

Farm Aid 2018: An Urgent Crisis for America's Farm Families

Economic Stress, Farm Losses and Suicide Are Ramping Up in Farm Country

The U.S. farm economy is in crisis.

- Calls to Farm Aid's hotline have increased by 30% in 2018, with **60-80 calls** each month from farmers who are experiencing extreme stress connected with financial and legal issues and the potential loss of their land, livelihood and legacy.
- In 2018, net farm income is predicted to be **53 percent lower** than it was in 2013. Meanwhile, production expenses and interest rates are increasing, putting family farmers in a vice that is forcing many to call it quits.
- The crisis is particularly urgent for dairy farmers. **This past February, in New England, the dairy co-op Agri-Mark sent farmers phone numbers for suicide prevention hotlines** and other mental health services along with the latest market forecasts, which told a bleak story: Prices for milk — usually the largest portion of dairy farmers' revenues — were forecast to fall for the third year in a row in 2018. Every day, dairy farmers are being paid significantly less for their milk than what it costs them to produce it.
- Price declines for all farm commodities make it difficult for farmers to pay their bills and obtain the operating loans they need to run their farm. Additionally, uncertainty around U.S. trade and immigration policies is creating turmoil in the marketplace and threatening farmers' ability to secure the farm labor they need.
- Farming is a business largely influenced by factors beyond farmers' control, including weather, disease, pests, prices, interest rates and policies. This puts farmers at a particularly high risk for stress and suicide. A 2016 study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that people working in the farming, fishing and forestry group had the highest rate of suicide of all occupations. The findings were retracted due to questions around methodology but Farm Aid knows through our hotline that regardless of the specific numbers, farmers need our support and farm policies that pay them a fair price and let them access fair markets. In addition, we must increase accessibility to mental health resources in rural America.
- Bills in the House and Senate have been proposed to re-authorize the Farmer and Rancher Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN), which was created by the 2008 Farm Bill but was never funded. Funding will enable the 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.
- FRSAN is just a first step. Farmer stress is usually rooted in economic and legal challenges and can be managed once steps are in place to address the root problem. Farm Aid's priority is to connect farmers to all of these services (mental health, financial counseling and legal expertise) to address farm stress holistically and practically. All three areas of service to farmers have suffered since the Farm Crisis, chipped away over the decades by funding cuts and a systemic lack of desire to strengthen rural America.
- If the American family farmer is to survive, **farm policy needs a massive shift in direction.** For several decades, farm and trade policies have encouraged farmers to produce as much as possible, leading to boom-and-bust cycles that drive small farms out of business and compel mid- and large-sized farms to keep getting bigger. We need farm policy that delivers fair prices to farmers that allow them to make a living and the resources that provide a safety net in times of need.

