

Farmers in Battleground States Fret Over Rising Health Costs

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A local farmer at a small clinic located at a truck stop in Raphine, Va. Farmers across the country who purchase insurance from the individual insurance market are facing steep premium hikes this year.

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Republicans are facing tough scrutiny from a key demographic in rural states grappling with soaring health costs: farmers.

Though rural districts are typically out of reach for Democrats, high healthcare costs in Midwestern states like Iowa have given the party fresh hope that they can be competitive in a midterm election year that is shaping up to be favorable for them.

“There are people here who are having to cancel their health insurance altogether because they can’t afford it,” said former Iowa state Rep. Christina Bohannon, the Democratic challenger to Rep. [Mariannette Miller-Meeks](#) (R-Iowa). “Some of that does

include our farmers, who are already being hit really hard by tariffs and trade wars with China.”

More than a quarter of farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers received coverage through the individual insurance market in 2023, according to an [analysis](#) from the health research group KFF. But when the Affordable Care Act’s more generous premium tax credits expired last year, premium payments increased.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee said voters in November will take both Iowa Republican incumbents Miller-Meeks and Rep. [Zach Nunn](#) to task over their support for the 2025 tax-and-health law, which also has threatened rural hospitals’ bottom lines.

“As Iowans grapple with skyrocketing premiums, closed clinics, and struggle to even access care at all, they will hold Miller-Meeks and Nunn accountable for selling them out,” said DCCC spokesperson Katie Smith.

Pressure on Farmers

Agricultural workers were surprised when ACA health insurance tax credits were allowed to expire, said Aaron Lehman, president of Iowa Farmers Union and a fifth-generation farmer in Polk County.

“Our members had expectations that people would put down their minor partisan bickering in order to find a common solution, and that just didn’t happen,” he said.

Farmers in Ohio are blaming the administration for high prices, which could depress voter turnout among President Donald Trump’s supporters.

“Honestly, what’s happening is I think that they are not going to vote,” said Bryn Bird, vice president of international affairs of the Ohio Farmers Union. Bird said many farmers shared their frustration with the Republican party but are reluctant to vote for a Democrat, pushing them toward not voting at all in the midterms.

Bird added that health care prices are piling onto other affordability concerns; 2026 is also a year when “diesel fuel doubled, where markets were down, where fertilizer in some cases tripled, quadrupled.”

Sen. [Jon Husted](#) (R-Ohio), who is trying to hold down Vice President JD Vance's old seat against former Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown, laid the blame of the high health costs on the ACA itself.

"It allowed so much consolidation that many rural people only have one choice and it's an unaffordable choice," he said. "It is a broken system and it needs dramatic reform."

But some farmers will need a more immediate solution.

"Many of the farm operations are family-owned businesses with a limited number of employees, so every premium increase comes directly out of their operating budget," said Betsy Brooks, owner and chief operating officer of R&B Insurance Services, which partners with the American Farm Bureau to help farmers find more affordable health coverage.

Voting for a Failed Effort

Some House Republicans broke with their party earlier this year to force a vote on an extension of the enhanced premium tax credits under the ACA, also known as Obamacare.

Nunn touted his vote on that measure and added "what I don't want to see is what my Democrat opponent's offering is a complete government takeover of healthcare."

That opponent, Iowa state Sen. Sarah Trone Garriott, said healthcare access is a big reason why she is running. She's pushing for earlier access to Medicare and a public option "to make sure everybody can access healthcare."

Pennsylvanian Republican Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick and [Rob Bresnahan](#) are facing tough races where health care costs are playing a part. The two Republicans voted for an extension of the ACA premium tax credits.

"Independent contractors, small businesses, landscapers, farmers all purchase their health insurance through the exchange," said Bresnahan, who sits on the House Agriculture Committee. "And that was a big reason why we were vocal advocates trying to find some solution."

Fitzpatrick said he hopes to see progress on premium tax credits next year, but his Democratic counterpart, Bob Harvie, pointed out that in the meantime some farmers may just go without health insurance if they can't afford it.

"That's really an incredibly dangerous thing for a farmer to have to do," he said.

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