



NATIONAL GRANGE OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

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American Values. Hometown Roots.

December 2, 2020

Dr. Stephan M. Hahn, Commissioner
Food and Drug Administration
White Oak Building One
10903 New Hampshire Avenue
Silver Spring, Maryland 20933

Dear Commissioner Hahn:

The millions of Americans living in rural areas have, for decades, faced a growing struggle when compared to their suburban or urban contemporaries. Decreasing incomes, fewer jobs, and even fewer healthcare options have become unfortunate mainstays of rural life. The arrival of COVID-19, and its surge across the nation throughout this fall, have only magnified these existing problems.

Before COVID-19, it was clear from all available data that rural residents were, on average, older, poorer, and sicker than those living in suburban or urban areas, while their ability to access doctors and quality healthcare facilities has fallen dramatically with [128 rural hospitals having closed since 2010 and another 700 vulnerable to closure](#). The pandemic has stretched these meagre resources, which were already overextended, to the absolute breaking point.

While the latest news from the development of potentially successful vaccine candidates and treatments are encouraging, ensuring all Americans have access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines and treatments is our utmost priority. The question of how rural communities will fare in obtaining any future COVID-19 vaccine is becoming steadily more pressing as we are learning more of potential distribution and storage challenges. Many communities do not currently have the infrastructure necessary to maintain and store these vaccine candidates and do not have the ability to put the necessary resources into place in the immediate future. This could lead to a near-complete lack of vaccination coverage in some large swaths of the country.

This is why it is imperative that the federal government continue to support innovation in the fight against COVID-19 and that the FDA consider any and all safe and effective vaccine and treatment options. American companies are continuing to innovate and invent new solutions to address this crisis, including promising results on a potential oral delivery method for the COVID-19 vaccine. Offering multiple delivery mechanisms could preempt many of the concerns facing rural residents, ensuring that doses could be distributed rapidly and administered in the

safety of Americans' own homes, instead of having to travel long distances to a healthcare professional where they could potentially contract the virus. It could also allow those with difficulties travelling or those who are unwilling to travel access to a vaccine. The federal government should support all innovative routes to vaccination to guarantee that no communities are left behind.

All signs point to COVID-19 circulating around the globe for some time to come. The answer to ensuring all communities spread across the vastness of the United States are armed against the continued growth of this devastating virus is multiple options to vaccination. We very much appreciate the federal government's continued effort combating this pandemic and hope for a future free from the long shadow of COVID-19.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Betsy Huber". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Betsy Huber, President
National Grange

cc:

Dr. Peter W. Marks, Director
Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research