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Agricultural Access to Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Mental Health Care Act

U.S. Senators Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) and Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.)

Family farmers and ranchers across the West face unique challenges as they fight to preserve their livelihoods and pass on their farms to the next generation. Volatile commodity prices, increased input costs, more frequent wildfires, severe drought, and other extreme weather events significantly affect the mental health of farming and ranching communities.

According to the National Rural Health Association, the rate of suicide among farmers is three and a half times greater than the general population.¹ A Morning Consult poll found that during 2021, most farmers and workers (61%) and rural adults (52%) reported experiencing more stress and mental health challenges compared to the prior year.² The same poll also found that while the stigma around seeking help or treatment for mental health has decreased, it remains a factor in agriculture.

Despite the demonstrated need for substance use disorder treatment and mental health care, many rural communities face barriers to access these services. The Agricultural Access to Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Mental Health Care Act would require the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study to address these barriers and improve access to care.

Specifically, the study mandated by the legislation will assess:

- The availability and accessibility of substance use treatment and mental health care providers trained to serve the needs of farmers, ranchers, agricultural workers, and their families;
- Barriers faced by farmers and ranchers in accessing substance use disorder treatment and mental health care resources;
- Successful programs at the state and local levels that can be replicated at the federal level to address the mental and behavioral health needs of agricultural communities; and
- Best practices among grantees of the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network.

¹https://www.ruralhealth.us/NRHA/media/Emerge_NRHA/Advocacy/Policy%20documents/NRHA-Policy-Brief-Increases-in-Suicide-Rates-Among-Farmers-in-Rural-America.pdf

²<https://www.fb.org/news-release/new-national-poll-shows-encouraging-signs-of-reduced-stigma-around-farmer-mental-health>