

Leahy, Welch: Greater Protection Starts For Vermont's Fruit, Vegetable And Other Specialty Crop Growers

*. . . USDA Rolls Out New Farm Bill Program Upgrade Championed By Leahy
And Welch
Helping Farmers Who Have Traditionally Been Ineligible For Federal Crop
Insurance*

(TUESDAY, Dec. 16, 2014) – Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) say greater protections are now available for farmers who grow specialty crops such as fruits, vegetables, maple syrup, floriculture, ornamental nursery, mushrooms, honey and energy crops. In the past, farmers of these crops have traditionally been ineligible for federal crop insurance, but under new provisions in the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP), authored by Leahy and Welch as part of the 2014 Farm Bill, new risk management tools are now available for these fruit and vegetable growers.

In a joint statement, Leahy and Welch said: “The devastation to crops from Tropical Storm Irene, underscored how important it was that Vermont farmers have financial protection. We fought hard to include language in the Farm Bill that would help ensure that Vermont farm families will be better able to withstand financial losses caused by natural disasters. These Vermont farmers finally will have similar tools to those that long have been offered to traditional commodity crop farmers. This is a boost for their financial security, and for their peace of mind.”

Before the Leahy-Welch 2014 Farm Bill provisions, specialty crop farmers did not have access to traditional crop insurance programs and could only purchase ‘catastrophic’ protection that kicked in only if more than half of a farmer’s crops had been destroyed, and then paid only 55 percent of the value of what was lost. This was catastrophic coverage that might help buy seed for the next year but did little to make up a farmer’s lost income.

Under the new NAP Buy-Up provision, farmers can now choose higher levels of coverage, up to 65 percent of their expected production at 100 percent of the average market price. Thanks to the Leahy-Welch amendments, this new Buy-Up opportunity will be particularly helpful to beginning and traditionally underserved producers, as well as farmers with limited resources, who will receive fee waivers and premium reductions of 50 percent for this new expanded coverage.

For farmers interested in learning more about the greatly improved NAP and how it can help them, USDA has created a new web tool, available at www.fsa.usda.gov/nap. The web tool will allow producers to determine whether their crops are eligible for coverage under the new NAP protections

and to explore the wide variety of options to determine the best protection level for their operation.

To learn more, farmers are encouraged to visit the Farm Service Agency (FSA) website at fsa.usda.gov/nap or contact their local FSA offices at offices.usda.gov. The Farm Service Agency (FSA), which administers the program, also wants to hear from producers and other interested stakeholders who may have suggestions or recommendations on the program. Written comments will be accepted until Feb. 13, 2015, and can be submitted through www.regulations.gov.

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CONTACTS:

David Carle (Leahy): 202-224-3693

Ryan Nickel (Welch): 202-225-4115