

Reps. Sensenbrenner, Gallagher, and Duffy: Outline priorities for Wisconsin Dairy Farmers in letter to agriculture chairman

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CONTACT

Christopher Krepich, 202-225-5101

Washington, D.C.—Congressman Jim Sensenbrenner (R-WI-05), along with Congressmen Mike Gallagher (R-WI-08) and Sean Duffy (R-WI-07), sent a letter detailing 2018 Farm Bill policy priorities to House Agriculture Chairman Mike Conaway. Specifically, the letter calls for reforms to the Dairy Margin Protection Program, which provides producers with payments when dairy margins are below the margin coverage levels.

Congressman Sensenbrenner: “Americans across the heartland play a vital role in supplying our nation with fresh milk and other important agricultural products. As we begin crafting the upcoming Farm Bill, I will push to ensure programs, like the MPP-Dairy, are updated to become more responsive to the needs of Wisconsin dairy farmers. As a longtime supporter of the agricultural industry, I remain committed to working with my colleagues to see these issues addressed in the final legislation.”

Congressman Gallagher: “For too long hardworking farmers in Northeast Wisconsin and across the country have been paying into a program that does not give them the results they need. As Congress begins to debate the upcoming Farm Bill, I will work with my colleagues to improve the MPP-Dairy program so that it is effective in meeting the challenges farmers face in an increasingly volatile market.”

The full text is available below:

Dear Chairman Conaway:

As members who represent Wisconsin's vast dairy industry, we thank you for your early start to the 2018 Farm Bill process and we are grateful for your efforts to complete the bill on time. We appreciate your steadfast advocacy for rural America and your commitment to reforming dairy policy in the new Farm Bill.

As you know, Wisconsin is the second largest milk-producing state and is home to more dairy farms than any other in the nation. Wisconsin's roughly 9,500 family-owned dairy farms, totaling well over 1 million cows, produce roughly 14 percent of the U.S. milk supply each year. These farmers are the lifeblood of our communities and the fresh milk they produce supports many jobs in the agricultural and food manufacturing sectors of our state.

The dairy industry in Wisconsin and nationwide has faced significant struggles in recent years. Our current trade challenges with Canada are particularly acute in 'America's Dairyland', a major manufacturer of ultrafiltered milk, and our producers continue to struggle with labor costs and challenges. Moreover, milk prices deteriorated significantly last year, causing dairy farmers added pain during an already challenging climate.

With this in mind, a top priority for us in the Farm Bill is reforming the Margin Protection Program for Dairy (MPP-Dairy). While the program is fairly new, it has not performed to the expectations of our dairy farmers. In 2015 and 2016, the first two years of the program, dairy producers paid millions of dollars into the program but received very little return on this investment, even though last year was a very difficult year for our dairy farmers by all accounts.

Therefore, we look forward to working with you to improve MPP-Dairy to make it more responsive to farmers. We understand that the program's current feed cost formula does not fully reflect producer costs, so we are interested in improving the program to better reflect the margins producers face to provide them a viable safety net in the difficult years. We are also urging the U.S. Department of Agriculture to classify milk as a commodity under the federal crop insurance program, to provide producers with additional risk management options.

We recognize that there will be budgetary limitations in the Farm Bill process and we stand ready to work with you to craft a Farm Bill that supports all of rural

America. We appreciate your consideration and we are eager to work with you.
Sincerely,

Mike Gallagher
Member of Congress

Sean Duffy
Member of Congress

F. James Sensenbrenner
Member of Congress

A copy of the original letter can be found [here](#).