February 20, 1950

The Honorable Charles F. Brannan
Secretary of Agriculture
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. Secretary:

I have recently been receiving letters and personal appeals from some of my rural constituents who are in the milk, poultry and egg business who view, with more than ordinary alarm, the price trend in their particular commodity. They assert that they are selling in an unprotected market while they must buy in a protected market.

The dairy farmers, for instance, assert that the blend milk price in December 1948 was $5.34. In January 1950 it was $3.88. There are predictions it will go as low as $3.00 before the summer is over. This would represent a decline of almost 50 per cent while the price of grain for feed, for instance, has not declined in any comparable proportion.

The egg and poultry market reflects, I am told, an equally ominous price trend.

I know of the great problem which the entire subject of price supports presents to the Government. I am aware also of the broad solution which you yourself have proposed. Without debating the merits or demerits of any general legislative formula, I should like to know what steps can be taken, under the present legislative authorizations, to meet the growing crisis in the particular fields I have mentioned. Or can you think of some stopgap formula which might be considered legislatively to meet this situation?

It is possible that the actual facts are not quite as black as they have been painted to me. Nevertheless, the bare price quotations would indicate that something is wrong and that something radical must be done.
Some of the farmers in my state are talking of the necessity of curtailing the price supports of staple commodities in order that the dairy and poultry farmers may obtain their purchases more cheaply. This does not strike me as a very constructive solution, standing alone, since it seems to point the way to a descending spiral in our national economy.

I am seriously concerned about this particular problem, as I am about the overall agricultural problem. At this time, however, I should like to hear from you and your advisers as to what might be done in the restricted area I have outlined. I would appreciate the early attention of the Agriculture Department to this situation.

Very sincerely yours,

Herbert H. Lehman