

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 24, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

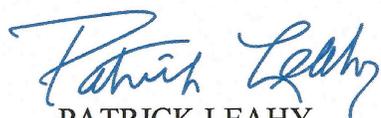
We write to request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) use authority its Section 32 to purchase additional dairy products for emergency distribution during the ongoing Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak.

COVID-19 will undoubtedly have widespread impacts on hunger and malnutrition. It is likely that many Americans will be without work, unable to afford adequate nutrition, increasing the strain on the charitable food system across the nation. Supplying local food banks with healthy dairy options will help ensure those in need receive critical nutrition during this challenging period.

At the same time, experts are projecting that COVID-19 will cause significant disruptions for the dairy sector, including declining prices. This is deeply concerning for states like Vermont, where dairy farms form the backbone of our rural economy. Over the past 10 years, the nation has lost more than 17,000 dairy farms. Meanwhile, the industry faces a consistent oversupply of dairy products that continues to drive prices below the cost of production. This oversupply has led to vast amounts of dairy products in storage. Just last year, the U.S. had stores of 1.4 billion pounds of cheese alone.

For these reasons, we request that USDA immediately exercise its Section 32 authority to purchase additional dairy products for distribution through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and to simplify and expedite your procurement process to ensure expeditious relief. In order to provide the assistance needed for food banks and other hunger organizations to meet this unprecedented nutritional need within our communities, as well as to help support our struggling domestic dairy industry, we ask that you make these purchases and payments as soon as possible.

Sincerely,


PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator


BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator


PETER WELCH
United States Representative