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 Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture
731 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 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

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

We urge you to reauthorize FRSAN 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