

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: And Joni Ernst introduce legislation to support resources for farmers in crisis

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin, a member of the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, and Joni Ernst (R-IA) introduced bipartisan legislation to provide our nation’s farmers with critical support and resources to respond to these difficult economic times.

A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found agricultural workers have a higher suicide rate than any other occupation. To assist farmers in crisis, the Facilitating Accessible Resources for Mental health and Encouraging Rural Solutions For Immediate Response to Stressful Times (FARMERS FIRST) Act would provide funding through the U.S. Department of Agriculture to state departments of agriculture, state extension services and non-profits to establish helplines, provide suicide prevention training for farm advocates, create support groups and reestablish the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN). The bipartisan FARMERS FIRST Act is co-sponsored by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO), Cory Gardner (R-CO), Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND) and Jerry Moran (R-KS).

“Farmers are the backbone of our rural economy and leaders in our rural communities. Washington has been slow to recognize the challenges that farmers are facing, and the daily stressors that they experience during difficult years,” said Senator Baldwin. “The FARMERS FIRST Act will make sure that when there is a crisis on the farm, farmers know they are not alone and there are resources available to

help them find a path through tough times. This bipartisan reform will provide funding for local resources and expand access to stress reduction strategies and suicide prevention programs that will help tackle this problem and save lives.”

“The incredibly high rate of suicide within the agricultural community underscores the urgent need to act to address this crisis,” said Senator Ernst. “We must do more to ensure those who work tirelessly from sunrise to sundown to feed and fuel our world have access to the mental health resources and supports they need. With more than 88,000 farms and over 150,000 farmers in Iowa, our agricultural community is the backbone of our state, I am glad to partner with Senator Baldwin to improve the quality and timeliness of mental health care for the hardworking folks in our agricultural communities.”

“This help for struggling farmers cannot come fast enough,” said Darin Von Ruden, President of Wisconsin Farmers Union. “Farmers are facing the triple threat of unpredictable weather, low prices, and consolidating supply chains that creates tremendous stress and uncertainty in their lives. The organizations that are out there helping farmers want to do more, but they are limited by a lack of resources. We appreciate Senator Baldwin’s attention to this truly life-and death issue.”

“The continued slump in milk prices is creating both economic and emotional stress for dairy farmers, which is why we support the continuation of the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network and the FARMERS FIRST Act, sponsored by Senators Baldwin and Ernst. We hope to see it move forward as part of the 2018 Farm Bill,” said Jim Mulhern, President and CEO of the National Milk Producers Federation.

“For those in rural areas seeking mental health services, they face two giant obstacles: availability and accessibility. In 55% of all American counties, most of which are rural, there is not a single psychologist, psychiatrist or social worker. The Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) could help support agricultural workers and their families in rural communities by providing at-home resources for mental health services,” said Jessica Seigel, National Rural Health Association. “As rural communities and economies struggle to come back from the Great Recession, many in the agriculture industry who have experienced little recovery are at higher risk of substance abuse and suicide. We applaud the bipartisan work of our rural health advocates in introducing legislation to provide a key resource for those at risk.”

“With the current situation of farmers working below their cost of production, we

are seeing a resurgence of financial and emotional stress and an increasing rate of farmer suicide, similar to the farm crisis of the 1980's. There is a desperate need for the Federal Government to provide tools to stabilize farm income and ensure financial security for farmers and farm workers, since financial stress is the driving force in farmer depression and suicide. Re-establishing the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network can provide help for farmers who are suffering and contemplating suicide as their only way out," said Jim Goodman, National Family Farm Coalition Board President and organic dairy and beef farmer from Woneewoc, Wisconsin.

"Farmers are facing uncertain times and need adequate services to deal with this mounting stress in the industry. The resources provided by Senators Baldwin, Ernst, Moran, and Heitkamp's FARMERS FIRST Act provide tools farmers need to manage these difficulties, allowing them to connect with all the resources at their disposal. I thank the Senators for introducing this vital legislation," said Jon Doggett, Executive Vice President, National Corn Growers Association.

"Farming and ranching is a highly stressful occupation. As the downturn in the farm economy worsens, many producers are finding themselves in a state of crisis. The FARMERS FIRST Act would provide farmers with the support they need to weather tough times. NFU has long advocated for the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network, and we applaud the efforts of Senators Baldwin, Ernst, Heitkamp, and Moran to expand the program and set a funding target. We urge Congress to reauthorize FRSAN and provide it with robust funding in the next Farm Bill," said Roger Johnson, President, National Farmers Union.

In addition to these resources, the bill would establish a Farm and Ranch Stress Assessment Committee to better understand how agricultural workers' mental health impacts rural development and provide recommendations for addressing mental health care needs within the agriculture community.

This bill has been endorsed by the Wisconsin Farmers Union, National Milk Producers Federation, National Corn Growers Association, National Farmers Union, National Family Farm Coalition, National Farm Medicine Center, Farm Aid, Female Farmer Project, National Rural Health Association, American Soybean Association, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, Rural and Agricultural Council of America, and U.S. Cattlemen's Association.

Read more about what our agriculture industry partners are saying about the

FARMERS FIRST Act [here](#).

Read the full text of the bill [here](#).

An online version of this release is available [here](#).