

Natural Resources Conservation Service
New Hampshire



Senator Jeanne Shaheen meets with NH Dairy Farmers

By Kimberly Zaleski

September 21, 2018, Stratham, NH - United States Senator Jeanne Shaheen met with local dairy farmers at the Stuart Farm to listen to their concerns as well as discuss the pending Farm Bill. Stuart Farm is owned and operated by former NH Commissioner of Agriculture, Lorraine Merrill and her husband John Merrill.

The discussion centered on the problems that dairy farmers are facing due to an increase in production costs and a decrease in milk prices. Senator Shaheen spoke of the Margin Protection Program ([MPP](#)), administered by the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), that she helped establish and fund after several dairy farms closed in New Hampshire. The MPP- Dairy program offers protection to dairy producers when the difference between the all milk price and the average feed cost (the margin) falls below a certain dollar amount selected by the producer. The program helps dairy farmers offset some of the loss they were facing as a result of increased production costs and falling milk prices.

Although the Farm Bill has supported large and small dairy farms in the past, the amount of funding for small dairy farms will receive under the new Farm Bill is still being negotiated in Congress. Senator Shaheen said one of the biggest challenges NH faces is competing for federal funds against the larger farms in the Midwest and West, which grow large commodities such as cotton.

Lorraine Merrill added, “The Farm Bill is important to us because, as a dairy farm, we have to prevent against market risk and FSA programs significantly help with that.” In addition, she said, “Conservation programs, like those offered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), are extremely important to New Hampshire farmers. NRCS conservation easement programs help protect the little farm land we have left from development,” she said. “NRCS technical and financial assistance programs are also crucial to maintaining and improving agricultural resources like water and soil quality which helps farms keep up with the costs of operating and producing successfully. There is so little money and the practices cost more and more; we need more help,” she said. Rick Ellsmore, State Conservationist with NRCS added, “The number of live-stock applications for our Environmental Quality Incentives Program ([EQIP](#)) are at an all-time low as a result of the financial distress in the dairy sector.”



Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Lorraine Merrill, Owner Stuart Farm



From Left: Jeff Holmes, Executive Director Farm Service Agency, Rick Ellsmore, NRCS State Conservationist, Dennis Ward, President NH Farm Bureau, Nate Merrill, Dairy Farmer, Sara Holmes, State Director Senator Jean Shaheen's office, John Merrill, Owner Stuart Farm, Catherine Deronde, Agri-Mart, Lorraine Merrill, Owner Stuart Farm, Senator Jeanne Shaheen

“The issue is that NH is a high income, small state and we’re at the bottom with regards to grant formulas; farmers don’t always meet the requirements to receive Farm Bill assistance,” said Shaheen. “I know that recent efforts of legislators are seeking to emphasize the needs of dairy farmers in the Farm Bill, and if passed, would make it easier for dairy farmers to run a sustainable operation, and I also think the legislators are beginning to realize the importance of the dairy industry,” she added.

In response to a question about the trade tariffs that have recently been imposed by the Senator Shaheen said, “There is a lot of bipartisan opposition to the tariffs. Negotiations continue on The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).”

“I came here for some guidance on what you, the farmers, think are the most important concerns; what we should be pushing for, and I will continue my efforts in supporting the NH dairy farmers,” added Shaheen.