

(Washington, D.C) – Rep. Rush Holt (NJ-12) hosted more than 40 New Jersey farmers and agricultural leaders Thursday for another in his series of "D.C. Days." Participants met with policymakers and thought leaders, discussing ways to improve agriculture policy. Among the issues they discussed was legislation Holt introduced to create a Farm to School grant program that would support local farmers who provide quality, healthy foods to community schools.

"This is an opportune time to discuss agricultural matters, as we are two years into the new Farm Bill, which did so much to increase funding for organic agriculture, and we will soon be reauthorizing the Child Nutrition Act, which gives us an opportunity to increase investments in activities that link school districts with local farmers," Holt said. "Together, these developments will help us ensure that children eat healthier food, while investing in our local agricultural communities."

The Farm to School Improvements Act (H.R. 4710), which Holt introduced earlier this month, would establish a competitive grant and technical assistance program to increase the use of local foods from small- and medium-sized farms in schools. The funds also would improve the relationships between schools and local food providers. The legislation would provide \$10 million in mandatory funding each year for the duration of the program and require that grant recipients provide a local match to ensure serious commitment to the project.

Pilot projects have shown that locally and regionally produced food can be provided efficiently from nearby producers if there is a good distribution system. The grants provided by this legislation will provide communities with the seed money they need to develop robust, economically sustainable programs linking agricultural producers with schools.

Speakers included Kathleen Merrigan, Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA); representatives from the USDA's Risk Management Agency, Farm Service Agency, and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service; and speakers from the National Organic Standards Board and Community Food Security Coalition. Rep. Ron Kind (WI-3), a leader on agriculture issues, also spoke.

D.C. Days are day-long meetings where residents from New Jersey can discuss the latest in federal policies with Holt and other leaders in Washington, and where those in Washington can learn about the concerns and initiatives of those in attendance.

Attending the day-long meeting were farmers and agricultural leaders from across New Jersey

including representatives of McKittrick Nurseries in Colts Neck, Beechtree Farm in Hopewell, Sweet Sourland Farm in Hopewell, Ironwood Farms in Monmouth Junction, Princeton Lawn to Food, and Princeton School Community Garden. Additionally, there were representatives from American Crop Insurance, Rutgers Cooperative Extension, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, West Windsor Open Space, Rutgers Food Science, the NJ Beef Council, NJASCOE-Pitman, American Crop Insurance, New Jersey State 4H, Rain and Hail Crop Insurance, the New Jersey Farm Bureau, and Isles, Crop Growers.