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Dairy Industry Applauds USDA Secretary Perdue for Supporting School Milk Options

Washington, D.C. – Dairy leaders thanked newly confirmed Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue for recognizing the important role school milk plays in ensuring school-aged children get the nutrition they need.

In one of his first actions as Secretary of Agriculture, Perdue visited Catoctin Elementary School in Leesburg, Va., to announce that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will implement regulations to allow school districts to again offer low-fat (1%) flavored milk as part of the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs. Under the Obama Administration, USDA eliminated low-fat flavored milk as an option in the school meal and a la carte programs. Since then, consumption of school milk declined, as did overall participation in the school lunch program.

“In just the first two years after low-fat flavored milk was removed from the program, 1.1 million fewer school students drank milk with their lunch,” said Jim Mulhern, president and CEO of the National Milk Producers Federation. “Secretary Perdue’s action today recognizes that a variety of milks and other healthy dairy foods are integral to child nutrition programs in schools.”

“Today Secretary Perdue took an important step toward bringing back lunchroom favorites – low-fat chocolate and strawberry milk – that students have been missing,” said J. David Carlin, senior vice president of legislative affairs and economic policy for the International Dairy Foods Association. “When kids don’t drink milk, it’s extremely difficult for them to get the proper amounts of calcium, potassium, Vitamin D and other nutrients that dairy foods supply.”

Perdue was joined in Virginia by Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts (R-KS). Throughout the visit, Perdue outlined principles to provide schools greater flexibility while maintaining the nutritional standards of the program.

“We would also like to thank Sen. Roberts for his efforts to bring more milk options and flexibility to the School Lunch and School Breakfast programs,” said Carlin. In the House, Reps. GT Thompson (R-PA) and Joe Courtney (D-CT) were also strong supporters of enhancing the milk options available to school kids.

USDA will publish an interim rule to cover the regulatory changes needed to allow low-fat flavored milk in schools. It is unclear when the change will be implemented.

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The National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), 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 cooperatives produce the majority of the U.S. milk supply, making NMPF the voice of dairy producers on Capitol Hill and with government agencies. For more on NMPF’s activities, visit our website at www.nmpf.org.

The International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA), Washington, D.C., represents the nation's dairy manufacturing and marketing industries and their suppliers with a membership of nearly 525 companies within a \$125-billion a year industry. IDFA is composed of three constituent organizations: the Milk Industry Foundation (MIF), the National Cheese Institute (NCI) and the International Ice Cream Association (IICA). IDFA's nearly 200 dairy processing members operate more than 600 manufacturing facilities and range from large multi-national organizations to single-plant companies. Together they represent more than 85 percent of the milk, cultured products, cheese, ice cream and frozen desserts produced and marketed in the United States. Visit IDFA at www.idfa.org.