

Farmers Urge An Overhaul Of Health Care System

WASHINGTON D.C. — Farmers participating in a conference call with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton urged the administration to swiftly and comprehensively reform the nation's health care system.

Three of the seven farmers who shared their stories and concerns regarding health care reform with the First Lady were members of the National Farmers Union (NFU). They include Glen Strnad, Munden, Kan.; Ruben Hummell, Mott, N.D. and Ralph Johnson, Bloomfield, Iowa. NFU President Leland Swenson joined the conference call from the White House.

"I'm old enough to retire, but not old enough to get health care," said Strnad, who is in his early sixties. He told the First Lady that he and his wife dropped their health insurance in 1990 when monthly premiums hit \$600. Strnad said this same policy would now cost them \$1,400.

Access is necessary, said Mrs. Clinton. Everyone has access to a Mercedes Benz, but most of us can't afford one, she said.

Hummell thanked the First Lady for taking a stand on health care reform, saying, it's time Congress stops talking and acts. "I see no reason people in our country should be paying five times what other countries pay for health care," he said.

Mrs. Clinton criticized the "scare tactics" being used by special interest groups to confuse citizens about the need for health care reform. She acknowledged that the insurance lobby continues to be affective with members of the U.S. Congress.

Johnson told of health insurance premiums for he and his wife rising from \$2000 annually in 1983 to \$12,000 in 1992. "We had to drop to a lower level (of coverage). In 1994, if we had the same insurance, it would cost us \$13,876," he said. Johnson also said he believes it is unfair that farmers cannot deduct the full cost of their insurance premiums for their income tax like other businesses and commended the President's plan for this provision.

Another farmer talked about how his lender instructed him to

drop his health care insurance — holding that it was a luxury, rather than a necessity.

The First Lady asked the farm leaders participating in the conference call to "support" the goal of guaranteed insurance for every American at an affordable cost." Health care has become a financial drain for agricultural producers. Many families' health care premiums meet or exceed the average income earned by farm families from farming.

A recent study comparing health care costs for an average Kansas wheat producing family shows that in 1993, a farmer had to sell 3663 bushels of wheat to purchase health insurance and pay out-of-pocket costs. The 1993 level compares with an equivalent of 678 bushels in 1982 and 355 bushels in 1964.

National Farmers Union has advocated universal health care coverage for half a century. The following includes the key policy points adopted by delegates to

NFU's annual convention in March 1994.

• NFU supports a plan that provides preventive and long-term health care.

• NFU endorses 100-percent federal income tax deductibility of health care premiums paid by the self-employed.

• NFU believes that simplicity and streamlining will enable resources to be directed toward patient care, rather than administrative costs.

• NFU holds that the new health care plan must address discriminatory pricing policies and rural access to prescription drugs and pharmacy services.

Clinics Offered

HUNTINGDON (Huntingdon Co.) — Agronomic field diagnostic clinics will be held at the Penn State Agronomy Farm at Rockspring on July 21 and July 26.

The program offers hands-on diagnostic training in crop production, soil fertility, and pest management. Penn State specialists will cover key agronomic topics with ample opportunity for one-on-one discussion.

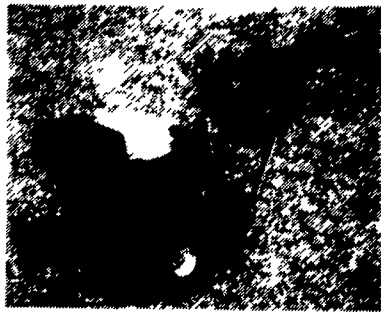
The July 21 clinic is targeted toward agricultural industry per-

sonnel. Farmers are invited to attend the July 26 session. Either group may attend either clinic if the planned date is inconvenient. The programs begin at 9 a.m. and conclude by 4:30 p.m.

Cost of registration is \$25, which includes lunch and support materials. Registration deadlines are July 11 for the ag industry clinic and July 18 for the farmer-oriented session. Register by phone at (814) 865-8301. Pesticide certification credits will be available.

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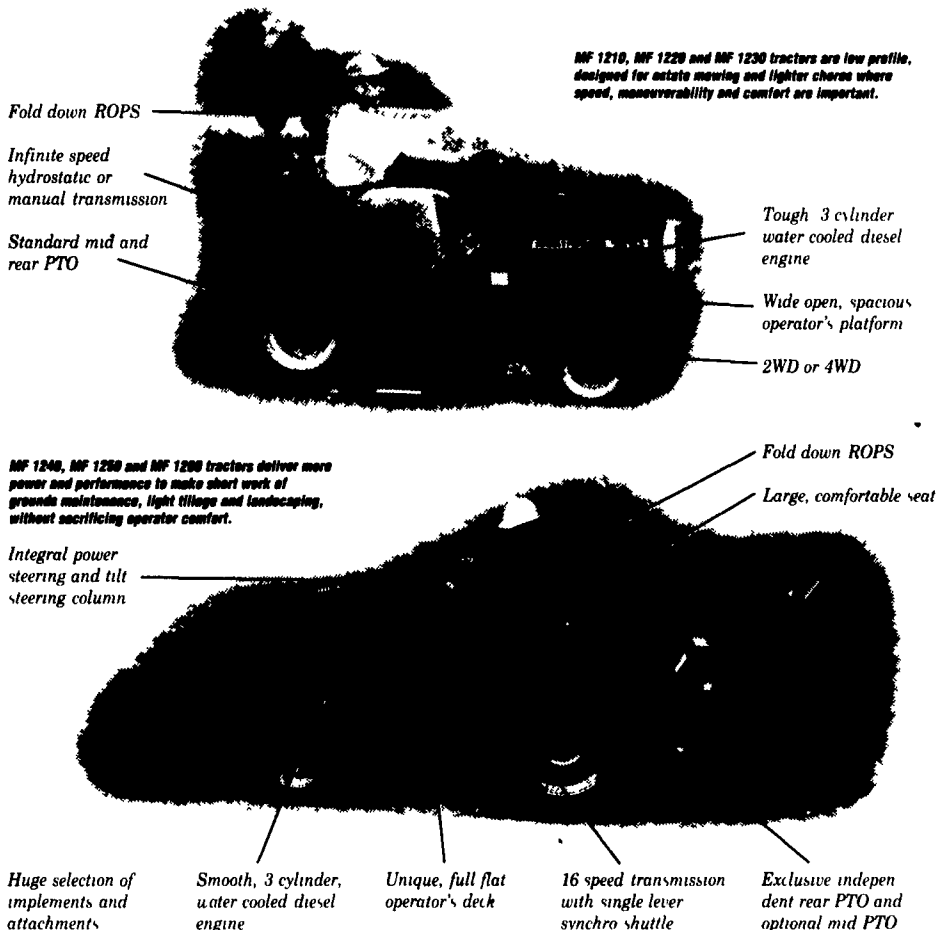
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