



August 2017

District Work Packet

Overview

The August congressional recess is upon us, and elected officials are back in their home districts and states spending time with their constituents. Now is the time to speak up and make your voice heard. Call and set up meetings with your elected officials while they are home and attend town hall meetings.

There are a number of legislative priorities for family farmers, ranchers and their rural communities that may be taken up this year in Congress. National Farmers Union's top three legislative priorities include strengthening the farm safety net, supporting homegrown renewable energy development, and ensuring family farmers and ranchers have access to affordable, quality healthcare. Read through this District Work Packet to find out more about these issues, and get in touch with your representatives to have your voice heard!

Top Issues

1. A Strong Farm Safety Net
2. Access to Affordable, Quality Healthcare
3. Transition to a Homegrown, Renewable Energy Future



For more information about these issues, contact the NFU Government Relations Department at (202) 554-1600. To contact your members of Congress, call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121.



1. A Strong Farm Safety Net

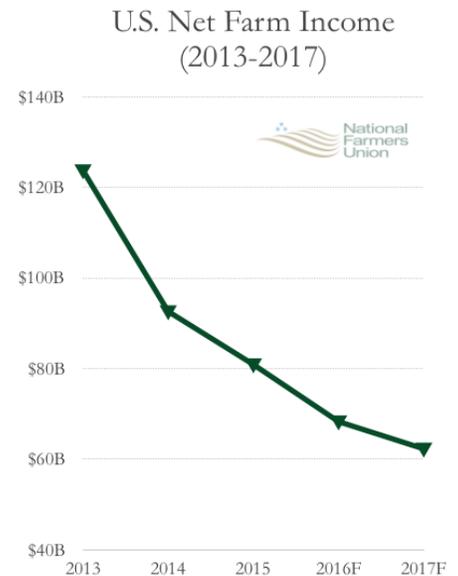
American family farmers and ranchers are enduring a severe economic downturn. Prices of major commodities have plummeted over the past four years, and projections indicate this trend will continue into the foreseeable future. To ensure the growth and success of family farm agriculture, Congress must strengthen the overall farm safety net.

The State of the Farm Economy

- ~ Net farm income has dropped by 50 percent in the past four years, and is projected to be \$62.3 billion in 2017.
- ~ The median farm income in 2017 is projected to be negative.
- ~ Farm lending dropped by 40 percent from one year ago.

Farming: Inherent Risks, Unique Markets

There are two things farmers can't control: the weather and the markets. Programs in the federal Farm Bill have historically helped mitigate these two risks so that family farmers and ranchers can continue to grow high quality food, fiber, feed and fuel for the country.



The Strong Farm Safety Net

To ensure farmers and ranchers can continue to provide for the country and the world, a strong farm safety net should provide meaningful support through severe economic downturns like the one we're in.

They can do this if they:

- ✓ **Improve farm programs**, which provide relief for farmers struggling with low commodity prices.
- ✓ **Protect crop insurance**, an essential risk management tool for farmers who suffer crop loss or loss of revenue.
- ✓ **Provide increased access to credit**. USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) set a new record across its loan portfolio last year and needs additional funding.
- ✓ **Support agriculture mediation programs**, which provide support to farmers struggling to meet financial obligation.

What Congress Should Do

- ~ Write a Farm Bill that addresses the needs of family farmers & ranchers, not arbitrary budget cuts.
- ~ Complete this Farm Bill immediately.



2. Access to Health Care

Health care is a top priority for family farmers and ranchers. As their health insurance premiums rise and the marketplace becomes more unstable, farmers need Congress to improve the **accessibility**, **affordability**, and **quality** of health insurance.

What is working?

- ✓ **The current system of tax credits & premium subsidies**
 - ~ These help farmers and ranchers maintain consistent coverage.
- ✓ **Medicaid expansion**
 - ~ The success of the Medicaid program is crucial to the viability of rural hospitals, where patients enroll in the program at a higher rate than their urban counterparts.
- ✓ **Protections for individuals with preexisting conditions**
 - ~ These protections ensure premiums do not skyrocket for those individuals.
 - ~ Two-thirds of farmers and ranchers report having a pre-existing condition.

What needs fixing?

- ✗ **The health insurance marketplace**
 - ~ Health insurance marketplaces continue to be unstable in many areas, leading to significant increases in premium costs.
- ✗ **Insurance companies cherry-pick profitable marketplaces**
 - ~ This leaves many farming and rural communities with little choice on health insurers.
 - ~ In fact, 41% of rural enrollees currently have just one insurer option.
- ✗ **Inadequate support for rural hospitals**
 - ~ This forces rural hospital closures, stranding farmers and rural residents.

BY THE NUMBERS:

Farming & Healthcare

58,000

adult farm injuries are estimated to have occurred in 2014 alone.

3/4 of farmers & ranchers rely on an off-farm job to obtain health insurance.

46% of rural hospital patients rely on Medicaid.

52% of farmers and ranchers are not confident they could pay the costs of a major illness or injury without going into debt.

What Congress Should Do

- ~ **Improve the affordability, accessibility, and quality of health care**
 - ~ Protect premium tax credits, subsidies, protections for those with preexisting conditions, and Medicaid.
 - ~ Place requirements on insurers to prevent cherry picking the most profitable marketplaces.
 - ~ Increase support to rural hospitals.



3. A Renewable Energy Future

The transition to a homegrown, renewable energy future for the U.S. is well underway. The growth of renewable energy use in transportation fuels, powered through policies like the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS), has been a success story for all Americans. For the U.S. to realize the full potential of the renewable energy sector, we should promote clean, higher-blended ethanol and advanced biobased fuels.

How to Transition

✓ E30

~ By removing arbitrary legislative and regulatory barriers to higher blends of ethanol, like E30, we can transition the energy sector to fuels that clean up our air and benefit farming and rural communities.

✓ Advanced Biofuels

~ Advanced biofuels also offer *tremendous* environmental benefits, and they provide farmers and ranchers additional value for farm byproducts. We should protect demand for new and advanced biofuels through policies like the RFS, removal of regulatory barriers, and further research, development and infrastructure investments.

Benefits from this Transition

✓ The Environment

~ Clean-burning fuels cut down on greenhouse gas emissions that exacerbate climate change, as well as pollutants that cause smog and increase ozone levels, which are hazardous to human health.

✓ American Family Farmers

~ Family farmers rely on expanded markets for their crops and biobased products, especially as low farm prices continue to push the national farm economy into its worst condition in a generation.

✓ Rural Communities

~ Biofuels development brings billions of dollars of capital investment, millions of dollars of new tax base, and many thousands of new, well-paying jobs with benefits to struggling rural communities.

BY THE NUMBERS:

Homegrown Fuels

43%

Ethanol's reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared to conventional gasoline.

500 Million

barrels of imported oil are replaced by homegrown ethanol each year.

\$100 Billion

in savings per year for consumers at the gas pump.

113

Octane rating for ethanol - improving the ability to meet fuel economy & emissions standards.

What Congress Should Do

~ Continue to support a strong RFS.

~ Eliminate barriers to higher-blended ethanol and advanced biofuels.