

April 6, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Michael Conaway
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
2430 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
2204 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson,

We, the undersigned agriculture and rural organizations representing millions of members across the country, thank you for your leadership on behalf of America's farm families and we strongly urge you to reauthorize the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) with adequate funding in the next farm bill.

Farming is a high-stress occupation. Financial risk, volatile markets, unpredictable weather, and heavy workloads can all place a significant strain on a farmer or rancher's mental and emotional well-being. A 2016 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed that farmers had a much higher rate of suicide than any other occupation.¹ This is exacerbated by the fact that 60 percent of rural residents live in areas that suffer from mental health professional shortages.²

Due to the prolonged downturn in the farm economy, many farmers are facing even greater stress. Net farm income has dropped by more than 50 percent since 2013, and current projections indicate the rebound could be years away. In fact, the Economic Research Service recently forecast net farm income to drop another 6.7 percent in 2018, its lowest level since 2006. As Congress works to pass a new farm bill, it's critical that farmers and ranchers are given the resources they need, including a strong network of support.

The 2008 Farm Bill established FRSAN to provide grants to extension services and nonprofit organizations that offer stress assistance programs to individuals engaged in farming, ranching, and other agriculture-related occupations. Eligible programs include farm helplines and websites, community outreach and education, support groups, and home delivery of assistance. Despite the

¹ McIntosh WL, Spies E, Stone DM, Lokey CN, Trudeau AT, Bartholow B. Suicide Rates by Occupational Group — 17 States, 2012. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2016;65:641–645. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6525a1>

² HRSA Data Warehouse, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, November 2017.

growing need, FRSSAN has never received funding, leaving many producers without access to important behavioral health services.

We urge you to reauthorize FRSSAN in the next farm bill and to provide funding necessary to meet the needs of farmers and ranchers as they endure increasing financial, mental, and emotional stress.

Sincerely,

American Agri-Women

American Pulse Association

American Soybean Association

Association of Public Law Universities

Catholic Rural Life

Farm Aid

Farmers Legal Action Group

Farmer Veteran Coalition

National Association of State Departments of Agriculture

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors

National Association of Rural Mental Health

National Association of Wheat Growers

National Barley Growers Association

National Black Growers Council

National Cattlemen's Beef Association

National Corn Growers Association

National Cotton Council

National Council of Farmer Cooperatives

National Family Farm Coalition

National Farmers Union

National Grange

National Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association

National Milk Producers Federation

National Rural Health Association

National Sunflower Association

National Young Farmers Coalition

Rural Advancement Foundation International USA

Rural and Agricultural Council of America

Rural Coalition/Coalición Rural

State Agriculture and Rural Leaders

USA Rice

U.S. Canola Association

U.S. Cattlemen's Association

U.S. Dry Bean Council

U.S. Dry Pea and Lentil Council

Women Involved in Farm Economics