

Vermont's congressional delegation – Sens. Patrick Leahy and Bernie Sanders and Rep. Peter Welch – Thursday welcomed nearly \$54,000 in U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) grants to five Vermont maple syrup producers to make their operations more energy efficient. The news came as USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development Dallas Tonsager is visiting Vermont.

The funding is provided through the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) and will allow producers to install reverse osmosis systems to remove water from sap before it is boiled down to syrup. By removing the water before boiling the sap, producers reduce the amount of energy consumed in the production process. The nearly \$54,000 in USDA funding will help to leverage \$182,298 in private investment for energy efficiency improvements.

In a joint statement, Vermont's congressional delegation members said: "We want to welcome Under Secretary Tonsager to Vermont and thank USDA for recognizing the importance of reducing energy costs on Vermont farms and in Vermont sugar houses. Maple syrup production is integral to our state's identity and economy. At a time when the price of energy is rising, these investments will help Vermont syrup producers reduce their energy consumption, lower their costs and expand their operations so they can continue providing quality product to the rest of the world."

According to figures compiled by the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Vermont led all states in maple syrup production in 2011 with over 1.1 million gallons produced, a 28 percent increase from the previous year.

A complete list of funding recipients is copied below.