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**Dairy Leaders Commend USDA for
Expanding School Milk Options**

Washington, D.C. – The nation’s two leading dairy organizations applauded Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue on Wednesday for allowing school districts to offer low-fat (1%) flavored milk as part of the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs. An interim final rule implementing the regulatory changes needed to reinstate low-fat flavored milk in schools was announced today on the [Federal Register](#) site and goes into effect for the 2018-2019 school year.

The regulation implements changes that Secretary Purdue proposed earlier this year to streamline the process by which schools can serve low-fat flavored milk without first obtaining a special exemption. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Agriculture eliminated low-fat flavored milk as an option in the school meal and a la carte programs, which resulted in a large drop in milk consumption in schools. Students consumed 288 million fewer half-pints of milk from 2012-2015, even though public school enrollment was growing.

"We appreciate the Secretary’s understanding that the regulatory process needed to move quickly so schools may include low-fat favored milk in their menu planning and procurement processes," said Michael Dykes, D.V.M., president and CEO of the International Dairy Foods Association (IDFA). "Today’s action will help reverse declining milk consumption by allowing schools to provide kids with access to a variety of milk options, including the flavored milks they enjoy."

"Secretary Perdue’s willingness to provide greater flexibility to schools recognizes that a variety of milks and other healthy dairy foods is critically important to improving the nutritional contributions of child nutrition programs in schools," said Jim Mulhern, president and CEO of the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF). "The math here is quite simple: More milk consumption equals better nutrition for America’s kids."

Earlier this year, Congress passed the FY 2017 omnibus appropriations bill that included provisions to allow schools to offer low-fat flavored milk. In addition, Reps. Glenn Thompson (R-PA) and Joe Courtney (D-CT) have introduced legislation, the School Milk Nutrition Act, to expand the ability of schools to offer various milk options. Their ongoing efforts in Congress have led to a greater awareness of the milk shortfall challenge in schools that today's USDA action begins to address.

In a joint letter last June, IDFA and NMPF urged Secretary Perdue to quickly finalize plans for low-fat flavored milk's return to school menus for the 2018-2019 school year.

The publication of the interim final rule will allow school districts to solicit bids for low-fat flavored milk next spring before the 2018-19 school year begins, giving milk processors time to formulate and produce a low-fat flavored milk that meets the specifications of a particular school district. The USDA action now allows schools to offer low-fat flavored milk during the next school year without requiring schools to demonstrate either a reduction in student milk consumption, or an increase in school milk waste.

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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.