

Sen. Patrick Leahy, Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Peter Welch on Thursday announced that \$5.7 million in emergency support to more than 1,000 Vermont dairy farmers has been released. The assistance, coming at a time when dairy farmers have experienced the lowest prices in 40 years, is part of a \$350 million dairy assistance measure sponsored by Sanders and supported by the Vermont delegation.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture began processing payments under the Dairy Economic Loss Assistance Payment program just prior to Christmas. Farmers have already begun seeing deposits.

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), a senior member of the Senate appropriations committee, and Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.), cochairman of the Congressional Dairy Farmers Caucus, helped guide the measure through the congressional appropriations process.

This funding will result in a payment of about \$8,000 to the typical Vermont farmer. The Sanders dairy assistance measure provides \$290 million for direct support to dairy farmers and another \$60 million set aside nationwide to purchase cheese for food banks and nutrition programs.

The county-specific funding levels as calculated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture are \$1,206,542 for Addison County; \$89,328 for Bennington County; \$378,141 for Caledonia County; \$241,599 for Chittenden County; \$113,441 for Essex County; \$1,505,072 for Franklin County; \$114,982 for Grand Isle County; \$161,587 for Lamoille County; \$371,581 for Orange County; \$730,752 for Orleans County; \$273,943 for Rutland County; \$143,378 for Washington County; \$139,186 for Windham County; and \$114,225 for Windsor County. In total, Vermont farmers will receive \$5,783,757 in emergency aid.

Sanders said, "At a time when family-based dairy farmers in Vermont and across the country have received the lowest milk prices in 40 years, these emergency payments will be a real help in keeping many Vermont farms viable and in business. The truth is, however, that we need long-term solutions to the dairy crisis in order to create a situation where farmers receive fair and stable prices for their product. My office is now working with dairy farmers and their organizations in Vermont and around the country to examine how we go forward - including the need for supply-management."

Leahy said, "Slumping revenues have pushed dairy farmers to the brink, and these payments will help many to hang on. Secretary Vilsack pledged to promptly get these funds into farmers' hands, and we appreciate his efforts. We also commend the Farm Service Agency county staff for working so hard to get these payments out to farmers so quickly during the holidays."

Welch said, "2009 has been a tremendously difficult year for Vermont's hardworking dairy farmers. While this emergency assistance will be helpful to many farmers struggling to hold on until prices rebound, it is clearly just a drop in the barrel. I am hopeful that, working with Vermont farmers and the Congressional Dairy Farmers Caucus, we will make great strides in 2010 toward building a dairy industry that is sustainable in the long term."

The average price farmers received for their milk fell this year to as low as \$11.30 per hundredweight, down from \$19.30 in July 2008. Prices have recently rebounded to \$15 per hundredweight. It costs farmers at least \$18 per hundredweight to produce milk. As prices plunged, family dairy farms in Vermont and around the country went out of business.

For farmers who may not have participated in the Milk Income Loss Contract or MILC program, sign-up for this aid remains open until January 19, 2010. They should go to their local FSA County Office and submit their production numbers for February through July 2009.