

# U.S. Sens. Baldwin, Ernst: Lead bipartisan bill to bolster mental health resources for farmers, rural communities

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) and Joni Ernst (R-IA) led a bipartisan group of colleagues in introducing the *Farmers First Act of 2023*, bipartisan legislation to address the mental health epidemic in rural America and expand access to critical mental health support and resources for our nation's agricultural communities.

The *Farmers First Act of 2023* will reauthorize the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN), a program that connects farmers, ranchers, and other agriculture workers to stress assistance programs and resources. Through FRSAN, state departments of agriculture, state extension services, and non-profits receive funding to establish helplines, provide suicide prevention training for farm advocates, and create support groups for farmers and farm workers. The *Farmers First Act of 2023* would increase funding for the program, authorizing \$15 million per year for the program for the next five years, up from \$10 million.

“No person should have to face a mental health crisis on their own, but sadly, too many Wisconsinites in our rural communities don't have anywhere to turn when they need help. Farming is hard, often isolating work with unique challenges like unpredictable weather, fluctuating prices and intensive labor that can take a toll on a person's mental health,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “Farmers, ranchers and growers are the heart of our rural communities and we can and must do more to support their mental health and well-being. I'm proud to once again partner with Senator Ernst to introduce this bill to increase funding for the Farm and Ranch Stress

Assistance Network and connect more Wisconsinites with the resources they need to take care of themselves and their loved ones.”

“Iowa farmers are the backbone of our agriculture economy, but first and foremost they’re part of a family. We cannot overlook the mental health struggles our men and women in farming face. After seeing the success of the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network, it’s evident we must continue supporting these important mental health resources for Iowa farm families and the agriculture community,” **said Senator Ernst.**

This funding comes as suicide, mental health challenges and stress are on the rise in agricultural and rural communities. According to the [National Rural Health Association](#), the rate of suicide among farmers is three and a half times higher than among the general population. 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. The same poll also found that while the stigma around seeking help or treatment for mental health has decreased, it remains a factor, especially in agriculture.

The *Farmers First Act of 2023* would reauthorize the FR SAN and build on Senators Baldwin and Ernst’s work to successfully [include](#) this program in the 2018 Farm Bill. Four regional centers established through FR SAN are currently increasing access to farm stress services including expanding access to hotlines, training Americans in rural areas to recognize the signs of depression, anxiety or suicidal ideation, and creating support groups for farmworkers.

The *Farmers First Act of 2023* increases funding available for the program to \$15 million per year through 2028, allowing grantees to hire additional staff to support farmers, including behavioral health specialists to provide counseling to agricultural workers, and bolstering grantees’ efforts to address the unique needs of different farming populations, including Veteran farmers and farmers of color.

Senators Baldwin and Ernst introduced the *Farmers First Act* with Senators Jon Tester (D-MT); Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Chairwoman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry; John Boozman (R-AR), Ranking Member; Tina Smith (D-MN); Jerry Moran (R-KS); Susan Collins (R-ME); and Michael Bennet (D-CO).

“Our farmers face so many unique challenges that cause stress and impact their

mental health. We're making real progress treating health care above the neck the same as health care below the neck. This legislation will help connect farmers and rural communities to stress resources and mental health care, including my successful Community Behavioral Health Clinics that offer 24/7 crisis services and other resources close to home," **said Chairwoman Stabenow.**

"Arkansas agricultural producers help feed and clothe the world. This responsibility creates unique stresses as they manage operations and face challenges that are often beyond their control. This legislation continues efforts to improve access to mental health services in rural communities and creates additional opportunities to connect agriculture workers and producers with behavioral health providers to enhance the quality of life for families and individuals throughout farm country," **said Ranking Member Boozman.**

The *Farmers First Act of 2023* is [supported by](#) the National Farmers Union, Wisconsin Farmers Union, National Rural Health Association, National Milk Producers Federation, Agricultural Retailers Association, The National Council, FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative, National Young Farmers Coalition, Organic Trade Association, American Psychological Association Services, U.S. Cattlemen's Association, Rural & Agriculture Council of America, NCBA CLUSA, Farm Credit Council, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, Organic Farmers Association, National Pork Producers Council, American Soybean Association, Midwest Dairy Coalition, FarmAid, National Association of Wheat Growers, National Corn Growers Association, Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance, Sustainable Food Policy Alliance (SFPA), National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, National Organic Coalition, Farmer Veteran Coalition, and American Farm Bureau Federation. See what they are saying [here](#).

A one-pager on this legislation can be found [here](#). Full bill text can be found [here](#).

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