

Vermont's congressional delegation – Sens. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) – on Wednesday applauded the announcement by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to expand assistance to Vermont for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP). Vermont is slated to receive nearly \$1.8 million to help provide free fresh fruits and vegetables to children throughout the school day.

The USDA FFVP makes fruit and vegetable snacks available at no cost to children in participating schools. The program began in 2002 as a pilot program in a small number of schools and, with the support of Vermont's congressional delegation, was greatly expanded in the 2008 Farm Bill. As a result, the FFVP will provide \$1,734,894 to the Vermont Department of Education for the 2011/2012 school year, ensuring between \$50 and \$75 worth of fresh produce per student in qualifying schools.

Leahy, who pushed for expansion of the program as a leading Senate Agriculture Committee conferee on the 2008 Farm Bill, said: "This is a perfect fit for Vermont. Our state is a leader in the Farm To School movement and leads all others in the fresh foods in our children's diets. Starting healthy eating habits early in life carries lifelong benefits." Leahy also has led in creating, expanding and funding USDA's related Farm To School program.

"Providing children with fresh, healthy fruits and vegetables at school is good for them and good for our family farmers. This is a welcome investment in childhood nutrition and in the growing local-foods movement in Vermont," said Sanders. He said the program compliments a \$120,000

grant he secured that will help 40 Vermont schools plant community gardens this spring to serve as outdoor classrooms to educate children about agriculture and nutrition.

Welch, who successfully amended the FFVP to encourage schools to purchase locally grown food, said: "Today's announcement is great news for Vermont. In addition to providing nutritious meals to Vermont's school children, this important program will also invest in our local communities and support our family farmers. "