

November 10, 2025

State Board of Agriculture and Education:

I am writing in support of additional funds for NDSU Extension Family and Community Wellness programs. I grew up in western North Dakota in Golden Valley county and currently spend 6 months every year back in my home community. In my current role as a Wisdom Keeper for the College of Human and Health Sciences, we have been actively involved in discussions about how to support the initiative to transform rural health care in North Dakota. A key part of this discussion has centered around the current and potential expanded future role of the FCW programs as a vital part of the overall rural health system (Attachment 1).

I can personally attest to the challenges in providing FCW programs even within the current level of funding. For example in Golden Valley and Billings county we do not have a dedicated FCW agent. In theory we are supported by the Stark county, however Dickinson is an hour drive away from Beach. So if we were to attend those programs it would mean 2 hours of commuting plus time to participate. For many of the residents in Golden Valley they already have a 30 minute commute to Beach from the surrounding countryside. If they have children, they are already commuting to Beach for school and after school events during the school year and in the summer are working until the sun goes down. So while it sounds good to say that Golden Valley county can be supported by a surrounding county, the reality is quite different. Our current Golden Valley county agent is focused on support for Agriculture and her time is fully utilized in that role.

When growing up our community had a hospital, doctors, clinic, public health nurse, and drugstores. However at this time we have NO hospital, a drugstore (pharmacy technicians only), a satellite clinic with nurse practitioners from a larger hospital system in Dickinson and part time public health nurse (shared with another county). There currently is NO support for public/community health programs within reach of the county residents. For residents who live and work in the agricultural sector in Golden Valley county the programs must be available within the community where they live and work and be delivered by people they trust who also live in the community.

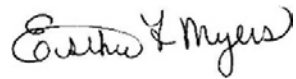
In North Dakota we are truly fortunate to have the County Extension Agricultural agents, but if we truly want to transform rural health care, we also need the same support for FCW agents in EVERY county to be able to meet the community needs and provide the community health component addressing nutrition, home health care, aging, and prevention programs. Additional funding for the FCW program is a vital part of the overall effort to create and sustain a healthy agriculture community which is the lifeblood of rural North Dakota.

Last year when my brother in law was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, we could not even access hospice care for guidance since they were located in Dickinson and could not support with a home assessment, could not provide hospital bed for stay at home care since they didn't have the resources to drive out to his house to "set up" the hospital bed, and left us completely on our own to try to provide hospice care. Their only suggestion was that there was no alternative other than putting him in a nursing home either in Wibaux, Montana or Dickinson, ND. The Manor in Beach can not provide support for any resident that can not live independently and was not an option. Being admitted to a

nursing home away from home was clearly NOT what he wanted. He wanted to remain at home for his final days surrounded by family and friends. Clearly the community is currently not able to support this basic effort. (Not to even mention the cost of nursing home care instead of staying at home.)

Situations such as this demonstrate the need to have a FCW agent who could recognize this type of need and create a suitable FCW educational program to address helping families in these situations as they provide support for their aging loved ones. The need is NOT being met with our current resources.

The benefits of the current FCW programs are outlined in the attached handout, however our community is not included at current time since funding is not available to support a truly local FCW agent within our county. Funding for the expansion of both the number of FCW agents as well as funding to continually create and support county and state wide specific programs is needed for the sustainment of a healthy agricultural community in rural North Dakota.



Esther Myers, PhD, RDN, FAND

PO Box 516

Beach, North Dakota 58621

efmyers@efmyersconsulting.com

Member of Wisdom Keepers for College of Human and Health Sciences, NDSU

Atch:

SBARE ASK: Program Support Funds for Family and Community Wellness (FCW)