

**Testimony of****Linda Lopes, California Dairy Producer****November 10, 2015**

**My name is Linda Lopes and I am a dairy producer from Turlock, California where my husband and I own and operate a 500 cow dairy operation for 48 years. We ship our milk to California Dairies, Inc. I currently serve as president of the California Dairy Women and a member of California Dairy Campaign, California Farmers Union, Progressive Agriculture Organization, the National Family Farm Coalition and California Milk Advisory Board.**

**I greatly appreciate the opportunity to testify here today in strong support of the federal order proposal put forward by California Dairies, Inc., Dairy Farmers of America, Inc., and Land of Lakes. An important aspect of the proposal is to maintain our state quota system. I realize the proposal will not solve all the problems of the California dairy producer but it is a start.**

**I do not claim to be an expert on milk pricing but I am in charge of the financial business of the dairy operation. This job has been very difficult. I have become an expert in balancing the check book and knowledgeable in the businesses income and expenses. I know that we are not covering cost of production. Our dairy has been on CDFA's cost study for over 20 years and I know the majority of the dairies have been losing money.**

**In the past 15 years I have testified many times at California Department of Food and Agriculture in order to correct this bad situation only to be granted pennies or nothing. I had high hopes when Karen Ross was appointed Secretary of Ag. I thought she would be a change. She wasn't. She has been the biggest disappointment for California Dairy women. She has done nothing of significance for California dairymen.**

**The California dairy business is at this moment disintegrating before our eyes. I hear from many distressed dairy wives who say they cannot take this constant pressure much longer. Thousands of cows have been sold for beef. We have lost many dairies, many dairymen, and some committing suicide. The dairy industry in California has split many families. My husband and I have worked**

side by side to maintain our operation along with our son, our only child. When our son returned from Cal Poly he was excited to be back on the dairy. When he married in 1998 we made him a partner. He became the manager as we cut back on some of the physical work. He had a difficult time handling the stress of the business, the work and not covering the cost of production during the bad years. There have been more bad years than good years. On July 3, 2013 he left the business without notice. We had to give him a settlement for his partnership. Since he left, my husband and I had to step up. We've taken over his jobs. We have not seen our 2 grandchildren since Christmas. They loved the dairy. This has been the most difficult <sup>thing</sup> think I've ever had to endure. He resents us for being in the dairy business which led him into the business. If the federal order had been in place we would have been paid at least a dollar more per hundreweight and things might have been different today for our family.

I realize this hearing is not for the purpose of pricing milk, however, we have to have a more stable pricing system if we want the younger generation to continue the dairy industry. Today, many dairymen are changing to trees. Trees are a lot less work and a lot more money. I think the federal order will be the first step as it puts the California dairy farmers in line with other producers throughout the federal system. The cost of production must be part of the equation. The Margin Protection Program does nothing for us in California.

In conclusion, it has been far too long that dairy producers in California have been at this disadvantage. We need to be on a level playing field. I urge you to adopt the cooperatives federal order proposal.

I thank the United States Department of Agriculture for the opportunity to present this testimony today.