

TOM EMMER
6TH DISTRICT, MINNESOTA

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NATIONAL SECURITY, INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT AND MONETARY POLICY

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2306

September 9, 2021

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HOUSE REPUBLICAN STEERING

REPUBLICAN WHIP TEAM

DEPUTY WHIP TEAM

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I write to urge you to help address the enormous mental health challenges faced by farmers and ranchers across the country, which have no doubt been exacerbated by the severe drought sweeping my state and elsewhere.

Over four million Minnesotans live and work in areas currently experiencing severe drought, which is taking an especially devastating toll on the agriculture industry. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Crop Progress and Condition Report, both corn and soybean development is well below last year's levels. Currently, 36 percent of Minnesota's corn is in the "good" to "excellent" range, whereas our soybeans are sitting at 31 percent in that range. Last year at this time, both the condition of corn and soybeans within the "good" to "excellent" range was 82 percent. Meanwhile, an alarming 94 percent of Minnesota's pasture ground is in "poor" or "very poor" condition.¹

Earlier this year, I led a letter with 28 of my House colleagues urging full funding for the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) to ensure our nation's farm families have access to mental health resources. There is clearly a major need to highlight this program: a December 2020 survey found that 87 percent of farmers and farmworkers say it is important to reduce the stigma about mental health.²

Given current challenges, the mental health of our farmers is at least as important now. As such, I request your office provide answers to the following questions:

- First, what resources is the USDA providing to help farmers cope with the stressors brought on by this current drought specifically?
- Second, and more broadly, could you provide me with a regional report detailing what FRSAN has done so far to help farmers in Minnesota and across the United States?

¹ United States Department of Agriculture. "Crop Progress." <https://usda.library.cornell.edu/concern/publications/8336h188j?locale=en> (Accessed: September 1, 2020).

² American Farm Bureau Federation. "Impacts of COVID-19 on Rural Mental Health." https://www.fb.org/files/Impacts_of_COVID-19_on_Rural_Mental_Health_1.6.21.pdf (Accessed: September 1, 2020).

- Lastly, what is the breakdown of funding the USDA has obligated and outlaid for FRSAN so far in the current fiscal year, and how much money is left to deploy?

The health and well-being of the agricultural sector is critically important to our nation's prosperity. I look forward to your timely response as we work to meet the mental health needs of farmers, ranchers, and their families during this especially difficult time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Emmer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "T" and a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

Tom Emmer
Member of Congress