

November 10, 2022

Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. S.W
Washington DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

The Northeastern States are greatly concerned with the impact on organic dairy farm viability and profitability due to increases to the cost of production for the dairy industry - as well as all agricultural industries in 2022. Fuel prices, fertilizer prices, and organic grain prices, as well as drought conditions, are all hitting farmers in this region in unprecedented ways but are impacting organic dairy farms disproportionately and severely.

As Secretaries and Commissioners of State Departments of Agriculture in the Northeastern States, we are requesting your attention to organic dairy and livestock farmers adversely impacted by the price of organic soybeans and soybean meal. The price has doubled since 2021, and an international trade issue with India may be fueling this issue. As you know, farmers have little ability to offset high input prices, and there are few substitutes in the organic industry for soybean meal.

Many organic dairy farmers are expected to cease operations in 2022 and Q1 2023 due to these high input prices, with no forecast of price relief expected. Inflation is hitting organic dairy farmers hard on the input-side, and organic buyers feel they are unable to further increase prices of organic dairy products for consumers for fear of losing market share. Loss of market share for organic products will not assist the farmers in the long run. We understand that for many, these farms operate at a size that seems insignificant, but these farms are critical components of our rural communities and economies, as well as the co-benefits these farms provide regarding a climate-resilient future.

With this year's regional drought adversely affecting grazing and hay yields locally, some organic farmers will need to destock to make it through the winter with such significantly reduced yields on grazing and hayland and supplemental organic forage unavailable. If these farms cease operations, what will become of this open land with increasing climate-related human migration to the Northeast and subsequent residential development – development of farmland does not benefit the efforts of USDA to combat climate change. We are currently at active risk of losing the very farms that have implemented, sustain, and can now provide critical data for how to achieve and maintain some of the highest soil carbon stocks in the nation

The investment in the Northeast from the Northeast Dairy Business Innovation Center is deeply appreciated by our communities and respective states. It will help to improve infrastructure, on-farm efficiencies, and processing capacity, but these are all long-term projects; however, the

Dairy Business Innovation Center is not designed to address the immediate need for existing farms facing a milk price/grain cost squeeze.

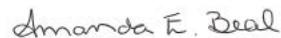
As Secretaries and Commissioners from the Northeastern States, we would strongly encourage you to find a means to offset the rising organic soybean meal prices through a form of emergency payment or other means to assist organic producers in the Northeast as well as throughout the country.

Please feel free to contact anyone in this group for specific information regarding the state of organic agriculture.

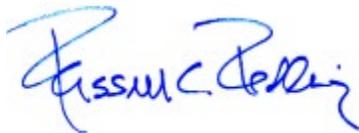
Sincerely,



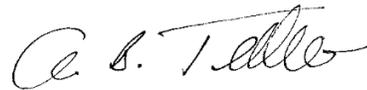
Commissioner Bryan Hurlbert
Connecticut Department of Agriculture



Commissioner Amanda Beal
Maine Department of Agriculture,
Conservation and Forestry



Secretary Russell Redding
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture



Secretary Anson Tebbetts
Vermont Agency of Agriculture,
Food and Markets