



News Release

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**NMPF CONGRATULATES NEW AGRICULTURE SECRETARY, URGES HIM
TO WORK TOWARD FINAL ADOPTION OF NEW FARM BILL**
Schafer Asked to Address Other Key Dairy Producer Priorities in Coming Year

ARLINGTON, VA – In a letter of congratulations to new Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer, the National Milk Producers Federation urged the former North Dakota Governor to work with leaders in the House, Senate and White House to complete the pending 2007 Farm Bill in the coming weeks.

Schafer, who was confirmed by the Senate and sworn in as the nation's 29th Agriculture Secretary on Monday, arrives at the position at a time when negotiations over the farm bill are at a critical phase. Unless the House and Senate can craft a compromise farm bill that the President will sign by mid-March, the temporary extension of the 2002 Farm Bill expires on March 15th, and several existing farm programs, such as the Milk Income Loss Contract and Environmental Quality Incentives programs, will end.

NMPF, in its letter to Schafer, said that "America's dairy farmers want this bill signed, sealed and delivered this year, rather than settling for an extension that could negate the many positive elements of the bills that have been approved by the House and Senate." Although the respective House and Senate bills are not identical, NMPF supports the general direction of dairy policy contained in them, and believes they represent an improvement over the policies of the 2002 Farm Bill.

NMPF is not interested in a status quo extension of current farm programs, said President and CEO Jerry Kozak, and would prefer that farm policy revert to the permanent law from 1949, which would be the default result if a new Farm Bill is not passed, or the existing one extended after March 15th.

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NMPF also asked the Secretary to work with the livestock industry on how to help dairy producers confront the soaring cost of production. Even though milk prices remain above historic averages, “the cost of making milk has grown stratospherically in the past year, and we need leadership in addressing the need to balance our energy and food policies so that both are abundant and affordable,” NMPF wrote. The key feed rations for dairy cattle – corn, soybeans and hay – are all at levels that threaten the economic health of all dairy farmers, Kozak said.

Along those lines, the dairy organization also asked Schafer to fully utilize all the USDA resources at his disposal to help stabilize dairy commodity prices at a time when prices are expected to turn down in 2008.

NMPF also commended Deputy Secretary Chuck Conner for his service as Acting Secretary during the transition between Mike Johann’s departure, and Schafer’s confirmation.

“USDA has been blessed with high-quality leadership during this critical period when we’ve been working on the Farm Bill, and Secretary Schafer and Deputy Secretary Conner will be a powerful team in the coming year,” Kozak said.

The National Milk Producers Federation, based in Arlington, VA, develops and carries out policies that advance the well being of dairy producers and the cooperatives they own. The members of NMPF’s 31 cooperatives produce the majority of the U.S. milk supply, making NMPF the voice of more than 40,000 dairy producers on Capitol Hill and with government agencies.

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