

May 28, 2009

Senator Schumer
313 Hart Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Gillibrand
478 Russell
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Schumer and Gillibrand:*

We write to underscore our concern about the economic health of our region's dairy farms. As you know, dairy farmers in the Northeast and around the country are facing severe and prolonged low milk prices—prices that are well below their costs of production. This sustained price slump has caused the loss of some dairy farms already, and threatens the future of thousands more in this region. Without federal action, New York and New England will continue to lose farms that produce a fresh and dependable milk supply for millions of nearby consumers, even as demand grows for local foods and a stronger regional food system.

Dairy farms are the “anchor tenants” of Northeast agriculture. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, dairy farmers own or manage 3.5 million acres of land in farms in New York and New England; an additional 2.7 million acres are used for hay and corn production, much of which is used to feed dairy cows. This acreage represents 55% of the region's land in farms. Dairy farms are critical to our region's landscape and environmental health, as they are to our states' rural character and identity. Because they manage millions of acres of farmland across the region, dairy farms are important allies in protecting water quality and natural resources and can play a role in mitigating the impacts of global warming.

Dairy farms are also a significant economic engine. The region's 7,472 dairy farms produce \$3.3 billion in dairy cattle and milk sales annually. The multiplier effect of that production is significant; according to Penn State's Center for Dairy Excellence, 85% of a dairy farm's income is spent locally and each farm dollar recycles 2.5 times through the economy.

We urge Congress to act quickly to provide a better federal income safety net for dairy farmers through the Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) program. We also urge you to make federal funds available to dairy farms, as they have been made available to other industries and businesses, to allow them to consolidate debt and restructure loans. Such actions are vital to protect the livelihoods of thousands of dairy farm families, in addition to protecting our region's landscape, environment and rural economy.

We appreciate your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Stewardship Association (NY)

American Farmland Trust, New England Office
American Farmland Trust, New York Office
Berkshire Natural Resources Council (MA)
Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (MA)
Connecticut Farm Bureau Association
Connecticut Farmland Trust
Connecticut Forest & Park Association
Connecticut State Grange
Cooperative Development Institute (NH)
End Hunger Connecticut!
Environmental League of Massachusetts
Franklin Land Trust (MA)
Maine Association of Conservation Districts
Maine Farm Bureau
Maine Farmland Trust
Massachusetts Audubon Society
Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation
Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition
Monadnock Conservancy (NH)
Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust (MA)
New York Agricultural Land Trust
Rhode Island Farm Bureau
Rutland Land Conservancy (MA)
Sheffield Land Trust (MA)
Southeast Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership
Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust (NY)
Vermont Farm Bureau

Vermont Land Trust

Very Alive (CT)

Working Lands Alliance (CT)

Westport Agricultural Commission (MA)

Westport Agricultural & Open Space Trust Fund Council (MA)

Wyoming County Department of Planning and Development (NY)

***Note:** This letter went out to the Northeast Legislators. American Farmland Trust organized this effort, which NYALT appreciates. NYALT has included a version of the letter that went to Senators Schumer and Gillibrand for your general interest. Each letter was addressed separately to the legislative leader.