

[By Bob Kinzel](#)

Congressman Peter Welch has joined a bipartisan group of House members to ask the Obama administration to temporarily suspend the mandate that ethanol be included in fuel.

Welch says the ethanol program is driving up feed prices for farmers at a time that a major drought in the Midwest is slashing the nation's supply of corn.

Currently under the national ethanol mandate, 10 percent of all transportation fuels in this country must come from corn based ethanol and it's estimated that it takes 40 percent of the country's corn crop to meet this mandate.

This year, a major drought has hit many parts of the Midwest and the drought has caused corn supplies to be cut in half.

Welch has joined a bipartisan coalition of 156 House members, 30 Democrats and 126 Republicans, who are urging the Obama Administration to suspend the ethanol mandate because the demand for corn is driving feed prices through the roof.

"Feed prices are up 40 percent," Welch said. "That affects our Vermont farmers. It's also affecting food prices. So this is a unique, once-in-50-years drought situation that is having a significant impact on the price of corn. And whatever your position on ethanol is for the long term, you've got to respond to this short term crisis."

Welch would like to see the ethanol mandate permanently ended, but for now, his goal is to get EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson to issue a temporary suspension:

"So there's a lot of us who think that we ought to get rid of the mandate altogether," he said.

"But in the practical situation we're in, where we have this fierce drought that is having an impact all over the country and on Vermont farmers, let's use the discretion that we've given the administrator to suspend this mandate while we continue to have the argument and debate about the future of ethanol."

EPA Administrator Jackson is in Vermont this week looking at a number of energy projects. She says her Agency is in the process of gathering information about the proposal.

"When we get a formal request, we have to take public comment," she said. "We're going to open public comment as soon as it gets published in the Federal Register. We take 30 days of comment and obviously we're going to get in a lot of information and by law consider it and make a decision."

Welch says he supports efforts to reduce this country's dependence on foreign oil, but he argues that this is a case where reducing feed prices should be the top priority.