

Pingree, Molinaro Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Support Organic Dairy Farmers

As organic dairies in Maine continue to face dire economic circumstances, Pingree's bipartisan bill will help USDA better target federal relief

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Congresswoman Chellie Pingree, a longtime organic farmer and member of the House Agriculture Committee, and Congressman Marc Molinaro (R-N.Y.) today introduced bipartisan legislation to support organic dairy farmers in Maine and across the country. The *Organic Dairy Data Collection Act* would enhance data collection at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to better understand the costs associated with producing organic milk.

"International trade challenges, adverse weather, and skyrocketing organic feed costs have created a dire economic situation for organic dairy farmers across the U.S. These unsustainable circumstances could lead to farm closures, reduced competition, and ultimately, limited consumer choice," **said Pingree**. "These unique challenges require tailored solutions. My and Congressman Molinaro's bipartisan *Organic Dairy Data Collection Act* will ensure USDA can better understand and address the challenges organic dairies face. As the Agriculture Committee and I continue our work on the upcoming Farm Bill, I am hopeful we can include this targeted solution to support the organic dairy sector and strengthen the role of organics in the marketplace for years to come."

"The USDA collects pricing and production cost data so dairy farmers can have access to competitive markets, keep a pulse on industry challenges, account for feed costs, and make accurate decisions with reliable information. Unfortunately, this same data isn't available to organic dairy farmers. New York is one of the top states in organic production and during my farm bill listening sessions I have heard firsthand from organic dairy farmers about the uncertainty they experience," **said Molinaro**. "I am

proud to introduce the bipartisan Organic Dairy Data Collection Act to give organic farmers the data they need to make smart decisions for their farm and family."

The bipartisan *Organic Dairy Data Collection Act*:

- Directs USDA to collect and publish cost-of-production data for organic milk, including the costs of major organic feedstuffs, domestically produced or imported.
- Directs USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) to gather and report monthly data about the amounts that organic dairy farmers are being paid for organic milk.
- Directs USDA NASS, the Economic Research Service (ERS) or Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to publish reports on the cost of production data by state, regional data on the quantity of organic milk production and prices.

This legislation is supported by the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, Organic Trade Association, Organic Farmers Association, National Organic Coalition, Organic Farming Research Foundation, Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance and Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance.

"Improved organic data collection and reporting, bolstered by this bill, is going to provide more reliable and consistent information on organic dairy production costs and markets. The reality is that this type of information can vary region by region so this effort can help farmers like me plan for the year and make decisions on what actions I need to take on my organic dairy," **said Annie Watson, Organic Valley farmer-member and owner of Sheepscot Valley Farm in Whitefield, Maine.** "Representative Pingree continues her life's work to advance organic agriculture with this bill – big thanks to her and Representative Molinaro for introducing this targeted but meaningful bipartisan legislation."

"We are thankful to Congresswoman Pingree and Congressman Molinaro for taking the lead and acknowledging the lack of data we have accessible for organic dairies. This is a nationwide issue affecting organic dairy farmers of all sizes and backgrounds. Our hope is that this information becomes the conduit to many necessary conversations that the sustainability and succession of our industry hinges upon," **said Lia Sieler, Executive Director of the Western Organic Dairy Producers Alliance.**

"Family run organic dairy farms provide healthy food and environmental stewardship to rural communities across the country. The Organic Dairy Data Collection Act can provide valuable data collection to inform future support for an industry facing economic crisis," **said Kate Mendenhall, Executive Director of Organic Farmers Association.** "We applaud Representatives Pingree and Molinaro for championing this important work."

"The famous business adage "You can't manage what you don't measure" applies to the organic dairy market. The Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance supports the Organic Dairy Data Collection Act as it will provide that necessary measurement by requiring the collection and publication of data that will shed light on the state of the organic dairy sector. Representative Pingree's leadership with this Act will help facilitate understanding and improvement in the market," **said Kathie Arnold, a New York organic dairy farmer and chair of the Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance's policy committee.**

"Organic dairy producers and consumers in Maine and across the country are grateful to Representative Pingree for her introduction of the Organic Dairy Data Collection Act," **said Sarah Alexander, Executive Director of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA).** "A perfect storm of adverse effects, including escalating costs of production, low pay-prices, a labor shortage, unstable international supply chains, and dramatically shifting weather patterns have created a crisis for the organic dairy sector. This legislation is a critical component of an urgently needed rescue plan for organic dairy. Having a clear national picture of all costs associated with organic dairy production in each state, regional production data and pay prices will help ensure that technical and financial assistance goes where it is needed most."

"Farmers, like all business managers, depend on solid and trustworthy data to make decisions. With the continued fluctuations in market conditions from global events impacting domestic organic dairy farmers, it is more important than ever for producers, stakeholders, and USDA to have

access to accurate data. The Organic Trade Association is grateful for the vision and work of Reps. Pingree and Molinaro in introducing this important legislation, which will result in better and more useful regional organic dairy data collecting and reporting. We look forward to working with the sponsors in the House of Representatives to ensure its passage,” **said Matthew Dillon, Co-CEO of the Organic Trade Association.**

As a member of the House Agriculture Committee, Pingree is working to support Maine dairy farmers in the [upcoming Farm Bill](#). She [recently called on](#) the USDA to support organic dairy farmers in Maine and across the country as they continue to face environmental and economic challenges. In December 2023, [the House passed *Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act*](#), which Pingree co-sponsored, to help students thrive at school and support local dairy farmers and local economies.