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Statement of Maine President Pro Tempore Richard A. Bennett

Presented at the Monthly Meeting of the Northeast Dairy Compact Commission
Monday, July 9, 2001

Chairman Schmidle and distinguished members of the Northeast Dairy Compact Commission, my name is Richard A. Bennett and I am the President Pro Tempore of the Maine State Senate. I am honored to be here this morning to express my strong support for the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact. I want to thank the Commission for venturing to Maine to discuss the many benefits of the Compact.

As you are abundantly aware, the Northeast Dairy Compact has provided the people of Maine and New England with a means to stabilize the price of milk for farmers and consumers. Last month, as a show of support for the Compact, the Maine Legislature passed a Joint Resolution urging the Congress to reauthorize the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact. The Joint Resolution was sponsored by 146 members of the Legislature and was passed by unanimous consent in our House and Senate.

Copies of the Resolution were sent to President Bush, the Speaker of the House, President of the Senate, House Chair of Agriculture Committee, Senate Chair of the Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, United States Secretary of Agriculture and the members of Maine's Congressional delegation. In addition, legislators wrote personal letters to the members of Maine's Congressional delegation urging the delegation's strong support for reauthorization of the Compact.

Here in Maine, dairy farming runs a very close second to potatoes in terms of agricultural production. In fact, Maine has nearly 500 dairy farms that annually produce milk valued at over \$100,000,000. That is a huge chunk of Maine's agricultural economy. The money that is directed to Maine's farmers from the Dairy Compact is critical in helping the dairy industry survive tough times. I am especially pleased that funding for the Compact comes not from taxpayers, but from the consumers, farmers, processors, handlers, distributors and retailers.

It is vitally important that we maintain the feasibility of dairy farming in Maine and New England, thereby ensuring a sufficient supply of fresh milk and milk products. Our family dairy farms are crucial to protecting the rural character of Maine's towns and communities.

And, as an unintended benefit of the Compact, Maine's dairy farmers are conserving open spaces and encouraging use of their farmland for recreational activities. Should Congress not reauthorize the Compact, many Maine farms would simply not be able to continue operating and would likely be sold for development. Such a loss would have a devastating impact on the quality of life in Maine.

Now that the United States Supreme Court has upheld the Constitutionality of the Compact, we can all turn our efforts toward persuading our lawmakers in Washington to reauthorize the Compact prior to the September 30th sunset date. From what I understand, there is strong support in the United States Senate for reauthorization of the Northeast Dairy Compact. From the show of support here today by Maine's Governor, its Congressional delegation and state Legislative delegation, I think you can see that Maine is committed to preserving the Northeast Dairy Compact. It has demonstrated its ability to stabilize consumer milk prices - - which is good for farmers and consumers - - and it has helped preserve Maine's rural character, values and environment.

Thank you for inviting me here today and thanks for all your fine work.