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**Congressman Peter Welch
United States House of
Representatives**

House passes five year Farm Bill, includes key Vermont priorities;

Dairy compromise approved

Washington, DC. (January 29th, 2014)- By a vote of 255-161, the House of Representatives today approved a House-Senate conference report on a five year Farm Bill. The Senate is expected to begin debate on the legislation later this week or early next week. Rep. Peter Welch voted for the legislation which includes several important priorities for Vermont's agricultural sector.

After House Speaker John Boehner blocked the inclusion of dairy reforms championed by Vermont's dairy farmers and the Vermont Congressional delegation, House and Senate conferees reached an important compromise under the leadership of Senator Patrick Leahy, a conferee and the senior Democrat on the Senate Agriculture Committee. The compromise creates a dairy insurance program that will protect farmers against wild swings in feed prices that too often have driven them off their farms. It also includes steep discounts on insurance premiums for small dairy farms, including most farms in Vermont. It will help limit overproduction of milk, a trend that has resulted in a death spiral for small dairy farmers. And it empowers the U.S. Department of Agriculture to intervene in the markets if dairy prices drop too low through the purchase of dairy products which would be used by local food banks. Significant cuts in nutrition assistance (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP) were reduced from \$40 billion in the House bill to \$8 billion in the compromise bill. And important

programs to improve rural development, conservation and forestry in Vermont were renewed.

“This bill is far from perfect but America and Vermont need a Farm Bill,” Welch said. “While it falls short of all that Vermont wanted, it is a significant improvement over the status quo and will provide much needed relief to Vermont’s dairy farmers, vegetable growers, and the organics and maple syrup industries. A new insurance program will provide a strong safety net for dairy farmers. And important conservation programs that help protect land, improve water quality, and enhance stewardship of our natural resources are preserved. While it rolls back draconian cuts in nutrition assistance, the cuts in this bill will add yet another challenge to families struggling to make ends meet.”

The following legislative priorities championed by Rep. Welch in the House were included in the conference report on the Farm Bill:

- **Disaster insurance for vegetable growers:** The Farm Bill includes Rep. Welch’s legislation that makes disaster insurance available to Vermont’s fruit and vegetable farmers under the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP). Currently, farmers can only purchase catastrophic coverage. Many of Vermont’s small farms were devastated when Tropical Storm Irene slammed Vermont in 2011. This provision will protect these farmers should disaster strike again.
- **Promote local fruits and vegetables in school lunches:** The bill includes Rep. Welch’s bill that would create a pilot program in Vermont to allow states to purchase local fresh fruits and vegetables for school lunches.
- **Growing Vermont’s maple industry:** The bill includes two of Rep. Welch’s bills that support Vermont’s maple industry. The first will help sugar makers install efficiency improvements to reduce fuel consumption during the sugaring process. Also included is the Maple Tapping Access Program (TAP) Act, which authorizes grants to states for the research and promotion of maple and allows states to open lands for sugar production.
- **Supporting the growth of organic farms and food:** The bill includes Rep. Welch’s legislation to exempt organic farmers from conventional research and promotion fees. It would also allow the organic farm and food industry, if they choose, to establish an organic research and promotion program – commonly called a check-off.

Watch Rep. Welch’s remarks on the House floor before today’s vote:



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