

115TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# S. 2712

To amend the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 to establish a farm and ranch stress assistance network, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 19, 2018

Ms. BALDWIN (for herself, Mrs. ERNST, Mr. MORAN, Ms. HEITKAMP, Mr. GARDNER, Mr. BENNET, Mr. HOEVEN, and Ms. SMITH) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

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## A BILL

To amend the National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 to establish a farm and ranch stress assistance network, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Facilitating Accessible  
5 Resources for Mental health and Encouraging Rural Solu-  
6 tions For Immediate Response to Stressful Times Act”  
7 or the “FARMERS FIRST Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. FARM AND RANCH STRESS ASSISTANCE NETWORKS.**

2 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds that—

3 (1) agricultural work continues to be—

4 (A) highly stressful;

5 (B) characterized by uncertainty; and

6 (C) subject to—

7 (i) changing market conditions;

8 (ii) the unpredictable nature of weather; and

9 (iii) other factors beyond the control  
10 of agricultural producers;

11 (2) individuals working in agriculture have the  
12 highest overall suicide rate among all occupations;

13 (3) access to behavioral health care is often limited  
14 among individuals working in agriculture due to  
15 time and geographical constraints; and

16 (4) agricultural workers are in need of specialized  
17 behavioral health programs that are—

18 (A) affordable;

19 (B) available as needed; and

20 (C) carried out with understanding of concerns  
21 specific to agricultural work.

22 (b) FARM AND RANCH STRESS ASSISTANCE.—The  
23 National Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching  
24 Policy Act of 1977 is amended by inserting after subtitle  
25 I (7 U.S.C. 3291 et seq.) the following:  
26

1       **“Subtitle J—Farm and Ranch**  
2               **Stress Assistance**

3   **“SEC. 1460. DEFINITIONS.**

4       “In this subtitle:

5               “(1) AFFECTED INDIVIDUAL.—The term ‘af-  
6       fected individual’ means any individual engaged, as  
7       determined by the Secretary, in—

8                       “(A) farming;

9                       “(B) ranching; or

10                      “(C) another agriculture-related occupa-  
11       tion.

12               “(2) COMMITTEE.—The term ‘Committee’  
13       means the Farm and Ranch Stress Assessment  
14       Committee established under section 1461A(a).

15               “(3) NATIONAL NETWORK.—The term ‘national  
16       network’ means the National Farm and Ranch  
17       Stress Assistance Network established under section  
18       1461(b)(1).

19               “(4) STATE NETWORK.—The term ‘State net-  
20       work’ means a State farm and ranch stress assist-  
21       ance network established under section 1461(a)(1).

22   **“SEC. 1461. FARM AND RANCH STRESS ASSISTANCE NET-**  
23               **WORKS.**

24       “(a) STATE NETWORKS.—

1           “(1) GRANTS.—The Secretary, in coordination  
 2           with the Secretary of Health and Human Services,  
 3           shall establish a program under which the Secretary  
 4           shall provide competitive grants to State depart-  
 5           ments of agriculture, State cooperative extension  
 6           services, and nonprofit organizations to carry out eli-  
 7           gible cooperative programs described in paragraph  
 8           (2).

9           “(2) DESCRIPTION OF ELIGIBLE COOPERATIVE  
 10          PROGRAMS.—An eligible cooperative program re-  
 11          ferred to in paragraph (1) is a program—

12                 “(A) established and carried out by a part-  
 13          nership between—

14                         “(i) one or more State departments of  
 15                         agriculture, one or more State cooperative  
 16                         extension services, or one or more non-  
 17                         profit organizations, as applicable; and

18                         “(ii) entities providing appropriate  
 19                         services in the one or more States; and

20                 “(B) the purpose of which is to establish  
 21                 a farm and ranch stress assistance network to  
 22                 provide stress assistance programs to affected  
 23                 individuals, including counseling and support  
 24                 (including behavioral health counseling and re-

1           ferral for other forms of assistance, as nec-  
2           essary) through—

3                   “(i) farm telephone helplines and  
4                   internet websites;

5                   “(ii) training for advocates for af-  
6                   fected individuals and other individuals or  
7                   entities that may assist affected individuals  
8                   in crises, including training programs and  
9                   workshops;

10                  “(iii) support groups;

11                  “(iv) outreach services and activities,  
12                  including the dissemination of information  
13                  and materials; and

14                  “(v) home delivery of assistance, in  
15                  any case in which a farm resident is home-  
16                  bound.

