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SELECT COMMITTEE ON ETHICS

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 28, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As you know, our nation's dairy farmers are facing the worst prices in decades. The price of milk has continued to decline sharply while the cost of production has remained high, causing many dairy farmers to operate at a loss. I am concerned that without relief, a staggering number of our nation's dairy farms will be forced to shut down.

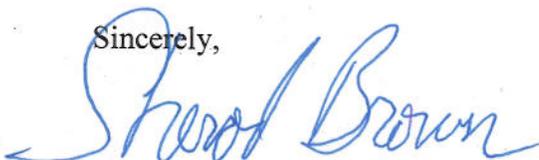
With more than 3,000 dairy farms, this sector is vital to Ohio's economy. The loss of these farms poses a huge risk to the rural communities in Ohio and throughout the nation where agriculture and dairy are the primary sources of income. In addition, as our domestic dairy industry continues to suffer, we become increasingly reliant on foreign imports.

To bolster our nation's dairy sector and increase the price of milk received by farmers, I urge you to temporarily increase purchase prices under the Dairy Price Support program. With the passage of the 2008 Farm Bill, Congress set the current purchase price levels, but gave the Department the authority to increase those prices if necessary. While I understand that this change will not entirely restore profitability to the domestic dairy industry, I am confident that it will ensure an immediate and vital safety net that will help keep many farmers afloat during this economic downturn.

In addition, I would like to reinforce my previous request to USDA to hold listening sessions in Ohio on the price of milk, the cost of feed and inputs, as well as the overall health of the dairy system. This would allow legislators and the Department to gain insight into the problems that dairy farmers and related professions are facing, so that we may properly address the situation.

Immediate action is necessary to avert this crisis, and I appreciate your prompt consideration of this request. I look forward to working with you to support dairy producers in Ohio and across the nation.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator