

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 15, 2008

The Honorable Ed Schafer
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250-0001

Dear Secretary Schafer:

We are writing to request that USDA complete the 8.1 million pound purchase of red tart cherries for use in domestic nutrition programs announced by Acting Secretary Conner on January 8, 2008. The timing of this necessary purchase is absolutely critical, and we request that it happen as soon as possible to remove surplus cherries before the close of the current crop year on June 30, 2008.

The industry has an unmanageable surplus of red tart cherries and gratefully received the January news that USDA would purchase up to 8.1 million pounds of cherry products. To date, USDA has purchased 5.5 million pounds of finished product. We ask that USDA purchase at least an additional 3 million pounds of red tart cherry products in fulfillment of its stated purchase intent. We understand that a USDA purchase of dried cherries would be particularly helpful as it would remove the maximum amount of raw product from the surplus – approximately 15 million pounds – as well as providing additional commodities for the National School Lunch Program, TEFAP and CSFP.

International market sales this year are flat even with a Euro that is valued at almost \$1.60 US along with the Yen which dipped below 100 Yen to the US dollar this month. The freight advantage along with the duty-free access the European cherry producers enjoy have made US cherries non-competitive in this market. The lack of export sales will put the cherry industry in a secondary inventory position on July 1, 2008 unless additional sales are made to USDA soon.

The cherry industry is self regulated, in conjunction with USDA, through a Marketing Order. Should the industry enter a new crop year with a significant surplus, cherries would be relegated to the secondary reserve under the Marketing Order. Cherries held in the secondary reserves cannot be withdrawn until all primary reserve cherries are released. The projected cost to the industry of the secondary reserves alone is \$12.2 million in the first year and \$4.2 million each year thereafter. Costs such as these will severely impact grower returns for the current year, and the presence of a secondary reserve will adversely impact next season's harvest.

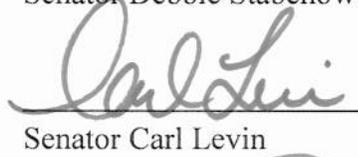
Weather conditions in cherry growing regions have been ideal for a large crop this summer. While this is good news for cherry growers and processors, a large crop in 2008, combined with a substantial carryover surplus would have a devastating effect on price and local economies dependent on the cherry industry. For this reason, it is critical that a purchase of at least 3 million pounds of dried or other tart cherry products take place before June 2008.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our request, which will support an important industry in our states and provide a nutritious fruit commodity for school children and families in need. We look

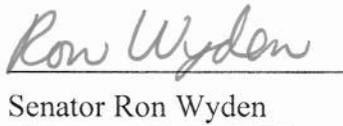
forward to our continued work together to enhance and expand American agriculture.

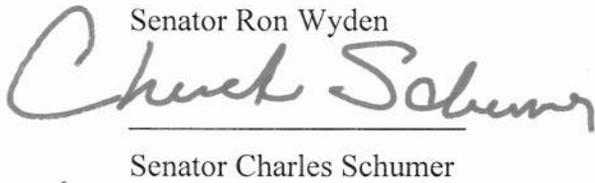
Sincerely,

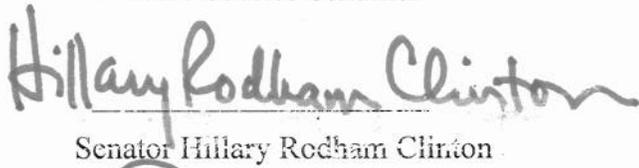

Senator Debbie Stabenow

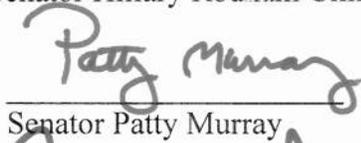

Senator Carl Levin

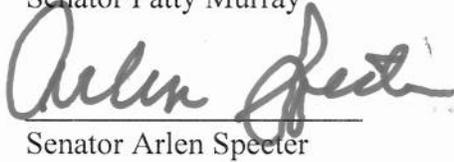

Senator Russ Feingold

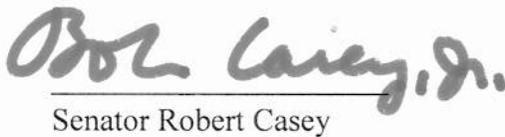

Senator Ron Wyden

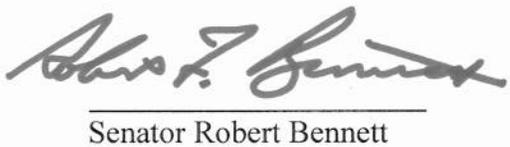

Senator Charles Schumer


Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton

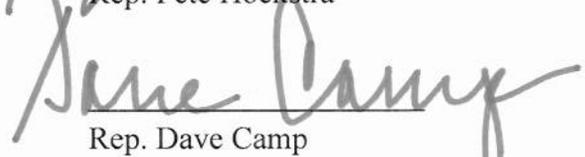

Senator Patty Murray

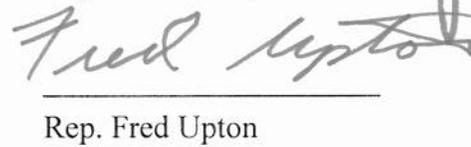

Senator Arlen Specter

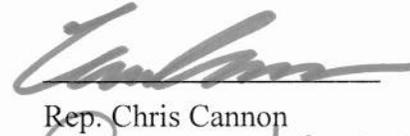

Senator Robert Casey

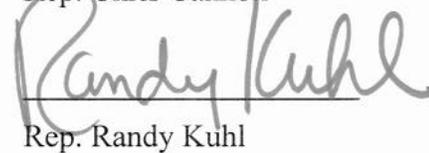

Senator Robert Bennett


Rep. Pete Hoekstra


Rep. Dave Camp

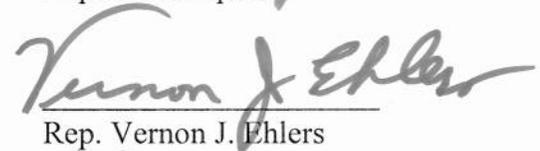

Rep. Fred Upton

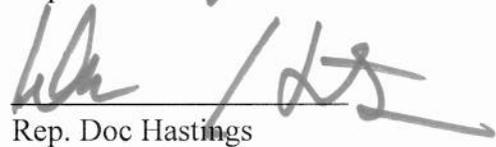

Rep. Chris Cannon

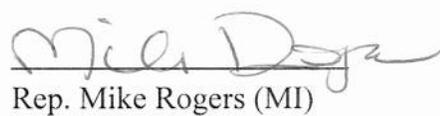

Rep. Randy Kuhl

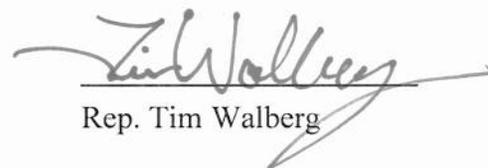

Rep. Rob Bishop


Rep. Bart Stupak


Rep. Vernon J. Ehlers


Rep. Doc Hastings


Rep. Mike Rogers (MI)


Rep. Tim Walberg