

April 13, 2023

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Chair, Subcommittee on Agriculture
Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable John Hoeven
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture
Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Andy Harris
Chair, Subcommittee on Agriculture
House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Sanford Bishop
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Agriculture
House Committee on Appropriations

Dear Chairmen Heinrich and Harris, and Ranking Members Hoeven and Bishop,

We, the undersigned agriculture, rural, and mental health professional organizations representing millions of members across the country, thank you for your leadership in providing strong funding for the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) in recent appropriations packages. **We urge you to continue funding FRSAN at no less than the fully authorized level of \$10 million.**

FRSAN is a program that supports a service provider network that connects individuals and their families engaged in farming, ranching, and other agriculture-related occupations to stress assistance programs and resources. Four regional centers established through FRSAN are increasing access to farm stress services across the United States and its territories by coordinating efforts to serve the unique needs of the populations in each region. Services provided or coordinated through FRSAN include telephone helplines and websites, training programs and workshops, support groups, and outreach services.

There are many reasons for ongoing farm stress and mental health challenges for farmers and farm workers, including volatility in the farm economy, the financial risk involved in agriculture, weather unpredictability, and a changing climate. Moreover, 60 percent of rural residents live in areas with mental health professional shortages.¹ FRSAN is essential for serving populations where the need is great and resources are limited.

To ensure FRSAN's ongoing success and further development, ongoing support is needed. A Morning Consult poll found that during 2021, most farmers and farm workers (61%) and rural adults (52%) reported experiencing more stress and mental health challenges compared to the prior year.² The same poll also found that while stigma around seeking help or treatment for mental health has decreased, it remains a factor, especially in agriculture. The majority of rural adults, farmers, and farm workers say there is at least some stigma around stress and mental health in their communities. Stigma can create barriers to seeking assistance, and programs like FRSAN help reduce stigma and increase access to services.

¹ Morales, Barksdale, and Beckel-Mitchener, "A call to action to address rural mental health disparities," *Journal of Clinical and Translational Science*, October 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7681156/#r13>

² "Farmer and Rural Perceptions of Mental Health," December 2021. https://www.fb.org/files/Farmer_and_Rural_Mental_Health_AFBF.pdf

As the Subcommittees develop the FY 2024 agriculture appropriations bill, we urge you to continue funding FRISAN at no less than \$10 million. This funding will be critically important in improving the wellbeing of farmers, ranchers, and their families.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Retailers Association
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Psychological Association
American Seed Trade Association
American Soybean Association
Farm Aid
Farm Credit Council
Farmer Veteran Coalition
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Association of Counties
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Center for Appropriate Technology
National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA CLUSA)
National Corn Growers Association
National Cotton Council
National Council of Farmer Cooperatives
National Family Farm Coalition
National Farmers Union
National Milk Producers Federation
National Organic Coalition
National Pork Producers Council
National Rural Health Association
National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition
National Young Farmers Coalition
Organic Farmers Association
Organic Trade Association
RAFI-USA (Rural Advancement Foundation International-USA)
Rural & Agriculture Council of America
Sustainable Food Policy Alliance
The National Grange
United States Cattlemen's Association
USA Rice