

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 8, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to urge you to quickly resolve technical problems with the Department's software used for making payments under the Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) program.

We understand from Vermont Farm Service Agency staff, that the Department began making MILC program payments for the month of February on April 1, 2009. However, soon thereafter, it became evident that the Department's software system for processing payments was encountering problems and the Department halted making MILC payments. In that short timeframe, approximately \$1.1 million in payments were distributed to Vermont producers. Unfortunately nearly the same amount of payments currently remains on hold due to the computer software issues.

As you know, since last summer the United States dairy industry has been grappling with a serious imbalance which threatens the stability and future of American dairy farmers. Falling domestic prices combined with high input costs have put an extraordinary strain on the entire dairy sector. In Vermont and across the nation, our dairy farmers face the prospect of losing money every time they milk a cow. Continued low prices could devastate not just dairy farmers and the dairy industry, but thousands of rural communities where agriculture and dairy are the primary economic engines.

The MILC program, along with the new feed cost adjuster and increased production cap, was enacted to bring much needed countercyclical assistance to dairy producers during these times of significant price depressions. We strongly urge the Department to move expeditiously to resolve the current software programs and distribute the remaining February MILC payments as soon as possible, our dairy farmers cannot afford to wait any longer.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



PETER WELCH
United States Representative