

October 7, 2009

Washington, DC – Today, Rep. Ben Ray Luján took action to fight for dairy farmers, voting for the Agriculture Appropriations Act that will protect dairy farmers against price fluctuations for necessities. The bill also includes aid for dairy farmers who are struggling with historically low prices. A member of the Congressional Dairy Caucus, Rep. Luján has sent several letters to the administration, urging action on the current dairy price crisis. The bill passed by a vote of 263 to 162. Once it is passed by the Senate, the Agriculture Appropriations Act will go onto the President's office to be signed into law.

“The dairy industry in New Mexico is very important to local economies,” said Rep. Luján. “One dollar translates to 4 or 5 dollars as dairy products move through the local economy. This means jobs for small business throughout my district and the state. The dairy crisis has had tragic consequences for many of my constituents, and this has been the reality for producers throughout the country. Since coming to Congress, I have worked with my colleagues to help struggling dairy farmers in my district. It is important that we continue to advocate for the needs of dairy farmers, particularly during these difficult times.”

Rep. Luján joined the Dairy Caucus to advocate for the dairies in New Mexico's 3rd Congressional District.

“Long-term sustainability of the milk industry and the nation’s milk infrastructure is crucial to sustaining the economic livelihoods of thousands of rural communities across the country, including those right here in New Mexico,” said Rep. Luján.

In addition to voting for today’s legislation, Rep. Luján has also sent several letters to the Administration on issues related to assistance for dairies during the price crisis.

Letter to Peter Orzag, Director, Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

In a letter dated July 29th, 2009 that outlined the severe drop in prices, Rep. Luján discussed the seriousness and magnitude of the situation -- urging action be taken immediately to provide relief under the Dairy Price Product Support Program.

Letter to Lawrence Starfield, Acting Regional Director, US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

In a letter dated September 1st, 2009, Rep. Luján asked EPA region 6 to allow an extension of the Nutrient Management Plan (NMP) for existing permit holders because of the current price crisis. While farmers work to comply with environmental regulations, the current crisis makes it almost impossible for dairies to comply in the 90-day time frame. If this request were granted, they would be able to complete plans within an additional 90 days.

Letter to Secretary Tom Vilsack, US Department of Agriculture (USDA)

In a letter dated September 29th, 2009, Rep. Luján asked Secretary Vilsack to re-evaluate the current Dairy Pricing System and create a competitive pricing system using a Dairy Pricing Advisory group, ensuring that policies enhance the competitiveness of American dairy farmers in the U.S. and world markets.

Letter to Secretary Tom Vilsack, USDA

In a letter dated October 1st, 2009, Rep. Luján advocated for the Fiscal Year 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Conference Report, which included \$350 million in emergency relief funds for dairy farmers across the country. Rep. Luján joined Senators and Members of Congress to send this letter to Secretary Vilsack.

