

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

November 04, 2009

Thomas Vilsack, Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Kathleen Merrigan, Deputy Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Secretary Vilsack and Deputy Secretary Merrigan:

As Members of Congress representing various regions of our nation's dairy farmers, we recognize and commend USDA for the efforts implemented this year in response to the severe financial stress being faced by America's dairy industry. Though the crisis persists, the assistance provided by USDA has provided urgently needed relief and has helped thousands of farmers stay in business.

While most of the focus has been on ways to increase milk prices and provide dairy farmers with additional revenues, we also are concerned about how to help dairy farmers avoid being squeezed by low prices and high costs in the future. With that in mind, one of the best strategies that farmers can adopt is to reduce operating costs. Skyrocketing feed prices remains one of the most significant factors driving up production costs, while decreasing profits. American agriculture has an enviable track record of innovation and adoption of new technology that helps farmers reduce costs and survive in an intensely competitive market.

Recently, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture adopted a resolution in regard to Roundup Ready alfalfa, which is a technological innovation still under environmental review by USDA, despite being approved by USDA in 2005. Many dairy farmers and alfalfa growers planted Roundup Ready alfalfa in 2006, and they now have nearly three years experience with the crop. In 2007, a federal judge ruled that USDA should have prepared a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on Roundup Ready alfalfa. As a direct result, further sales of the variety were suspended until the completion of the EIS. However, existing stands of Roundup Ready alfalfa were not affected by the ruling.

According to survey data and individual testimonials by those farmers, they have experienced a tremendous financial benefit through the use of Roundup Ready alfalfa. The additional production efficiency from it has resulted in reduced production costs, higher yields, and higher feed value. Those farmers have quantified the benefit to be in the range of \$100 per acre.

Roundup Ready alfalfa is considered a safe, effective, and well-accepted trait that delivers proven benefits to farmers. And dairy farmers, many of whom grow alfalfa hay for their own dairy cows, are eager to have access to this technology.

When ordered to conduct the EIS, USDA told the judge that it would take 18-24 months. 30 months later, the draft EIS still has not been published for public comment. On behalf of America's dairy farmers, we urge you to make the review of Roundup Ready alfalfa a priority for USDA and that you provide the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service with the resources needed to complete the process in time the 2010 planting season. This is just one particular step that we can take to help bring down feed costs and provide our nation's dairy farms with an additional form of relief.

Sincerely,



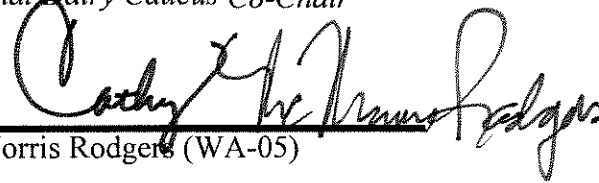
Glenn "GT" Thompson (PA-05)



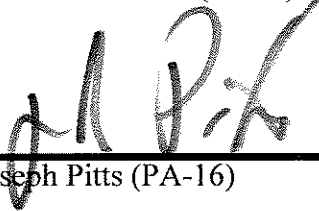
Joe Courtney (CT-02)  
*Congressional Dairy Caucus Co-Chair*



Leonard Boswell (IA-03)



Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA-05)



Joseph Pitts (PA-16)



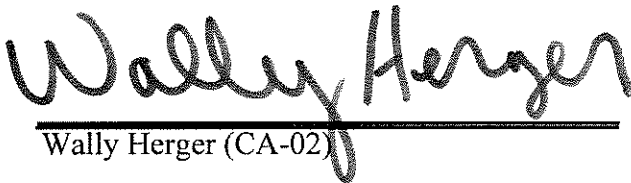
Tim Holden (PA-17)



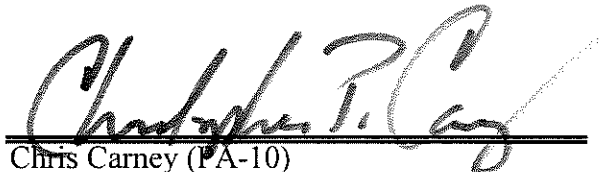
Michael Conaway (TX-11)



Bob Goodlatte (VA-17)



Wally Hergert (CA-02)



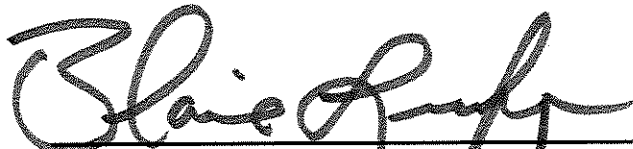
Chris Carney (PA-10)





Steve Austria (OH-07)





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