

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 11, 2014

Mr. Tom Vilsack, Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

RE: CFDA 10.311; Funding Opportunity Number USDA-NIFA-BFR-004518

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I am pleased to write in support of the GrassWorks' Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship (DGA) application for funding from the USDA NIFA Beginning Farmer and Ranch Development Program for the training of future American farmers through formal agricultural apprenticeship.

While apprenticeship programs have existed in a wide array of industries for centuries, the DGA program is the first of its kind in the US agriculture sector. The primary goal of the DGA is to support the viability of dairy production by improving its resilience. At present, the growing retirement rates of dairy farmers is not being offset by sufficient entrance of new farmers. Furthermore, the growth of large-scale farms in the Midwest has come at the expense of independent ownership of small family farms, a problem that continues to affect young farmers.

The work-based learning model of the DGA program includes 4,000 paid hours over two years, with 3,700 of these hours dedicated to on-farm employment. All apprentices are paired with an established dairy farmer, or a Master Dairy Grazier. As apprentices progress within the DGA program, they gain the skills necessary to own and operate dairy farms by receiving mentorship and increasing personal responsibility from Master Graziers. The DGA focuses on teaching sustainable farming practices by implementing managed grazing techniques, improving animal health, and building healthier water and soil environments. By facilitating the transition from apprenticeship to independence, the DGA program produces successful smaller farms that help rural American communities to thrive.

The DGA program will continue to diversify farming practices, allowing the next generation of young farmers to make a living for their families while strengthening Wisconsin's rich agricultural tradition. I am happy to support the GrassWorks' DGA application and respectfully request that full and fair consideration be given for funding in the amount of \$750,000 through the USDA NIFA Beginning Farmer and Ranch Development Program. Please keep Todd Crouch in my office up-to-date on the progress of this application and contact him if you should have further questions or concerns. He can be reached at todd.crouch@baldwin.senate.gov or by calling my Madison office at 608-264-5338. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator