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Gov. Patrick Endorses Resolution Calling for Federal Aid for Massachusetts Farmers

BOSTON – State agricultural officials today hailed Gov. Deval Patrick’s support for a resolution that urges Congress to provide disaster relief funds for New England farmers hurt by devastating floods and cool weather last May and June. The resolution, which also calls on Congress to extend a federal program that boosts price reimbursements for dairy farmers, passed this week at the New England Governors’ Conference in Washington, D. C.

The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture issued a “Natural Disaster Determination” for Massachusetts and parts of Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont and New York in August, recognizing the negative impact last spring’s unusually wet weather had on crop production. That action made affected farmers eligible for federal low-interest loans and cash payments for lost crops and livestock, but Congress has not yet passed an appropriation to fund such assistance.

In addition to asking Congress to provide federal disaster relief funding, the resolution endorsed by Gov. Patrick urged federal lawmakers to reauthorize the Milk Income Loss Contract program (MILC), which funds a safety net payment to farmers when milk prices are low. When milk prices rise, the payment decreases. Considered an essential program for the dairy industry, the MILC is now set to expire Aug. 31 – prior to the start of the new federal fiscal year. Gov. Patrick plans to urge the Massachusetts Congressional delegation to extend the MILC program until September 30, 2007, so that costs associated with the program would be built into the base budget of the 2007 Farm Bill. The governors’ resolution urged “the President and his Administration to support federal disaster relief assistance for affected farmers,” as well.

“The Commonwealth’s 6,100 farms – more than 80 percent of them small, family-owned businesses – provide the state with \$6 billion in revenue while supporting approximately 13,500 jobs. Beyond these statistics, it is impossible to calculate the value of the wholesome character farming lends to the Massachusetts landscape,” said Massachusetts Acting Commissioner of Agriculture Scott Soares. “In casting his vote for the ‘Resolution in Support of New England Agriculture,’ Gov. Patrick recognizes the wisdom of supporting an industry that has historically provided our state with myriad economic and environmental benefits.”

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