



National Family Farm Coalition

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FARMER AND FISHER GROUPS PRAISE WHITE HOUSE FOR RECOGNIZING RURAL HEALTH CARE PROBLEMS

NFFC Member Groups Invited To Discuss Problems in Obtaining Quality Health Care

Washington D.C. (May 5, 2009) – The National Family Farm Coalition and three of its member organizations were invited to a May 4 meeting organized by the White House Office of Public Liaison to discuss the issues and challenges of rural health care costs, access and affordability. Lisa Griffith of the National Family Farm Coalition, said, “NFFC commends the Obama Administration for recognizing the severe problem of health care among farmers and fishermen. We are honored that the White House recognizes our insights as well as the important differences between rural and urban health care needs.”

Moderating the event was Nancy-Ann DeParle, Counselor to the President and Director of the White House Office of Health Reform. Also representing the Administration were Dr. Mary Wakefield, Administrator at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Tina Tchen, Director of the White House Office of Public Liaison, and Representative Mike Ross (D-AR), who serves on the Subcommittee on Health of the Committee of Energy and Commerce.

Rhonda Perry, Policy Director of the Missouri Rural Crisis Center, noted that many Missouri farmers spend up to 15% of their annual income on catastrophic high-deductible health insurance (often up to \$5,000) to protect their farming operations in case of emergency health care events. Perry said, “The ‘free market’ has been a total failure for farmers. The individual market forces farmers to obtain the most expensive policies with the highest overall health care costs. We have so few options from which to purchase affordable health care. This crisis cannot be allowed to continue.”

J.J. Bartlett, President of the Fishing Partnership Health Plan, oversees the demonstration program utilized by Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance of fishermen in Massachusetts. In 1997, 40 per cent of Massachusetts fishing families had no health care, but their sliding scale, zero-deductible and zero-exclusion plan is now universal in the state.

Bartlett said, “Working with members of the community to perform outreach and advocacy services keeps our program’s administrative costs low and member satisfaction high.”

Sibyl Miller, an organic farmer representing Ohio Farmers Union, mentioned the need for preventive health care in rural areas, including mobile van services and education around healthy foods. Miller also suggested that as food producers, farmers should have access to healthy foods and affordable health care like other citizens.

The attached photo from the meeting features from left to right Representative Mike Ross (D-AR), Rhonda Perry, Nancy-Ann DeParle and J.J. Bartlett.

