

April 29, 2024

The Honorable Thomas Stevens
Chair
House Committee on General and Housing
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 056333-5301

Dear Chair Stevens:

On behalf of Dairy Farmers of America, Inc. (DFA) and its 263 farmer-owners and 205 employees in Vermont, we join others in expressing concern with S. 102, an act relating to expanding employment protections and collective bargaining rights. The legislation, drafted with little input from the agricultural community, removes the agricultural exemption from collective bargaining without consideration of the unique nature of food production, especially dairy, which is highly perishable.

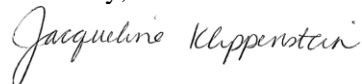
DFA is a national dairy marketing cooperative that serves and is owned by 11,000 dairy farmers on nearly 6,000 farms. As the nation's most diverse manufacturer of dairy products with 82 processing facilities across 33 states and supported by nearly 19,000 employees, we take seriously our responsibility to provide safe, high-quality, and nutritious milk and other dairy products to consumers around the country.

For years, the agriculture sector has faced and had to manage around labor shortages. For the dairy industry, this issue is exacerbated by the year-long, 24-hour needs of a dairy farm which includes 2 or 3 time-a-day milkings as well as activities to maintain herd health. Skilled laborers who have experience with large animals and the unique challenges of dairy farms are in short supply. To retain their workforce, dairy farmers strive to maintain competitive wages, safe and healthy conditions and to provide meaningful benefits. Additionally, the dairy industry has invested in tools and in partnerships to enhance dairy farmer knowledge of important workplace issues as well as best practices to foster better communication with employees as well as to address compliance issues.

Crafting legislation which changes the landscape of one of the state's most important industries requires the engagement of all of the impacted stakeholders. The unintended consequences of passage of a bill without engagement of those most impacted has the potential to lead to challenges in the state's food production system and may have a negative impact to animal health, among other issues.

This legislation may have critical and unintended consequences on the state's dairy industry. We urge its reconsideration.

Sincerely,



Jackie Klippenstein
Senior Vice President, Chief Government and Industry Relations Officer

