

SUSAN M. COLLINS
MAINE

413 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904
(202) 224-2523
(202) 224-2693 (FAX)

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1904

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October 25, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

I am writing to request an update from you about the actions that the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) intends to take to support farmers who have experienced PFAS contamination. On October 18, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released its PFAS Strategic Roadmap, which details planned actions for that Agency's work to address PFAS. Notably, however, EPA's Roadmap does not incorporate coordination with USDA or assistance to farmers who have been affected by PFAS contamination.

In 2016, a dairy farmer in Arundel, Maine, discovered the milk produced by his cows was tainted by PFAS contamination. The cow's milk from this family farm contained some of the highest levels ever reported for a PFAS contaminant, and PFAS were also found at raised levels in both the drinking water on the farm and in a nearby public water supply well. Unfortunately, this problem is being discovered at additional dairy farms across the state. In 2020, a dairy farm located in Fairfield, Maine, found PFAS levels that were 153 times higher than Maine's standard for determining whether milk is fit for sale. The PFAS contamination on both of these farms came from wastewater sludge spread as fertilizer and has prevented these farms from selling products. The discovery of PFAS contamination has caused financial hardship for these Maine farms and concern amongst the broader dairy and agricultural community. Additionally, it has strained the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry's resources as there is little federal aid available to assist farms facing a PFAS problem.

I raised this issue with you before your confirmation, and again during a Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee hearing in June 2021. During these conversations, you assured me that PFAS contamination is a high priority for USDA. Some press reports indicate that USDA is considering changes to the Dairy Indemnity Program to make it easier for farms to recover following the discovery of PFAS, but there has been no action taken thus far. I am seeking an update from you about USDA's plans to assist farmers who have experienced PFAS contamination, and how USDA's actions may fit within EPA's Roadmap.

I appreciate your attention to this issue. I look forward to receiving this information on behalf of farmers in Maine and across the country whose livelihoods have been disrupted due to PFAS contamination.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

CC: Michael Regan, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency