

VA FARMS Fact Sheet

In the spring of 2018, Congress directed the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Rural Health (ORH) to create a pilot program to provide Veterans with agricultural vocation training as well as behavioral health care services and treatments from licensed providers. In response, ORH collaborated with VA's Nutrition and Food Services as well as the Offices of Care Management and Social Work, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention's Therapeutic and Supported Employment Service section, and Community Engagement to develop the Veterans Affairs Farming and Recovery Mental Health Services (VA FARMS) pilot program.

To generate nationwide interest in the program, ORH launched a targeted Request for Applications (RFA). ORH opened applications to VHA facilities and encouraged each to partner with an existing community organization engaged in agricultural training. Representatives from each partner office reviewed the applications for feasibility, probability of success and compliance with the Congressional mandate.

In July 2018, VA awarded ten VHA sites of care with funding to implement their proposed pilot programs. Today, seven sites remain active including:

- ▶ VA Maryland Health Care System
- ▶ Canandaigua VA Medical Center
- ▶ VA Portland Health Care System
- ▶ VA Caribbean Health Care System
- ▶ VA Puget Sound Health Care System
- ▶ Huntington VA Medical Center
- ▶ William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital

Each pilot site is responsible for reporting regularly on Veteran participants, program activities, and mental health referrals. To meet legislative requirements, ORH provides national oversight of the pilot program and evaluates outcomes, efficacy, and lessons learned to determine agritherapy's ability to enhance outcomes in Veterans with behavioral and mental health needs.



Vegetables, herbs, and flowers at the TALMAR Farm.

Program Overview



Offers a range of health and wellness services, educational and vocational training programming.



Helps Veterans gain a sense of purpose, grow their skills, and find new opportunities for employment.



Encourages Veterans to increase physical activity, socialization, and community integration.

Veterans who participate in VA FARMS learn:

- ▶ **Technical agriculture and gardening skills** such as plant identification, propagation, harvesting, soil amendments, and sustainable agricultural practices
- ▶ **Business skills** related to agriculture including marketing agricultural products and developing business plans to sell products at local farmers markets
- ▶ **Life skills** such as time management, organization, and healthy cooking and nutrition
- ▶ **Therapeutic skills** to aid in recovery and the transition to civilian life

For more information on VA FARMS, contact ORH at rural.health.inquiry@va.gov or 202-632-8615.

The Office of Rural Health (ORH) works to see that America's Veterans thrive in rural communities. To support the health and well-being of rural Veterans, ORH and its Veterans Rural Health Resource Centers establish and disseminate initiatives that increase access to care for the 2.7 million rural Veterans enrolled in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' health care system. Key focus areas include programs that address workforce shortages, transportation, primary care, mental health, telehealth, and specialty care.