

Secretary Vilsack sits down with Congressional Dairy Farmer Caucus

At a meeting with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack Thursday afternoon, Rep. Peter Welch called for quick dispersal of emergency assistance to dairy farmers.

Vilsack's first meeting with the Congressional Dairy Farmers Caucus came on the heels of an agreement reached by House and Senate negotiators to provide \$350 million in assistance to dairy farmers. The aid, which still must be approved by both houses of Congress, includes \$290 million in direct support to dairy farmers. This emergency assistance will be distributed using guidelines to be determined by the Department of Agriculture.

Welch, co-chair of the 88-member caucus, called on Vilsack to ensure the emergency assistance reaches Vermont's dairy farmers immediately upon becoming law.

"I appreciate Secretary Vilsack's commitment to helping dairy farmers weather the ongoing, devastating price crisis. Many Vermont farmers are hanging on by their fingernails and need this vital assistance as soon as possible," Welch said. "I am hopeful the Secretary will expedite the process."

Members of the caucus discussed a variety of other topics with Vilsack, including growth management plans, membership of the USDA's Dairy Advisory Committee and proposed trade restrictions on milk protein concentrate (MPC).

Earlier this week, Welch introduced legislation to close a trade loophole allowing for the unlimited importation of MPC, a form of dried milk product that has driven down dairy prices due to lax trade restrictions.