

[Howard Weiss-Tisman, Brattleboro Reformer](#)

Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., continued his listening tour of Vermont farms Friday with a stop at Walker Farm, where the Congressman met with farmers, nutritionists, chefs and program directors for local food initiatives.

As a new member of the House Agriculture Committee Welch scheduled a series of meetings to meet with people involved with farming and local food across Vermont.

The discussion Friday was the third in the state.

"I am really excited to be on this committee because there is a vivid awareness about the enormous potential of revitalizing local agriculture in Vermont," Welch said after the meeting. "It is good for people's health and it is good for farming and it is good for creating jobs and for the economy."

Welch's new appointment to the agriculture committee also comes as Gov. Peter Shumlin has made it a priority to support the local food economy in Vermont.

Welch said he wants to do what he can to find support for the state's efforts to grow the local food economy.

"This is a focus here in the state and this is a great partnership with the Congressional delegation and the Vermont General Assembly," Welch said.

Welch also said he wanted to hold the meetings around the state to learn more about the programs that were working.

The state is leading the way with its farm to school movement, Welch said, and with its diversified farms and its commitment to support the infrastructure that could help expand local agriculture.

"There is an immense network here along the chain from planting the seed to preparing the meal," said Welch.

Welch said it will be at least a year before Congress takes up another Farm Bill, but as a member of the House Ag Committee he will try to make some kind of changes to the national dairy pricing system that he says is hurting small dairy farmers.

Even in a partisan climate, Welch said Republican and Democratic lawmakers have rural constituents who want to see Washington support local agriculture and he hopes Congress will be able to pass legislation to help the dairy industry.

The group that braved it through a snowstorm Friday morning to be at the meeting included Jamie Beribeau, director of food and nutrition at Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, Farm to School Coordinator Katherine Gillespie and farmers Mike Collins, Paul Harlow, Howard Prussack and Amanda Thurber Jack Manix, co-owner of Walker Farm, said the Congressman called to bring together the group and they met in a greenhouse on the farm as the snow fell Friday morning.

Manix has been farming in Southeastern Vermont for about 40 years and he could not remember another time when a Washington lawmaker called a meeting to discuss agriculture in the region.

Walker Farm has been at the center of the local Farm to School movement, with the growth of community supported agriculture and the farm has a tight connection with food banks and food shelves.

"We have a real revolution going on in our state and Peter wanted to come to hear about things

here that are working," Manix said. "We are ahead of what is going on in agriculture."

At the meeting some farmers talked about the problems with the farm worker, immigration program.

The conversation was spirited, Manix said, adding that farmers and local food leaders are in agreement that the movement, as a whole, is growing.

Manix said he wanted to talk to the Congressman about the role the government could play in promoting local food and education the public.

"One thing the government can do is promote this and raise public awareness," he said. "We have to get people to break the supermarket cycle and the fast food cycle."