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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-3816

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The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
14th and Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

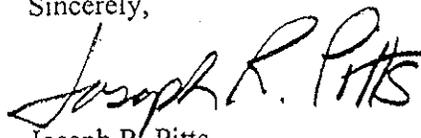
Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to ask for your careful review of proposals pending before the Department to eliminate the producer-handler exemption in all federal milk marketing order systems nationwide prior to initiating the requested administrative hearing. We have constituents who are producer-handlers. Their dairy operations provide important anchors of economic activity in our states, they provide significant numbers of good jobs, and support other businesses that have developed to supply their needs. These are always important to our state economies and especially so now in the current economic climate. Every job is valuable and every source of economic vitality important.

We understand that the intent of the proposals is to change national policy and federal regulations to outlaw these business operations on grounds that they create "disorderly marketing conditions." We are also aware that the national impact of these operations in the scale of U.S. dairy operations is very small - they account for 1.5 percent of milk production according to USDA statistics. We hope that you will require full examination of whether it is either appropriate or useful to spend scarce federal and private dollars beginning a formal rulemaking hearing on these proceeding focused on the activity of a variety of independent businesses constituting 1.5 percent of the market.

This is a matter of national significance that deserves policy attention by the new Administration. The Administration appointees with responsibility for these decisions have not yet been nominated or confirmed and the opportunity for them to consider this issue must be preserved. We urge you to work with all parties to find solutions to issues in the dairy industry that preserve competition, retain existing successful businesses and the jobs and communities they support in our states and support continued innovation.

Sincerely,



Joseph R. Pitts
Member of Congress

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