Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 19, 2014

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing in support of the recent request by U.S. cranberry growers in our states for Section 32 purchases of surplus cranberry products including cranberry concentrate, cranberry sauce, dried cranberries, and related processed products. With record crops over the past three years and inventories at all-time records, we are hopeful that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) can approve significant Section 32 purchases in Fiscal Year 2015 for distribution to appropriate USDA food and nutrition programs.

The industry has taken very aggressive measures over the past year to reduce existing inventories through market promotion and development activities. There is broad consensus that additional actions by USDA are needed to help address crop inventories and supply, which continue to vastly exceed the rate of growth in sales. According to recent projections by the Cranberry Marketing Committee, an expected 30 percent increase in inventory, amounting to 7.5 million barrels (750 million pounds) of cranberries, will be carried into the 2015 crop year. This inventory represents 90 percent of projected yearly sales and will place continued pressures on cranberry commodity prices, which are the lowest that they have been in nearly 15 years. Given the increase in production over the past three years, the projected 2014 crop—which is anticipated to be the second largest crop in history—and the continued growth of the industry outside of the U.S., the cranberry industry has requested that USDA consider a purchase that would remove approximately one million barrels of cranberries from inventory.

As you know, in the states of Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin, cranberry production is not only important to the many family farming operations, but critical to the local and state rural economies they support. In these states, the industry provides significant jobs, at both the farm level and throughout the region. A successful Section 32 purchase of cranberry products will directly assist these families and regional economies in weathering the impact of the aforementioned factors on cranberry commodity prices.

We appreciate your ongoing support and look forward to working with you and the Agricultural Marketing Service to ensure the concerns of the industry are given every appropriate consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance, and thank you in advance for your attention to our request.

Sincerely,

Senator Tammy Baldwin | Representative Reid Ribble | Representative William Keating

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Senator Cory Booker

Senator Maria Cantwell

Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr.

Senator Edward J. Markey

Senator Robert Menendez

Senator Patty Murray

Senator Elizabeth Warren

Senator Ron Wyden

Senator Jeff Merkley

Representative Jamie Herrera Beutler

Representative Peter DeFazio

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Representative Frank LoBiondo

Representative Stephen Lynch

Representative Tom Petri