17                  “(3) USE OF FUNDS.—A competitive grant pro-  
18                  vided under this subsection may be used to enter  
19                  into a contract, on a multiyear basis, with a commu-  
20                  nity-based, direct-service organization to initiate, ex-  
21                  pand, or maintain an eligible cooperative program in  
22                  the State.

23                  “(b) NATIONAL NETWORK.—

24                   “(1) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary, in co-  
25                   ordination with the Secretary of Health and Human

1 Services, shall establish a National Farm and Ranch  
 2 Stress Assistance Network to coordinate stress as-  
 3 sistance programs on a national scale for affected in-  
 4 dividuals, including through programs and activities  
 5 described in subsection (a)(2)(B).

6 “(2) DIRECTOR.—The Secretary, in coordina-  
 7 tion with the Secretary of Health and Human Serv-  
 8 ices, shall appoint an individual in the Department  
 9 of Agriculture to be the Director of the national net-  
 10 work.

11 “(c) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—Not-  
 12 withstanding any other provision of law, there is author-  
 13 ized to be appropriated to the Secretary to carry out ac-  
 14 tivities through the national network and State networks  
 15 \$10,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2019 through 2023.

16 **“SEC. 1461A. FARM AND RANCH STRESS ASSESSMENT COM-**  
 17 **MITTEE.**

18 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 90 days after  
 19 the date of enactment of the FARMERS FIRST Act, the  
 20 Secretary and the Secretary of Health and Human Serv-  
 21 ices shall establish an advisory committee, to be known  
 22 as the ‘Farm and Ranch Stress Assessment Committee’.

23 “(b) MEMBERSHIP.—The Committee shall consist  
 24 of—

25 “(1) the Secretary (or a designee);

1           “(2) the Secretary of Health and Human Serv-  
2       ices (or a designee);

3           “(3) the Assistant Secretary of Health and  
4       Human Services for Mental Health and Substance  
5       Abuse (or a designee);

6           “(4) the Administrator of the Health Resources  
7       and Services Administration (or a designee);

8           “(5) the Director of the Centers for Disease  
9       Control and Prevention (or a designee);

10          “(6) the Director of the National Institutes of  
11       Health;

12          “(7) the Under Secretary for Rural Develop-  
13       ment (or a designee); and

14          “(8) 4 members, to be appointed by the Sec-  
15       retary, one of which shall be a representative of each  
16       of—

17               “(A) affected individuals;

18               “(B) behavioral health professionals;

19               “(C) advocates for affected individuals;

20       and

21               “(D) as appropriate, other experts in occu-  
22       pational stress and behavioral health among af-  
23       fected individuals.

24       “(c) MEETINGS.—The Committee shall meet not  
25       fewer than 2 times each year.

1 “(d) REPORT.—

2 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year after  
3 the date of enactment of the FARMERS FIRST  
4 Act, the Committee shall submit to Congress and  
5 any other relevant Federal department or agency,  
6 and make publicly available, a report describing the  
7 state of behavioral and mental health in farmers and  
8 ranchers.

9 “(2) CONTENTS.—The report under paragraph  
10 (1) shall include—

11 “(A) an inventory and assessment of ef-  
12 forts to support the behavioral and mental  
13 health of farmers and ranchers by—

14 “(i) the Federal Government, States,  
15 and units of local government;

16 “(ii) communities that are comprised  
17 of farmers and ranchers;

18 “(iii) healthcare providers;

19 “(iv) State cooperative extension serv-  
20 ices; and

21 “(v) other entities, as determined by  
22 the Secretary;

23 “(B) a description of the challenges faced  
24 by farmers and ranchers (including financial,  
25 medical, and other challenges) that may impact



1 the behavioral and mental health of farmers  
2 and ranchers;

3 “(C) an evaluation of the impact of farmer  
4 and rancher suicides on—

5 “(i) the agricultural workforce;

6 “(ii) agricultural production;

7 “(iii) rural families and communities;

8 and

9 “(iv) succession planning; and

10 “(D) an outline of a long-term strategy  
11 and recommendations based on best practices to  
12 appropriate Federal departments or agencies  
13 for addressing the challenges identified under  
14 subparagraph (B).”.

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