

Washington, DC -- Congressman Michael A. Arcuri (D-Utica) and Congressman John M. McHugh (R-Pierrepont Manor) announced today that they have introduced legislation in the House of Representatives specifically targeted to help dairy farmers in New York and across the country secure the workers they need to help their farms remain viable. Specifically, the Dairy and Sheep H-2A Visa Enhancement Act, HR. 1660, would provide dairy farmers with access to the H-2A visa program and codify the longstanding practices that allow sheepherders such access.

“Success of the agricultural industry is critical to the Upstate New York economy,” **Arcuri said**. “Many local dairy farms are family run and have been part of our communities for generations. The dairy industry isn’t seasonal – cows need to be milked every day, all year round. We cannot expect our local dairy famers to survive without a reliable, legal supply of workers. I’m proud to join with John McHugh in supporting legislation that will keep the Upstate New York dairy industry strong and competitive, so that we can continue our region’s long tradition of feeding families across the country.”

“As a lifelong resident of Northern New York, I know how critical our dairy farms and families are to our economy and the fabric of our local communities. My Congressional District has approximately 2,000 dairy farms, and these farmers have repeatedly told me that their livelihood is threatened by the inability to access a stable, legal workforce. Coupled with a steep decline in milk prices, it is clear dairy farmers need Congress and the federal government to act now,” **said McHugh**.

“This program would be a significant first step in the much-needed farm labor reform process, and I am committed to continuing to fight for New York’s farmers.”

The Dairy and Sheep H-2A Visa Enhancement Act would codify the ability of American dairy farms and sheep ranchers to use the H-2A visa program, which they currently cannot access. If adopted, H.R. 1660 would allow the workers on dairy farms and sheep ranches to obtain an initial three year visa, which could be extended for additional three year periods without requiring intervening periods of absence. Currently, dairy farms are unable to access the H-2A program due to its “temporary or seasonal in nature” employment requirements.

Increasingly, the U.S. dairy industry is relying on a workforce that is born outside of the United States. Dairy farmers have long overcome natural disasters and wide farm price fluctuations, such as the current nearly 50 percent decline in the price of milk from one year ago. However, these difficulties are exacerbated by labor shortages, which not only cause farms to remain

static in size or shrink but often are the final impetus for a decision to end a way of life and go out of business. According to an analysis completed by the Farm Credit Associations of New York, over 445 New York dairy farms are highly vulnerable to this situation.

This legislation is currently supported by the following entities: Agri-Mark, Inc.; American AgCredit; American Sheep Industry Association; California Wool Growers Association; CoBank; Colorado Wool Growers Association; Dairy Farmers of America; Dairylea Cooperative Inc.; Farm Credit Services Southwest; Farm Credit of Western New York; Farm Credit West; Federal Land Bank Association of Kingsburg; First Pioneer Farm Credit; Idaho ACA; Idaho Wool Growers Association; Maryland & Virginia Milk Producers; Montana Wool Growers Association; National Milk Producers Federation; Nevada Wool Growers Association; New York Farm Bureau; Northeast Dairy Farmers Cooperatives; Northwest Farm Credit Services; Oregon Sheep Growers Association; St. Albans Cooperative Creamery; South East Farmers Association; Upstate-Niagara Cooperative; Utah Wool Growers Association; Washington State Sheep Producers; Western Range Association; Western United Dairymen; Wyoming Wool Growers Association; Yankee Farm Credit; and Yosemite Farm Credit.

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