

FAMILY FARMING AND CRISIS RELIEF

2017 SPECIAL ORDER OF BUSINESS

2017 is expected to be another year of declining farm incomes and worsening economic conditions. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has projected *net farm income* to decline by 8.7 percent this year, marking a 50 percent decline from 2013.

Additional indicators point to ongoing stress within our rural communities. These include: declining farm asset values, an increase in overall farm debt, and an erosion of farm sector equity. Lending from financial institutions to producers has declined 40 percent and the debt-to-asset measure is now above its average over the previous ten years. As debt increases and working capital declines, National Farmers Union (NFU) is extremely concerned about the financial health of our nation's farmers and ranchers.

NFU urges congress and the administration to take action in support of farmers and ranchers. Such support should include robust discretionary and mandatory funding for the Certified Agricultural Mediation Program. This program assists agricultural producers, their creditors, and other persons to resolve disputes thereby reducing the participant's cost associated with administrative appeals, litigation, and bankruptcy.

Congress must also move to reauthorize and fully fund the Farmer and Rancher Stress Assistance Network to aid in the mental health of individuals coping with financial stress. This program supports cooperative agreements between state cooperative extension services and nonprofit organizations to provide stress assistance programs to farmers, ranchers, and other agriculture-related occupations.

Finally, NFU urges congress to consider the additional layer of burdens that affect beginning farmers during difficult financial climates. These producers represent the future of agriculture, yet are the most vulnerable to the current economic climate. NFU calls on congress and the administration to provide additional support to ensure their continued participation in agriculture.