



March 21, 2017

Dear Member of Congress,

I write on behalf of nearly 200,000 members of the National Farmers Union (NFU) who are engaged in all forms of farming and ranching. NFU's member-driven policy "affirms the right of all Americans to have access to affordable, quality health care." NFU believes the American Health Care Act (AHCA) would have serious negative impacts on farmers' and ranchers' access to affordable health insurance coverage.

Farming is a dangerous occupation, ranking 6th in occupational fatality rates. The injury rate for agricultural workers is also 40% higher than the rate for all workers. Finally, the average age of farmers in the United States is over 58 years. U.S. healthcare policy must take into account the unique needs of the men and women who provide food and fiber for our country and much of the world.

While our current healthcare system is not without its problems, the number of uninsured individuals in the United States has dropped by nearly 13 million since the passage of the Affordable Care Act. The expansion of Medicaid has proven beneficial to rural communities, where the rate of enrollment is higher than in urban America. The Health Insurance Marketplace makes coverage more accessible for many farm families. Tax credits and premium subsidies also help farmers maintain consistent coverage, especially during downturns in the farm economy.

Rural hospitals are more dependent on Medicare and Medicaid payments than their urban counterparts. The correlation between a strong Medicaid program and the success of rural hospitals has become evident during the influx of rural hospital closures over the last six years. Seventy-eight rural hospitals have closed since 2010 with over 80% of those located in states that opted out of the Medicaid expansion. With another 673 hospitals at risk of closure, the AHCA's proposed Medicaid cap could have devastating consequences for rural communities.

The AHCA's proposed system of basing subsidies on age instead of income is particularly troublesome for small farms and younger farmers. In 2012, 75 percent of farms sold less than \$50,000 in agricultural products and 57% had sales less than \$10,000. Young farm families that don't receive additional income or health benefits from off-farm jobs would find it extremely difficult to purchase health insurance. The proposed legislation would also hurt older farmers. The easing of restrictions on what insurance companies can charge older customers will offset the larger subsidies offered to older farmers.

Affordable access to quality health coverage is a high priority for all Americans. As you consider how to best improve our healthcare system, we ask that you give serious consideration to the needs of farmers and ranchers. While there is certainly room for improvement in current policy, the American Health Care

Act will only hurt family farmers and rural communities across the country. NFU requests that you vote no on the proposed legislation.

We appreciate your efforts to provide all Americans with high-quality comprehensive health insurance. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roger Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Roger" and the last name "Johnson" clearly distinguishable.

Roger Johnson
President