

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2204

October 1, 2004

The Honorable Ann Veneman
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

We are writing to express our deep concern about a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) briefing presented to the American Dairy Producers Institute on April 20, 2004, which suggests that the USDA is considering a new "milk tax" and a cut in the dairy price support. We are extremely disturbed by this proposal and that USDA officials would present such a partisan document.

The presentation, which bears the name of the USDA's Office of the Chief Economist, outlines the USDA's goals and objectives, which, according to this presentation, includes maximizing votes in major dairy states. It is not the responsibility of the USDA to "maximize votes" in California, Wisconsin, Minnesota, New York, and our home state of Michigan.

Further, the presentation acknowledges the record budget deficit and explains that the administration's answer is a new milk tax on America's dairy farmers and the possible termination of the Milk Income Loss Contract, a program which assists many of America's dairy farmers. Any effort to maximize votes in certain dairy states at the expense of America's dairy farmers is wrong and counter to the actual goals and objectives of the Department of Agriculture.

Michigan's dairy farmers look to the USDA to provide farm and business support and to ensure a fair price on their product, not to use tax dollars for partisan purposes. It is unacceptable for the USDA to deceive dairy farmers and consumers by implementing harmful policies for political purposes. We urge you to disassociate the USDA with these policy objectives or explain these calls for new milk taxes and milk support price cuts.

Sincerely,


Debbie Stabenow


Carl Levin