

UVM program is a model of cooperation between farmers and community creating new markets

Washington, DC - Rep. Peter Welch today outlined the importance of farm-to-school programs to Vermont farmers and his hopes for a 2007 Farm Bill that supports family farms and local food.

Welch announced today his support for the Local Food and Farm Support Act, H.R. 2364, which he hopes will be incorporated into this year's Farm Bill.

"I want to take our common-sense, Vermont approach for supporting local agriculture to Washington and into the 2007 Farm Bill. The average school meal in this country shouldn't travel over 1,500 miles before reaching lunch trays when we have family farmers deserving our support next door," said Welch.

"Farm-to-school programs effectively support our family farmers, reduce energy use, help maintain open land, and provide healthy food and educational opportunities for our students," he added.

Welch spent the Independence Day Recess in Vermont, talking with farmers and agri-businesses about the challenges facing the Vermont farm community and their hopes for the 2007 Farm Bill.

Speaking in the Harris-Millis dining hall on the University of Vermont campus, Welch commended UVM's farm-to-school program, which partners with Sodexo, its food services company, and local farmers.

Joining Welch at the event were Annie Stevens, Associate Vice President of UVM, Bill Suhr from Champlain Orchards, and Paul Bahan from Sodexo, Abby Nelson from the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA), and members of Vermont Food Education Every Day (VT FEED).

Welch supported a farm-to-school initiative in the Vermont State Legislature, which, in 2006, authorized and funded a program that funded research and provides support to farm-school collaboratives around the state. The program was made permanent this year and currently over 40 Vermont schools participate in some form of farm-to-school partnership.

The Local Food and Farm Support Act, which was introduced by Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), supports family farmers with new revenue by developing local and regional distribution networks for their products and encouraging school and institutional links to local farms.

The Act includes creating:

- **Farm to Cafeteria Program:** Provides up to \$20 million a year to help promote child nutrition and increased market opportunities for local farmers by increasing funding for farm to school cafeteria programs, including providing local fruits and vegetables as part of school

meals.

- **Community Food Project Competitive Grants:** Helps increase food security in communities by providing \$60.5 million a year in grants to support projects that bring the food system together to create networks that improve the self-reliance of community members over their food needs.
- **Local Food Preferences:** Helps promote local food production by allowing government agencies, including schools, to use geographic preferences in their bidding and procurement programs and provides start-up grants to help promote the purchase of local food.
- **Healthy Food Enterprise Development Program:** Helps enhance producers' share of the retail product price by providing \$5 million a year in grants for feasibility studies and \$35 million a year in loans and loan guarantees for infrastructure and equipment to improve farmer access to processing and distribution systems, which help deliver local foods to consumers and underserved communities.
- **Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program:** Helps promote good nutrition and increased market opportunities for local farmers by increasing funding up to \$75 million a year for this program to provide fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables to low-income senior citizens.