

ST. ALBANS, Vt.-- One of the first congressional hearings setting the stage for Congress's rewrite of a new multi-year Farm Bill has been set for March 12 in Vermont, at the request of Sen. Patrick Leahy (D).

The hearing, to begin at 10 a.m. on Monday, March 12, in the House Chamber of the Vermont State House in Montpelier, will be chaired by Leahy, the second-ranking Democratic member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. The session will be an official hearing by the Senate Agriculture Committee, and Leahy has invited Sen. Bernie Sanders (I) and Rep. Peter Welch (D) to join him in hearing testimony at the State House session.

Welch announced the hearing on Saturday on behalf of the Vermont Congressional Delegation at the 88th Annual Meeting of the St. Albans Cooperative Creamery.

The current Farm Bill expires this fall. Deliberations on the next Farm Bill began earlier this month with an opening hearing in Washington by the Senate Agriculture Committee, with Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns.

Leahy said: "I requested this committee field hearing to make sure there is an opportunity to get detailed Vermont and Northeast priorities on several Farm Bill provisions. Establishing a formal Agriculture Committee hearing record is essential to winning the best dairy policy for Vermont and the Northeast. In addition to dairy issues, we want to cover a number of other areas important to Vermont agriculture early in the process."

Sanders said: "Earlier this week, we had a wide-ranging informal listening session in South Burlington, and now we will begin gathering official testimony to build the record for meeting Vermont's needs in the next Farm Bill. I know that all of us in the Vermont Congressional Delegation are committed to getting the very best deal possible for family dairy farmers in Vermont and across the nation."

Welch said: "Our Vermont farmers deserve the strongest advocacy possible in Washington. I am committed to working hard with Senator Leahy and Senator Sanders to bring home the best dairy program possible in this year's farm bill. A Vermont-based hearing on the Farm Bill is a great step toward helping us assure an even stronger Vermont voice in this process."

The hearing will include testimony from several panels of witnesses representing a broad cross section of the Vermont agricultural community who will be invited to provide information and perspective on issues of particular importance to Vermont in the Farm Bill, including dairy policy, conservation programs, forestry, organic agriculture, rural development, and nutrition issues.

Leahy said the Senate Agriculture Committee will leave the official hearing docket open after the hearing for Vermonters to submit written or electronic testimony.