

Welch successfully amends bill to support local foods in schools; receives critical commitment from Ag Chair that cost of production be considered in the price of milk

Washington, DC - Rep. Peter Welch supported the U.S. House-passed 2007 Farm Bill today, which makes "long-overdue progress, provides a starting point for necessary farm policy reforms," he says.

The bill passed 231 to 191.

Welch successfully amended the legislation to encourage schools to use local foods and received a commitment from the chair of the Agriculture Committee to include consideration of the cost of milk production in an upcoming commission study.

The Milk Income Loss Contract (MILC) program is included in the House-passed bill, as well as increased funding for fruit and vegetable nutrition programs, renewable energy initiatives, rural broadband, and conservation. The final bill also includes the first ever title for organic agriculture.

"This action represents the first major step in years toward reforming federal farm policy to support family farmers, local food, rural communities, and renewable energy," said Welch. "As this bill moves to the Senate, I will work with Senators Leahy and Sanders for further reforms that support our local dairy farmers and improve important programs that support nutrition, conservation, and farm-based renewable energy development."

Welch added, "It is always an uphill battle to change federal farm policy. I am hopeful we can increase support for Vermont's hard-working dairy farmers as this process continues."

Welch successfully amended the Fresh Fruits and Vegetable program- known as the "Snack" Program- to encourage schools to purchase locally grown food. The program is expanded under the bill to include all 50 states, and increases funding from \$9 million to \$70 million.

"It is long-overdue that we focus as a nation on local food. The average bite of food in this country shouldn't travel over 1,500 miles before reaching kitchen tables and lunch trays when we can reduce energy costs, maintain open land, and invest in local communities by supporting our family farmers next door. Federal policy can help change that," added Welch.

Welch also successfully offered an amendment that begins reforms to the Federal Milk Marketing Orders to take cost of production into consideration when determining the price of milk. To help improve the chances of such a provision in the final bill, Welch withdrew the amendment after the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee Rep. Collin Peterson, agreed on the House floor that he would "extend an offer to work with [Welch] in conference to make sure his concerns on energy and feed costs are incorporated into the commission's study."

In addition, Welch also supported the Fairness in Farm and Food Policy Amendment offered by Rep. Ron Kind, which would have reduced excessive commodity payments for large and wealthy farmers, and shifted the savings to support other domestic priorities such as nutrition and local food programs, conservation, and rural development. The amendment failed, but forced an important debate on the floor, according to Welch.

Yesterday, Welch and like-minded members of the Rules Committee were able to block an amendment by Rep. Heather Wilson of New Mexico, which would have stripped all funding from the MILC program and an amendment by Rep. Michael Conaway of Texas which would have drastically limited incentives for organic farmers.

Additional highlights of the bill include:

- Guaranteeing a historic \$1.5 billion in funding for fruit and vegetable programs for nutrition, research, pest management and trade promotion programs;
- Adding \$4.3 billion more to preserve farmland, improve water conservation, and enhance soil conservation, air quality, and wildlife habitat on working lands;
- Establishing the Community Wood Energy Program, which will provide federal grants to help communities purchase new biomass energy systems and sustainably use local forests for needed wood supply;
- Expanding nutrition programs that will help 35 million low-income families by providing an additional \$4 billion over the next five years and nearly doubling the funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program;

- Investing in rural economic development programs, including improving access to broadband in rural, underserved areas;
- Reducing commodity payments to farmers with incomes above \$500,000; and
- Increasing funding renewable energy initiatives by 600 percent to address global warming.