

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2599

To amend the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 to provide assistance to manage farmer and rancher stress and for the mental health of individuals in rural areas, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER 15, 2019

Mr. TESTER (for himself and Mr. GRASSLEY) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

A BILL

To amend the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 to provide assistance to manage farmer and rancher stress and for the mental health of individuals in rural areas, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Seeding Rural Resil-

5 ience Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. DEFINITION OF SECRETARY.**

7 In this Act, the term “Secretary” means the Sec-

8 retary of Agriculture.

1 **SEC. 3. FINDINGS.**

2 Congress finds that—

3 (1) according to the Centers for Disease Con-
4 trol and Prevention, the suicide rate is 45 percent
5 greater in rural areas of the United States than the
6 suicide rate in urban areas of the United States;

7 (2) farmers face social isolation, the potential
8 for financial losses, barriers to seeking mental health
9 services, and access to lethal means to commit sui-
10 cide; and

11 (3) as commodity prices fall and farmers face
12 uncertainty, reports of farmer suicides are increas-
13 ing.

14 **SEC. 4. PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT CAMPAIGN TO**
15 **ADDRESS FARM AND RANCH MENTAL**
16 **HEALTH.**

17 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, in consultation
18 with the Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall
19 carry out a public service announcement campaign to ad-
20 dress the mental health of farmers and ranchers.

21 (b) REQUIREMENTS.—The public service announce-
22 ment campaign under subsection (a) shall include tele-
23 vision, radio, print, outdoor, and digital public service an-
24 nouncements.

25 (c) CONTRACTOR.—The Secretary may enter into a
26 contract or other agreement with a third party to carry

1 out the public service announcement campaign under sub-
2 section (a).

3 (d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
4 authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary to carry
5 out this section \$3,000,000, to remain available until ex-
6 pended.

7 **SEC. 5. EMPLOYEE TRAINING PROGRAM TO MANAGE FARM-**
8 **ER AND RANCHER STRESS.**

9 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subtitle A of the Department of
10 Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6912
11 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

12 **“SEC. 224B. EMPLOYEE TRAINING PROGRAM TO MANAGE**
13 **FARMER AND RANCHER STRESS.**

14 “(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall establish a
15 voluntary program to train employees of the Farm Service
16 Agency, the Risk Management Agency, and the Natural
17 Resources Conservation Service in the management of
18 stress experienced by farmers and ranchers, including the
19 detection of stress and suicide prevention.

20 “(b) REQUIREMENT.—Not later than 180 days after
21 the date on which the Secretary submits a report on the
22 results of the pilot program being carried out by the Sec-
23 retary as of the date of enactment of this section to train
24 employees of the Department in the management of stress
25 experienced by farmers and ranchers, and based on the

1 recommendations contained in that report, the Secretary
 2 shall develop a training program to carry out subsection
 3 (a).

4 “(c) REPORT.—Not less frequently than once every
 5 2 years, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on
 6 Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Com-
 7 mittee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Sen-
 8 ate a report describing the implementation of this sec-
 9 tion.”.

10 (b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

11 (1) Subtitle A of the Department of Agriculture
 12 Reorganization Act of 1994 is amended by redesignig-
 13 nating section 225 (7 U.S.C. 6925) as section 224A.

14 (2) Section 296(b) of the Department of Agri-
 15 culture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C.
 16 7014(b)) is amended by adding at the end the fol-
 17 lowing:

18 “(11) The authority of the Secretary to carry
 19 out section 224B.”.

20 **SEC. 6. TASK FORCE FOR ASSESSMENT OF CAUSES OF MEN-**
 21 **TAL STRESS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR RE-**
 22 **SPONSE.**

23 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall convene a
 24 task force of agricultural and rural stakeholders at the
 25 national, State, and local levels—

1 (1) to assess the causes of mental stress in
2 farmers and ranchers; and

3 (2) to identify best practices for responding to
4 that mental stress.

5 (b) SUBMISSION OF REPORT.—Not later than 1 year
6 after the date of enactment of this Act, the task force con-
7 vened under subsection (a) shall submit to the Secretary
8 a report containing the assessment and best practices
9 under paragraphs (1) and (2), respectively, of subsection
10 (a).

11 (c) COLLABORATION.—In carrying out this section,
12 the task force convened under subsection (a) shall collabo-
13 rate with nongovernmental organizations and State and
14 local agencies.

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