

News Release
For Immediate Release
Compiled by Kay Rogers

Massive opioid impact in farm country

74% of farmers & farm workers say they have been directly impacted by opioid abuse



"We've known for some time that opioid addiction is a serious problem in farm country, but numbers like these are heartbreaking," AFBF President Zippy Duvall said. "Opioids have been too easy to come by and too easy to become addicted to. That's why we are urging everyone we know to talk to their friends, family, co-workers – anyone at all they know or suspect needs help. And because opioid addiction is a disease, it's up to all of us to help people who suffer from it and help them find the treatment they need. Government cannot and will not fix this on its own. Rural communities are strong. The strengths of our towns can overcome this crisis." (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Flickr/Creative Commons)

WASHINGTON — The opioid crisis has struck farm and ranch families much harder than the rest of rural America, a Morning Consult survey shows.

While just under half of rural Americans say they have been directly impacted by opioid abuse, 74 percent of farmers and farm workers say they have. Three in four farmers say it would be easy for someone in their community to access opioids illegally, and just under half of rural adults – 46 percent – say the same. The poll, sponsored by the American Farm Bureau Federation and National Farmers Union, is a first step in the groups' collaboration on this issue.

“We’ve known for some time that opioid addiction is a serious problem in farm country, but numbers like these are heartbreaking,” AFBF President Zippy Duvall said. “Opioids have been too easy to come by and too easy to become addicted to. That’s why we are urging everyone we know to talk to their friends, family, co-workers – anyone at all they know or suspect needs help. And because opioid addiction is a disease, it’s up to all of us to help people who suffer from it and help them find the treatment they need. Government cannot and will not fix this on its own. Rural communities are strong. The strengths of our towns can overcome this crisis.”

“The opioid crisis is not just some talking point or abstract issue—it is an enormous challenge for both rural and urban America, and we as a country need to come to grips with it,” said NFU President Roger Johnson. “These responses demonstrate the reach of the unrelenting and deadly crisis that is gripping farm families across the country. Farm and rural communities currently face major challenges in the fight against addiction, like access to services, treatment and support. Time and time again, farmers and ranchers have come together to help their families and their neighbors through challenging situations. That same resolve and compassion will help us break the grips of opioid addiction in rural America.”

More highlights from the survey:

- Half of farmers and farm workers (50 percent) say addiction to opioids is a disease, rather than due to a lack of willpower.
- Three in four farmers (77 percent), as well as those who work in agriculture generally (76 percent), say it would be easy for someone in their community to access a large amount of prescription opioids or painkillers without a prescription.
- Rural adults overwhelmingly recognize that opioid abuse can begin accidentally with the use of what are deemed safe painkillers or opioids (75 percent).
- Rural adults are largely unaware that rural communities are impacted the most by the opioid crisis (31 percent). And, they say opioid abuse is a major problem in urban communities more so than in rural communities by a 10-point margin (57 percent vs. 47 percent).
- One in three rural adults (34 percent) say it would be easy to access treatment for addiction to prescription drugs or heroin in their local community. But, less than half (38 percent) are confident they could seek care that is either effective, covered by insurance, convenient or affordable.
- One in three rural adults say there is a great deal of stigma associated with opioid abuse in their local community (31 percent), and that the stigma of abuse and addiction contributes a great deal to the opioid crisis (32 percent).
- A strong majority of rural Americans believe increasing public education surrounding resources (68 percent) and reducing the shame or stigma around opioid addiction (57 percent) are effective means for solving the opioid crisis.

—American Farm Bureau Federation
November 30, 2017