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Conservation, Farm Groups Call on Congress to Address Dairy Crisis

Washington, D.C.—Thirty-six conservation groups, farm organizations, local governments and others across the Northeast have joined together requesting Congress and the Obama administration take quick action to address the crisis facing dairy farmers. Dairy farmers in the Northeast and around the country are facing severe and prolonged low milk prices—prices that are well below the farmer’s costs of production. This sustained price slump has caused the loss of some dairy farms already and threatens the future of thousands more in the Northeast.

“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.” said Cris Coffin, New England Director of the American Farmland Trust.

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 percent of the region’s land in farms.

“Gil Livingston, President of the Vermont Land Trust said, ‘Dairy farmers and healthy dairy enterprises are critical to our region’s economy, agrarian communities, and environmental health. Because they steward millions of acres of farmland across the region, dairy farms are important allies in protecting water quality, natural communities, and other important resources, and they 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 percent of a dairy farm’s income is spent locally and each farm dollar recycles 2.5 times through the economy.

“Dairy farms are critical to the health of our region’s economy. They purchase supplies and services from machinery dealers, veterinarians, hardware stores and other local businesses

while supporting thousands of food processing jobs,” said Dean Norton, President of New York Farm Bureau. “It hurts all farmers when dairy farms go out of business as it makes it more likely that these support businesses will leave the region.”

The 36 groups urged Congress to provide a better federal income safety net for dairy farmers through the Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) program. In addition, they have called on Congress to make federal funds available to dairy farms, as have been made available to other industries and businesses, to allow them to consolidate debt and restructure loans.

Organizations that joined on the call to Congress include:

Teri Ptacek Agricultural Stewardship Association	Barrington, NH 03825 Lucy Nolan End Hunger Connecticut	Ryan Owens Monadnock Conservancy Leigh Youngblood Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust
Cris Coffin American Farmland Trust, New England Office	Nancy Goodman Environmental League of Massachusetts	Maureen Knapp New York Agricultural Land Trust
David Haight American Farmland Trust, New York Office	Rich Hubbard Franklin Land Trust	Dean Norton New York Farm Bureau
Narain Schroeder Berkshire Natural Resources Council	Eric Grace Genesee Valley Conservancy	Al Bettencourt Rhode Island Farm Bureau
Phil Korman Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture	Bill Bell Maine Association of Conservation Districts	Cindy Trahan-Liptak Rutland Land Conservancy P.O. Box 404 Rutland, MA 01543
Steve Reviczky Connecticut Farm Bureau	Jon Olson Maine Farm Bureau	
Henry Talmage Connecticut Farmland Trust	John Piotti Maine Farmland Trust	Kathy Orlando Sheffield Land Trust
Eric Hammerling Connecticut Forest and Park Association	Jennifer Ryan Massachusetts Audubon Society	Carolyn DeMoranville Southeastern Massachusetts Agricultural Partnership
Gordon Gibson Connecticut State Grange	Doug Gillespie Massachusetts Farm Bureau Federation	Linda Garrett Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust
Lynda Brushett Cooperative Development Institute	Bernie McHugh Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition	Jeanie McIntyre Upper Valley Land Trust
		Jackie Folsom

Vermont Farm Bureau

Gil Livingston
Vermont Land Trust

Robin Chesmer
Very Alive

Terry Jones
Working Lands Alliance

Barbara Hanley
Westport Agricultural
Commission

Barbara Hanley
Westport Agricultural & Open
Space Trust Fund Council
Town of Westport

Drew Shapiro
Wyoming County Department
of Planning and Development