like the federal government, Wisconsin has recognized that food and agriculture are part of our nation's essential critical infrastructure workforce. Agriculture is part of our nation's foundation, and it is imperative that our nation's farmers and food processors are able to continue operating and producing the quality products we all depend on.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created tremendous fear and uncertainty in the agriculture community at a very difficult time. Wisconsin's dairy farms have endured five years of low milk prices and are now watching their future prices drop. Our state's grain and specialty crop farmers are cautiously gearing up for another growing season, wondering about access to input supplies and what Mother Nature may send their way.

On top of all this, farmers are now worrying about what happens if products cannot move on and off their farm. As the dairy state, our immediate concern is what if a dairy processor closes its doors today and the milk hauler does not come to the farm? What if a bulk tank is not emptied before the next milking must begin? Emergency milk disposal is a devastating financial and emotional loss to a dairy farmer and detrimental loss to our food supply chain.

At the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP), we want to ensure that milk continues to move from the farm, through the processing plants, and onto food shelves. We understand that consumer preferences and buying methods are very different during this national emergency.

Now is the time for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to keep the food supply chain moving by purchasing surplus commodities. These purchases can support food banks and nutrition assistance programs, which families rely on now more than ever. They also can contribute to the national school lunch program, which continues to deliver breakfast and lunch to youth across the country. It makes no sense to allow nutritious products like milk and dairy products to be disposed of when people who are food insecure can consume those products to supplement their diet.

*Wisconsin - America's Dairyland*

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The long-term success of our agriculture industry and nation's prosperity rests on what we do right now to ensure that our family farms are still here at the end of this national emergency. Surplus food purchases will allow each food product to have a buyer and keep our essential food processors running. In the midst of a pandemic, the nation cannot stand for food plants to scale back production or layoff essential workers.

Dairy farmers also need the opportunity to enroll in the Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program. When this program was open, the outlook for dairy prices in 2020 was very different. Economists were predicting higher prices, which would have allowed dairy farmers to meet their cost of production without the risk management tool. This is no longer the case.

The futures are now telling quite a different story. By re-opening the DMC sign-up period, dairy farmers will be able to make an informed decision based on the impacts of the national emergency and their farm's current situation. Farmers may choose to buy additional coverage that will enable them to weather this pandemic and continue to contribute to the state's dairy industry for another generation.

Thank you for your immediate attention to these requests. Our farmers, food processors, and consumers need our support during these trying times. I am aware that USDA has taken actions during COVID-19 response by waiving restrictions and expanding flexibilities in programs. Making surplus food purchases and re-opening the Dairy Margin Coverage program are two additional tools in your toolbox, and I hope you will give them immediate consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Randy Romanski". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and legible.

Randy Romanski  
Interim Secretary

cc: Wisconsin Congressional delegation