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FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative Approves of Senate Introduction of Ocean Shipping Reform Act

Madison, Wis. [February 4, 2022] – FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative is elated by the recent introduction in the U.S. Senate of the Ocean Shipping Reform Act. The bipartisan supported bill will help relieve congestion and other challenges being experienced at U.S. ports, which has negatively impacted nearly every corner of U.S. manufacturing.

“Port challenges have continued to plague supply chains and have cost us greatly, making this legislation incredibly important, for everyone,” says John Rettler, dairy farmer from Neosho, Wis. and president of FarmFirst. “While this issue has a far-reaching impact, dairy alone has so much to lose. The U.S. dairy industry has worked hard to build our reputation as a supplier of high-quality dairy products around the globe and experiencing congestion at our nation’s ports puts these valuable export relationships at risk. The burden of these delays is taking its toll, with over \$1.3 billion in export losses being recognized from January 2021 through September 2021.”

Issues being felt at our nation’s ports stem from challenges securing shipping containers which are also accompanied by record-high fees. The Senate bill mirrors a similar House version, also known as the Ocean Shipping Reform Act (HR 4996), which passed by a wide margin (364-60) in December.

The introduction of the Senate legislation will serve to level the playing field for American exporters by making it harder for ocean carriers to unreasonably refuse goods ready to export at ports. The bill also gives the Federal Maritime Commission (FMC) greater rulemaking authority to prevent harmful and discriminatory practices by carriers and requires carriers to report how many empty containers they are transporting. In addition, the bill directs the FMC to set rules on what fees carriers can reasonably charge shippers.

“The issue has gone on long enough, and it is time for action to be taken. Over the last two years, agricultural exporters have lost 22 percent of sales. How much more has to be lost at the expense of agriculture?” says Rettler.

FarmFirst commends our Upper Midwest senators who cosponsored the bill, including Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), John Thune (R-SD), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Gary Peters (D-MI), Todd Young (R-IN) and Jodi Ernst (R-IA).

FarmFirst has been advocating on this issue from the moment it started, and recently signed a letter with 77 other dairy cooperatives, companies and organizations to emphasize the impact such reforms could have on the U.S. dairy industry. The letter was sent to Congressional leaders on Dec. 8.

FarmFirst looks forward to working with other industry partners in continued advocacy efforts and legislation reform to alleviate the ongoing dilemma affecting our supply chains.

FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative, established in 2013 and based in Madison, Wis., represents farmers in Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, Michigan, Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana by providing legislative and regulatory advocacy, dairy marketing services, disaster protection, laboratory testing opportunities and industry promotion. Learn more about FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative by visiting: www.FarmFirstDairyCooperative.com.

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