

In the spring of 2018, Congress directed the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) 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. These sites include:

- ▶ Canandaigua VA Medical Center
- ▶ VA Maryland Health Care System
- ▶ Huntington VA Medical Center
- ▶ VA Puget Sound Health Care System
- ▶ VA Caribbean Health Care System
- ▶ Madison VA Medical Center
- ▶ VA Hudson Valley Health Care System
- ▶ VA Butler Health Care System
- ▶ VA Portland Health Care System
- ▶ VA New Jersey Health Care System

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.

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

