

# GRANGE NEWS

STATE CONVENTION  
GRANGERS IN THE GARDEN



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## UPCOMING EVENTS

November 14-19	National Convention
February	Winter Youth Conference
March 14-17	Family Conference

Cover Image by Jessica Horton of NC Grangers enjoying lunch at the Duke Mansion in Charlotte, NC.



The Grange is a grassroots, community service, family organization with a special interest in agriculture and designed to help meet the needs of people, young and old, through a cooperative effort with government and other organizations that also seek the greatest good for the greatest number.

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## FROM JIMMY | FUNDING

There are some great opportunities ahead in the coming year for local Granges. NC Grange is offering some significant financial support to help Granges become stronger. It is a good time to take advantage of these programs.

- Fundraiser Matching Program – NC Grange will match local Grange fundraisers up to \$10,000.00.
- Grange Project Grant Program – This is to help local Granges finance worthwhile projects such as community service.
- Grant for Building Renovations – We believe that the appearance of Grange Halls is important, and they should be structures for which your members and the community can be proud. NC Grange is offering to assist with the associated expenses.

Why would NC Grange offer these programs to local Granges? If our Granges are more financially sound, it puts you in a position to conduct more activities within the community. A busy Grange creates a healthier Grange and increases the potential to grow. One President of a Grange that has been participating in the Fundraiser Matching Program told me that

these grants have led to more involvement, great participation, and this Grange is growing. We want to see this happening with every Grange in the state. Supporting efforts to conduct projects can produce the same results and can lead to some great community service projects.

Maintaining Grange Halls can be horribly expensive especially for major renovations. Everyone wants their Grange Halls to look attractive as people drive by, but sometimes even with fundraisers, there is not enough funding in the bank to pay for needed renovations. Sadly, we have had Granges to sell their buildings because they could not afford to maintain them. I hate to see this happen, but sometimes it is necessary.

The NC Grange Board is unanimous in their support for these grant offerings. Forms for these programs are available from the Grange office. Let us know if you are interested.



## THE NAMES OF CHRIST

A couple of years ago I crafted a Christmas wreath that depicted some names of Jesus using a grapevine as the foundation. On it I glued some 3D figurines and flowers to represent these names: The Vine, Rose of Sharon, Lion of Judah, Good Shepherd, Lamb of God, The Savior, Lily of the Valley, Prince of Peace and Light of the World, and centered it with letters titled “His Name is Jesus.”

The Bible ascribes many different names to Jesus, including Emmanuel (God with us). All of these names provide great insight into His character and person. To give a little insight into this, I am going to use a resource by the late Dr. Charles Stanley. Since my husband and younger son are both named John, I chose names of Jesus from John’s gospel that are particularly revealing.

**THE BREAD OF LIFE** (John 6:25-35) is the only one who can truly satisfy our hearts. Jesus feeds our souls with sustenance that never leaves us wanting for more.

**THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD** (John 9:5) shines His light through our countenance as a ministry and testimony to a dark world.

**THE DOOR** (John 10:7-9) is the only way to enter heaven. Whoever enters through the “gate” of Christ will be saved.

**THE GOOD SHEPHERD** (John 10:11) protects his sheep at all costs from predators. They know His voice and follow Him.

**THE VINE** (John 15:1-10) is the source of our spiritual life. When we stay intimately connected to Jesus, we bear fruit. If we do not remain in Him, we wither.

**THE WAY** (John 14:6) to happiness, peace, joy, and eternal life is Jesus Christ.

**THE TRUTH** (John 14:6) of His revelation, as recorded in the New Testament, is the reason we can know as much as we do about God.

**THE LIFE** (John 14:6) Jesus imparts to believers is powerful, effective, and fruitful, not only in eternity but here on earth as well.

In biblical times, Israelites would choose a baby’s name based on the child’s characteristics or a hope or prayer of the parent. The names given to Jesus tell a great deal about His ministry on earth over 2,000 years ago. The scriptural names describing Him reveal who He was and is and will be for eternity.

To me, “Jesus is the sweetest name I know.” How about you?



### *In Memoriam*

<i>Archie McKenzie</i>	<i>Juniper Grange</i>
<i>Denny Tart</i>	<i>Grantham Grange</i>
<i>Gene Montgomery</i>	<i>Schley Grange</i>
<i>Mary Sue Johnson*</i>	<i>Schley Grange</i>
<i>Ronald Walker</i>	<i>Schley Grange</i>
<i>Rocky Wilkerson</i>	<i>Schley Grange</i>
<i>Raymond Stegall</i>	<i>Matrimony Grange</i>

*You light a lamp for me. The Lord, my God, lights up my darkness.*

*Psalm 118:28*

*\* 50 Year Member*

# FERGUSON GRANGE

by : Margaret Martine

Ferguson Grange members met at the home of Dick and Margaret Martine where a program was shared on historic preservation. Their home, the Hagler house, was built by William Hagler in 1832 and has a long family history.

William’s parents, Johannes Hagler (from Switzerland) and Elizabeth Van Hoose (Dutch), moved to the plantation in the 1700s. Most people in this area considered them outsiders since their Swiss farming practices were different from their Scottish and Irish neighbors. Johannes Hagler gave financial aid to the Patriots in the American Revolution, and years later, William fought in the War of 1812. The family eventually added an “i” to the name because people called them “hag-lers” instead of ‘haiglers.’”

An Englishman by the name of Hopkins helped William Hagler build the Hagler House. The bricks were made by hand in a field next to the Yadkin River. It was built beside the original log cabin home on the property, but the cabin was later burned down by a caretaker for firewood when the family was away. In 1886, the house was damaged by the Charleston earthquake and now has earthquake rods running through sections of the walls. The Hagler house, known as Beech Hill, is listed on the National Historical Register. Dick Martine shared information on how houses are considered for the National Register, which contains 25 sites from Wilkes County. The Hagler descendants have continued to own the property since the 1700s, which Ferguson member Margaret Martine has owned since the late 1970s. She is the 4 times great granddaughter of William Hagler.





## GRANGERS IN THE GARDEN



Photos & Story: Jessica Horton

NC Grange held its annual State Convention in Charlotte, September 21-24, 2023. Grangers from North and South Carolina gathered together for fellowship and business at the University Hilton.

Most Delegates and State Officers arrived on Thursday for 6th Degree practice and began submitting contest entries for judging before kicking off all the weekend festivities.

Friday morning, attendees boarded a bus for the day's tour, which started at Winghaven Garden located in the Myers Park area of Charlotte. Winghaven Garden was started by Elizabeth and Edwin Clarkson. The Elizabeth Lawrence House and Garden, which is just down the block, also operates under the Winghaven name. Both resided on Reiglewood Avenue and cultivated their properties to be sanctuaries for animals and a legacy for southern horticulture. The grounds are filled with charming paths, huge trees, and lush landscapes.

Grangers were split into three groups to see the first floor of the Clarkson home and the surrounding gardens. The home was built in 1927, and the property encompassed eleven parcels, totaling nearly 3 acres. The paths through the garden are made mostly of brick with plaques and statues integrated into the landscape. The group was then escorted down the block to see the Elizabeth Lawrence Garden. Lawrence is an internationally known garden writer and was the first female to graduate from NC State University's Landscape Architecture Program. The lot is only about 1/3 of an acre but is packed with year-round botanicals. Between the two properties, the Clarksons host more than 40 events each year, including summer camp for children.

After touring Winghaven, Grangers traveled just up the road to the Duke Mansion where they were greeted with fresh lemonade and water. The home was built in 1915 by Zeb Taylor but was soon purchased by the famous James Buchanan Duke. Duke tripled the size of the home and used it to serve as a headquarters for his business. The home went through multiple families and hardships, but eventually the Ray family of Raycom Sports sold the home to the Duke Foundation, and it was opened in 1998. Today it is used as a boutique hotel and event venue. It is surrounded by spectacular gardens in one of the prettiest neighborhoods of Charlotte. Grangers enjoyed a delicious lunch at the mansion, prepared by their in-house chef. This included an informative history lesson by a volunteer. Members were able to explore the gardens before departing back to the hotel.

A special awards ceremony was held Friday afternoon. Winners from across North Carolina were present to receive recognition for service to their communities and Granges. Several Grange members received standout awards including Jason Davis, named Granger of the Year; the Denning Family, who were named Family of the Year; and MariBee's Boer Goats which was recognized as our Farm of the Year. A full list of award winners is included on the following pages. That evening brought the annual auction, which raised almost



\$2,000 for the Grange's Disaster Relief Fund which assists members when natural disasters strike North Carolina. This can include hurricanes, drought, flooding, etc. Funds have been used in the past to provide hay after drought and to help cover insurance deductibles following Hurricane Florence.

Saturday morning, Senator Rachel Hunt joined the group for breakfast. She happily met, shook hands, and posed for photos with members of all ages. She spoke and reminisced on her time attending Grange Camp as a child. Several members at the event attended camp with her. After breakfast, the Youth and Junior members opened the business meeting with Junior President Lucy Anderson and Youth President Asheton Medlin presiding. NC Grange President Jimmy Gentry then took the reins and led the delegation through officer elections while Committee Chair David Allen led delegates through the resolutions that were submitted.

Saturday lunch brought in many to celebrate the Junior and Youth achievements. The highlight of this meal was Karly Denning being named Youth of the Year, and Raegan Hartsell being named Junior of the Year. Camp and leadership awards were also presented to our young Grangers. Following lunch, Youth and Juniors participated in a service project while the young adults enjoyed an afternoon outing together.

After wrapping up the business meeting, the 6th Degree Conferral was held with David Allen acting as President. The degree team was led by director Vinnie Duncan, and eleven new candidates were in attendance to receive the degree. Afterwards, Grangers enjoyed dinner with guest speaker, David Pike. Mr. Pike is the owner and operator of Witherspoon Rose Culture, which has locations in

Durham and Charlotte. Witherspoon offers sales, installation, maintenance, and consultations for growing rose bushes. Mr. Pike informed the group about bed preparation, diseases, pruning, and more. He brought a wide variety of their Hybrid Tea Roses to show different colors, scents and characteristics of their products. The group thoroughly enjoyed his talk, which rounded out the weekend's activities focusing on gardens.

The convention's annual memorial service was held Sunday morning to honor those we lost over the previous year. NC Grange Chaplain LaRue Tart of Grantham Grange ended our time together with a lovely worship service. It was a great, productive weekend full of celebrations and fellowship. We already look forward to the 2024 Convention which will be held back in the Raleigh / Durham area.







# 2023 AWARDS

WRITING  
ADULT POEM

1ST CLARKIE BROWN  
2ND SHARON UNDERWOOD

ADULT CREATIVE  
WRITING

1ST SALLY WADDELL  
2ND DAVID ALLEN  
3RD SHARON UNDERWOOD

COMMUNITY  
SERVICE

1ST FERGUSON  
2ND CAPE FEAR  
3RD GRANTHAM  
4TH ST JOHN

CHURCH  
LAW ENFORCEMENT

ST. STEPHENS

OFFICER

DONNIE ROSS

EDUCATOR

JENNIFER SLOOP

FIREFIGHTER

LEWIS STRICKLAND

FIRE DEPARTMENT

FERGUSON

GRANGER

JASON DAVIS

GRANGE MONTH

WESTBROOK

GRANGE OF THE YEAR

WESTBROOK

LEGISLATIVE

EDNEYVILLE

FARM

MARIBEES BOER GOATS

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

MARY HILL HENRY

FAMILY

DENNING FAMILY

SECRETARY

SHARON RITCHIE

JUNIOR GRANGER

REGAN HARTSELL

JUNIOR GRANGE

ST JOHN'S

YOUTH GRANGER

KARLY DENNING



# WORKING LANDS TRUST PROTECTS 1,200 ACRES OF FARMLAND IN PAMLICO COUNTY

by : Mikey Fulk with  
Working Lands Trust

Working Lands Trust, a leading nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of North Carolina's vital farms and working forests, is thrilled to announce the successful closing of the McCotter Promised Land Opportunity Zone (PLOZ) Farm Easement in Pamlico County, North Carolina. This significant milestone marks the second-largest agricultural conservation easement to close in the state and is a testament to the tireless efforts of our organization and our valued partners.

The McCotter PLOZ Farm Easement, encompassing a sprawling 1,200 acres of agricultural land and working forests, has been safeguarded thanks to the generous support and funding from the North Carolina Department of Agriculture's Agriculture Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (ADFPTF) and the Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) program. This collaborative effort ensures the protection of essential farmlands, which play a critical role in feeding our nation and maintaining the rural integrity of vital military training areas.

Mikey Fulk, Executive Director of Working Lands Trust, expressed her enthusiasm, stating, "The closing of the McCotter PLOZ Farm Easement is a momentous occasion for Working Lands Trust and demonstrates the power of collaboration and dedication. This achievement reinforces our commitment to protecting the farmlands and rural communities that are the backbone of our state's agriculture and defense industries."

The closing of the McCotter PLOZ Farm Easement comes at a crucial time. According to American Farmland Trust, North Carolina faces the potential loss of approximately 20% of its 8 million acres of farmland to development by 2040. Currently, NC ranks second in the nation for agricultural land loss, trailing only behind Texas. The protection of these vital farmlands is not only a victory for Working Lands Trust but for the entire community as well.

"Once land like this is converted from agricultural use, it is lost to food and fiber production, so we're very proud this project will preserve the land's use as a farm for generations to come," said North Carolina Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler. "To complete a transaction this large takes

great teamwork and we appreciate our partners in the Working Land Trust, the U.S. Navy, and Promised Land Opportunity Zone Funds. North Carolina is at high risk of losing farmland in the decades to come, but easements like this help ensure the future of our state's top industry."

According to the report published May 2023 entitled "Agriculture and Agribusiness, North Carolina's Number One Industry" by Mike Walden, Reynolds Distinguished Professor Emeritus, NC State's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, North Carolina agriculture and agribusiness reached a milestone of \$103.2 billion in economic impact. In addition, the state's food, natural fiber, and forestry industries employ almost one in five North Carolina workers.

"The placement of a conservation easement on a portion of our 4,500 acres at McCotter PLOZ Farm is a landmark transaction for Promised Land and the Pamlico County community," commented John Heneghan, Manager of Promised Land Opportunity Zone Funds. "McCotter is highly productive farmland with attractive return potential from its rental income and appreciation attributes. We were delighted to work with Working Lands Trust and its capital partners to place a conservation value on the farm for its many ecological and environmental benefits."

Colonel Brendan Burks added, "The successful closing of the McCotter Easement not only protects our military training capabilities but it also reinforces our commitment to maintaining the rural character of working farmlands that are compatible with military training and testing areas. We are proud to contribute to the preservation of North Carolina's working lands through REPI and other partnering programs."



For additional information about the McCotter PLOZ Farm Easement and Working Lands Trust's ongoing farmland preservation efforts, please contact Mikey Fulk, Executive Director of Working Lands Trust, at 336-460-2562 or mikey@workinglandstrust.org.

About Working Lands Trust: Working Lands Trust is a leading nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of farmlands and working forests. Through strategic partnerships and innovative conservation initiatives, Working Lands Trust works towards ensuring the long-term viability of working farmlands, protecting our nation's food security, and preserving the rural heritage of communities across the state.

*Working Lands Trust used NC Grange grant funding to close and record this conservation easement.*

## LITTLE MOUNTAIN GRANGE

by : Robert Hayes



Little Mountain Grange has had a great year serving its community. This past spring, the Grange sponsored one ice cream day per month for 4 months for every student at Traphill Elementary School. We also co-sponsored enough funds so that every student at Traphill Elementary School received a yearbook. Members Patrick Colglazier and Nina Hayes also spoke to students in the FFA classes at East Wilkes High School and invited them to join the Grange. They handed out peanuts and pens donated by the NC State Grange.

In August, as we have done for the last few years, Little Mountain held a community-wide school supply drive at our Grange Hall. A BBQ pork meal was sold, and everyone who attended enjoyed live music by Crabgrass Band from Traphill, NC. The Young at Heart Sunday School Class at Elkin Valley Baptist Church and Cabeland Farms also partnered with us to collect supplies and attended the event. The school supplies were donated to both Traphill Elementary School and C.B. Eller Elementary School. The event was a great time!

This fall, our Grange created a display board explaining the work of the Grange and identified our two local Granges in Wilkes County, Little Mountain and Ferguson. This information was put on display at the Wilkes Agricultural Fair.

In the wee hours of September 22, the NC General Assembly at long last passed the 2023-24 biennial budget for North Carolina. On October 2, after a ten-day waiting period, the 30 billion budget automatically became law without Governor Cooper's signature. It was a long, hot summer as the budget was negotiated for months before it was passed. The contention between the Senate and House was primarily over casinos and video lottery terminals (VLT). The Senate leader insisted language go into the budget for commercial casinos in North Carolina; however, the House Speaker did not have the votes in his chamber to pass the budget with the casino language in it. The NC Grange policy does not support any form of gambling, so we were pleased that the provision did not make the budget.

Medicaid Expansion will take effect December 1. Earlier in the session, Medicaid expansion was passed but that bill was made contingent on the budget bill becoming law. Medicaid expansion did become law on October 2 along with the budget bill. This will make health insurance available to people who make too much money to qualify for Medicaid, but not enough to pay for an individual health care plan.

Appropriations provisions of the budget that the NC Grange lobbied for are as follows:

- \$250,000 – 1st annual celebration of NC Farmers Appreciation Day in 2024
- \$300,000 – North Carolina Troopers Association Caisson Unit
- \$35 million – School Safety Equipment (This money may be used for extended stop arms for school buses; however it will be up to the local school districts to

decide.)

- \$10,660,661 million – A&T University Research & Extension
- \$1 million – A&T Ag Research Platform

Other significant appropriations that are included in the budget are \$3 billion for economic development. The biggest chunk of money will be going to Megasites, NCInnovation, Global TransPark as well as infrastructure. There was also \$33 million nonrecurring each fiscal year to incentivize health care providers to practice in rural and underserved communities; \$12.5 million nonrecurring each fiscal year for grants to licensed hospitals that serve a rural community in the state and are in financial crisis or at risk of closing; \$20 million nonrecurring over the two fiscal years to provide grants to rural health care providers for start-up equipment for telehealth. The competitive grant program will prioritize independent primary care practices and obstetrics and gynecology practices.

Redistricting was once again taken up during this long session. Public meetings were held in Elizabeth City, Raleigh and Hickory during September. The redistricting process included the NC Senate and House seats as well as Congressional seats. The final maps were released, passed by the General Assembly, and became law on October 25. The urgency to finalize and pass the new maps was to ensure that they would be in place by December for filing for the 2024 election cycle.

In other legislation news, Governor Cooper signed Senate Bill 189 which increases the penalties related to trafficking heroin and fentanyl. The bill also allows more stringent

provisions for the prosecution of drug traffickers. Senate Bill 512 – Greater Accountability for Boards /Commissions was vetoed by Governor Cooper in late August. This bill in effect would replace the Board of Transportation and transfer appointment powers that would give the NC General Assembly more power over certain boards that make important and sometimes crucial governmental decisions. The veto was overridden by the General Assembly. Governor Cooper vetoed nineteen bills during this legislative session, all of which were overridden.

After wrapping up the 2023-24 budget as well as the redistricting maps, the North Carolina General Assembly adjourned in both the House and the Senate on October 25. Senate and House members will convene beginning on November 29 to “consider a limited number of items” per the adjournment resolution. It is unlikely however that the legislature will vote on any bills until the 2024 short session which will begin on April 24.

### From the Hill

Washington DC was full steam ahead the month of September as Congress struggled to come to an agreement on the 2023-24 Budget. It was not unlike what happened in the NC General Assembly over the summer but of course on a much larger scale. Unlike North Carolina, if a budget is not agreed upon and passed in Congress, the present budget does not carry forward. Instead, the government completely shuts down bringing DC to a screeching halt. That would have occurred, as it has in the past, but thankfully instead on September 30 just minutes before the shutdown would have occurred, the

Senate passed a stopgap spending bill that would fund the federal government until November 17. President Biden signed the bill shortly after the bill was passed. Not only was the Federal budget in jeopardy of expiring on October 1, but the federal Farm Bill was as well. Fortunately, the 2023 crops are covered by the expiring farm bill. Farm bills are passed for a five-year period but because the crops are covered, Congress will not be in a hurry to pass another bill. There are many other programs that are in the Farm Bill including SNAP, commodity supports, conservation programs and crop insurance. In actuality, farming makes up only about 24% of the actual appropriations.

The biggest news item from the Hill over the last two months was the twenty-one days of chaos that was spurred on by the ousting of

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy. Congressman McCarthy was temporarily replaced by NC Congressman Patrick McHenry as Speaker until the House of Representatives finally came to a majority vote by the Republican Caucus to elect little-known, social conservative Mike Johnson from Louisiana. His election came after three other House nominees could not garner enough votes from either the more moderate Republicans or the far right.

Make sure to read the NC Grange weekly "Legislative News" newsletter to receive regular legislative updates.



- Ronnie Clifton – Associate
- 5B Farms – Associate
- Celia Spillman – Associate
- Randy Hubers – Associate
- Karen Nethercutt – Brogden
- Macon Massey – Brogden
- Linda Bonin – Grantham
- Teresa Childers – Corriher
- Ron Corriher – Corriher
- Tisha Corriher – Corriher
- Mike Ketchie – Corriher
- Joyce Ketchie – Corriher
- William UpChurch – Capitol
- Carolina Sparks – Capitol
- Matthew Sparks – Capitol
- Randolph Cloud – Capitol
- Charles Gilliam - Capitol
- Barbara Lynch – Juniper
- Zeb Cox - Juniper



300+ MAN HOURS WORKED  
10,800 CHIP CLIPS GIVEN  
3,000 BEACH BALLS GIVEN  
500+ PENCILS GIVEN



Thank you to all who helped make our booth at the NC State Fair a success! We appreciate all the workers and everyone who stopped to chat with us about the Grange. Over 300 hours were worked to staff the booth. Chip clips, Grange beach balls and pencils made great giveaways! Nearly 1 million attended the fair this year!



## SEASONAL CHANGES

Looking back over several years of articles that I have written for the September /October issue of Grange News, a recurring theme is present in all of them – a list of upcoming changes for the health insurance products offered by our NC Grange Agents. Every year brings changes to health insurance plans, and thankfully, many changes occurring in 2024 are positive for our NC Grange BCBSNC Program. Here are a few highlights of those changes in each market segment.

### For the Medicare eligible insureds:

Medicare Advantage Segments:

Blue Medicare HMO Plans:

- A Zero Insurance Premium available in all 100 NC Counties
- Many counties have a lower Maximum Out of Pocket cost for 2024.
- Lower co-payments for certain therapy services.
- Our Essential Plus plans have increased the respective segments Over the Counter Product allowances per quarter for health supplies like vitamins, first aid, etc.
- Dental, Vision and Hearing services are in most plans offered.
- Telehealth Services are available for virtual provider visits.
- Ambulance services are covered for both ground and air.
- A Medical Only plan that works well for retired State Employees.

### Blue Medicare PPO Plans in addition to many of the above features of the HMO plans:

- Gives our insureds the ability to see both In and Out of Network providers.
- Provides the PPO Travel Program where an insured can see a participating BCBS provider across the country as an In Network provider. This is a great feature for those that have a second home in another state.

### Blue Medicare Freedom:

- This plan is designed to work with Federal Retiree Benefits as a Medical Only Plan.
- Plan offers up to \$1,200 part B premium reduction.
- Zero Co-payments for most medical services.
- Works well with retired federal employees i.e., Postal Service Retirees.

### Healthy Blue + Medicare – a HMO-POS D-SNP plan:

- This plan is for those individuals who have both Medicaid and Medicare.
- Provides for medical, prescription drug, vision, dental, hearing services.

- Provides limited transportation services to the grocery store, medical appointments, or fitness centers.
- A generous monthly Over the Counter Allowance for approved OTC medical supplies and healthy food
- IF you can help us identify individuals that are eligible for the Healthy Blue + Medicare, you will do them and our NC Grange Program a great service to point them to us.

### Individual Under65 Plans:

- The big news for 2024 is lower premiums for most with a statewide average reduction of 4%.
- BCBSNC has plans in ALL 100 North Carolina Counties.
- Blue Advantage continues to have the broad statewide network of providers.
- Blue Advantage is offered as an Off Marketplace option in areas that only offer Marketplace options with a limited preferred provider network.
- Due to CMS regulations, there is a reduction of plans offered per metallic group which will result in an automatic mapping to a new plan for those individuals who currently have plans effected by this reduction.
- Some plan names will change to provide better clarity of their plan benefits.
- Insureds are encouraged to refresh their current marketplace information to ensure they receive the maximum subsidy they are eligible to receive for the start of the new year.

I have one last parting thought on our NC Grange Insurance Program. Many times, over the years that I have written plans for BCBSNC, I had the question asked of me, “Do you offer any plans other than BCBSNC?” I can answer that question quickly. Yes, I have had the opportunity to write for other carriers, both before my work with the NC Grange and while working for the NC Grange, and I have personally chosen not to write for any other carrier. Why? Because this year, BCBSNC just celebrated their 90th year serving the citizens of North Carolina. It has financial strength and an excellent track record of paying its members’ claims as they arise. In addition, knowing that when I meet you in church, a store, or a restaurant, I can greet you with a sincere smile, confident that you have a quality product that will cover you in your hour of need.

So, as we move into this season of change, give us a call to make sure that you have the best coverage available to fit your individual need! Our NC Grange Agents and I are eager to assist you.

NC Grange cooperated with the National Grange on an op-ed related to mental health drugs, which has been printed by newspapers in Raleigh, Durham, and Charlotte. We support the development of drugs that can provide better health care, including mental health. This op-ed explains the need for action that would enhance the development of mental health pharmaceuticals.

## HOW LAWMAKERS CAN HELP RURAL NORTH CAROLINIANS GET MENTAL HEALTHCARE

North Carolina faces a rural mental health crisis. We're seeing a rising tide of conditions like loneliness, depression, and suicide, combined with a shortage of the professionals and services we need.

Yet even as community organizations and government agencies take steps to address the situation, a single provision of a new federal law is poised to make it much worse.

The Inflation Reduction Act, President Biden's signature legislative achievement, contains a number of rules that will affect the cost and availability of prescription medicine. Some of its components will improve access; but unless one provision is revised, the law could make it even harder for rural residents to get mental-health treatment.

In general, people living in rural areas are more likely to experience depression and suicide compared to urban populations -- but have less access to mental health services.

In North Carolina, rural residents have higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and alcohol and drug abuse than their city-dwelling counterparts. All these factors can contribute to mental health issues. Meanwhile, nearly a third of North Carolina counties -- all of them rural -- lack a single practicing psychologist. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, only 13% of mental health needs are currently being met across our state, well below the national average of about 28%.

One way to ameliorate this situation would be by making sure that patients have access to the best medication to treat their mental illness. But unfortunately, the IRA does the reverse.

The most common drugs used to treat depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and other mental disorders are "selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors," or SSRIs -- such as Prozac, Zoloft, and Lexapro. These are classed as "small molecule" drugs due to their low molecular weight.

Due to their small size, these medicines are able to cross the blood-brain barrier, making them effective at treating mental health conditions. Small-molecule drugs are also accessible given they often come in pill or tablet form. This makes them convenient to pick up from a local pharmacy, even for patients who have to travel far to see a doctor.

The problem is that the IRA discriminates against this entire class of drugs.

For the first time, the bill makes it possible for Medicare to negotiate with drug companies to set the price of prescription medicines. Large-molecule "biologic" drugs -- which tend to cost patients more out-of-pocket and often have to be administered by injection in a clinic -- are exempt from price negotiations for the first 13 years after approval. However, small-molecule drugs are exempt for just nine years.

This four-year gap may sound small, but the impact could be profound.

It costs more than \$2 billion and can take more than 10 years to develop a single drug all the way from laboratory bench to pharmacy shelf. Drug companies are able to invest this much time and money because they know they'll be able to earn a return on their investment once a successful medicine hits the market. A shorter exemption period means less time to earn a return -- and considerably more risk that the company might never do so.

The IRA's "small-molecule penalty" is already having an impact on drug development. It has prompted both pharmaceutical companies and investors to shift funds away from small-molecule research in favor of the development of biologics, given their more limited exposure to IRA price setting. Ultimately, this means we'll see much less development of the very medicines that people with mental illness in rural areas most need.

There's a way to fix this before we start to see these catastrophic consequences. Lawmakers should consider amending the IRA to provide a 13-year exemption period for all drugs, not just biologics. This will help rural residents in North Carolina -- and throughout the United States -- achieve better mental health over the long term.

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## FERGUSON GRANGE

by : Sharon Underwood

Ferguson Grange member Deborah Howell presented a super September program for the local Grange on Christian clowning, a business she has been involved in for many years as a professional clown. Audience participation was required with songs, magic tricks, and lots of fun! President Mike Brown helped with some of the tricks. Junior Grange member Liana Brown loved the balloons the best.

