

Burlington Free Press staff report

Vermont's congressman brought a sweet idea Friday to the 44th annual Vermont Maple Festival.

Rep. Peter Welch introduced legislation to expand tapping access to maple syrup producers, promote the industry through marketing and provide funding for research.

Welch's Maple Sugaring Access and Promotion Act authorizes \$20 million in U.S. Department of Agriculture funding for states to support maple syrup production. The grants can be used to open up state lands to tapping or provide incentives for private landowners to do so.

"Vermont's maple syrup makers improve pancake breakfasts around the world, and as they do so, they improve Vermont's reputation as a source of high-quality, delicious agricultural products," Welch said in a news release. "This legislation will bolster the maple sugaring industry and empower Vermont's hardworking maple syrup makers to expand their businesses."

The three-day festival is a celebration of the maple sugaring industry in Vermont. The state is the largest producer of maple syrup in the U.S.