

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 1, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We recognize the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s work to sustain and promote U.S. agriculture production during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, many of our farmers and producers are still struggling with the seismic market shifts caused by the pandemic, and that includes organic farmers. These farmers need our help and our continued support. To that end, we write to urge the USDA to take immediate action to finalize the National Organic Program 'Origin of Livestock' Rule.

Family-run organic dairies are an important economic engine in rural communities across the country. However, we have heard from many of these family farms that they are being unfairly harmed by the loopholes that exist in the current rules for organic dairies. As you know, USDA issued a proposed rule to close the loopholes around the transitioning of conventional dairy cows into organic productions in 2015, but the rule was never finalized. Failure to close this loophole has allowed some producers to continuously cycle cows in and out of organic management, putting smaller producers in states like ours at a significant financial disadvantage and placing the integrity of the organic label at risk. These loopholes have contributed to an oversupply of milk in the market, have depressed organic dairy prices, and have diminished consumer confidence in the organic label as a whole.

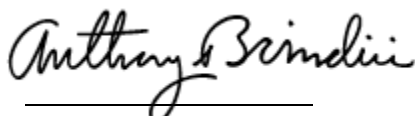
In order to preserve the viability of this sector and safeguard consumer trust in the organic label, organic producers and USDA-accredited organic certifiers must interpret and apply the organic standards uniformly. Congress, on a bipartisan and bicameral basis, included language in the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2020 directing USDA to finalize the Origin of Livestock Rule. This legislation was signed into law by President Trump on December 20, 2019 and stated:

*SEC. 756. Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Agriculture shall issue a final rule based on the proposed rule entitled "National Organic Program; Origin of Livestock," published in the Federal Register on April 28, 2015 (80 Fed. Reg. 23455): Provided, That the final rule shall incorporate public comments submitted in response to the proposed rule.*

The 180-day period that Congress provided USDA to finalize this rule has now closed without action from the agency. While we understand that demand for USDA services has increased during the pandemic, we urge the Department to immediately finalize the Origin of Livestock proposed rule, and in doing so demonstrate meaningful support for the economic stabilization and recovery of family-owned organic dairy farms. Further, we expect the final rule to reflect the widespread consensus among the organic community in support of the 2015 proposed rule.

Thank you for your full and fair consideration of our request, consistent with applicable statutes and regulations. We stand ready to assist you to continue serving our nation's farmers and producers.

Sincerely,



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Anthony Brindisi  
Member of Congress



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Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress



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Dan Newhouse  
Member of Congress