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The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

Thank you for your active partnership on behalf of America's food products and growers as well as the communities and individuals that are nourished by this partnership. The Tobacco Settlement Agreement Fund Oversight Committee has jurisdiction over matters pertaining to the Agricultural Development Board, which is charged with utilizing Master Settlement Agreement funds to establish short-term and long-term goals, and make investments that will assist farmers in the revitalization and diversification of Kentucky's tobacco farms. As co-chairs, and on behalf of the Tobacco Settlement Agreement Fund Oversight Committee, we are writing today about an area of concern in Kentucky. Many of our dairy producers are struggling as contracts have been unexpectedly cancelled this spring.

In particular, there is a significant economic crisis among dairy producers in Kentucky and other states with producers losing processing contracts quite suddenly, creating acute economic hardship, millions of gallons of fluid milk being dumped, and a clear challenge for dairy producers and their economic survival. This milk could easily be processed into fluid milk or other dairy products for donation through food banks. We urge you to look into this issue and take action to make purchases that will help our food banks continue to provide necessary food to families in our communities and provide an outlet for the fluid milk that producers no longer have a contract for.

Food banks are also struggling with less bonus commodities distributed through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) this year. As background, at this time last year, USDA had purchased over 93 million more pounds of surplus food for distribution through the TEFAP program than it has during the current fiscal year. This situation is causing severe hardships for many food banks and the 60,000 local agencies that depend on food banks for nutritious food to provide to families facing hunger. More importantly, this situation is having an impact on the quantity, quality and variety of foods available for low-income families and individuals.

Specifically, Kentucky has one of the highest hunger rates in the nation. Kentucky ranks 4th highest in summer hunger. Kentucky's food insecurity rate is 19.2%. Over 700,000 Kentuckians, or 1 in 6, are fed using food banks. One in five kids in Kentucky are fed using food banks. Last year, Kentucky food banks provided 63 million meals to food insecure persons. According to a 2014 Feeding America report, 53,400 Kentuckians were fed each week using food banks.

Fluid milk is one of the number one requested items at food banks, yet on average food banks only receive enough milk through donations or low-cost purchase opportunities to provide each client with one gallon of milk a year. This is far below the FDA's Recommended Daily Amount (RDA) and indicates a significant need in our communities.

Given the challenges U.S. farmers and ranchers are facing, as well as the numerous dairy producers that have milk production without a processing contract, we are confident that you can find opportunities to make purchases that may help farmers in need of support as well as hungry families. Food banks in Kentucky and across the country are depending on USDA to continue this commitment.

We appreciate your attention to this request, and we look forward to hearing from you regarding this issue.

Respectfully,



Myron Dossett, Co-Chairman
Tobacco Settlement Agreement Fund Oversight Committee



C.B. Embry, Jr., Co-Chairman
Tobacco Settlement Agreement Fund Oversight Committee