

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 16, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Michael Conaway
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
2430 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow, Chairman Conaway, and Ranking Member Peterson:

As you finalize the 2018 Farm Bill, I write to urge you to include strong investments in programs that support economic development through local food systems, promote innovative production techniques and expand markets for American agricultural products. Wisconsin farmers are facing an extremely difficult economic landscape due to years of low prices for major products, especially milk. Small farms have felt the economic pressure particularly deeply, and Wisconsin has lost over 580 dairy farms so far this year, most of which are small operations that have been in the family for generations.

Addressing the current confluence of economic challenges for farmers requires a range of solutions. Initiatives like the Beginning Farmer and Rancher program that help the next generation get started in farming are crucial. Expanding markets and providing opportunities for farmers to diversify and add value to their products is also important to sustain these farms and mitigate the impact of low commodity prices. Programs like the Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program help entrepreneurial farmers create new products and start businesses that increase the value of their agricultural products. I ask for your strong support for these critical programs in the final bill.

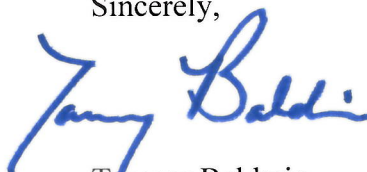
Innovative producers represent a growing segment of Wisconsin's agricultural sector, and these farmers, along with small-scale and specialty operations, need access to local markets where their unique products are in demand. However, in many areas distribution networks for these products are inadequate. Programs that help connect products from farmers and emerging food businesses with consumers are critical to helping these new entrepreneurs build their businesses. The Local Agricultural Market Program (LAMP), included in the Senate Farm Bill, is an

important provision to spur agriculture economic development, leverage private investment in rural businesses, and connect producers with potential consumers of their products. In order to ensure our rural economy keeps growing, the final bill must include robust investments in this key economic development effort.

Growing techniques are evolving, and federal resources must also evolve to meet farmers' needs. By growing food close to where it is eaten, innovative and urban farmers contribute to food access and economic development in our communities. Yet USDA programs are not meeting their unique needs. Many farmers lack clean soil. Others lack information on optimal growing techniques and varieties for non-traditional operations. Given the increasingly important role of urban and innovative farming, I urge you to maintain the provisions from the Urban Agriculture Act included in the Senate Farm Bill that aim to address the pressing unmet needs of producers in urban areas and those using innovative growing methods.

As our farmers and rural communities face strong economic headwinds and the challenges of uncertain markets, it is crucial we continue to invest in tools for farmers and agriculture entrepreneurs to continue to innovate and keep our agriculture economy strong and our communities healthy. Thank you for your attention to these important priorities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Tammy Baldwin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tammy" and last name "Baldwin" clearly distinguishable.

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator