



**RURAL STATE OF MIND:
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IN AG
COMMUNITIES**



AGENDA

Introduction

Overview of Ag Behavioral Health

Strengths and Challenges

Strategies to help

Resources for Rural Population

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

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DEFINING RURAL

- Multiple definitions for “Rural”
- Urban Areas (US Census Bureau, 2015)
 - Urbanized Areas of 50,000 or more people
 - Urban clusters of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people (US Censes Bureau)
 - “Rural” makes up any territory not included in an urbanized area.



Farmers and Ranchers

Farmer: A person who cultivates land or crops or raises animals (such as livestock or fish)

Rancher: A person who own or works on a ranch

Merriam-Webster

Your Logo or Name Here





Agricultural Lifestyle

Variety Across Nebraska

Nebraska

Who: Farm/Ranch Families, Farm/Ranch workers, Farm/Ranch owners

Crops: Corn, soybeans, wheat, hay, alfalfa, bees, popcorn, dry edible beans, sugar beets, potatoes, grain sorghum, Christmas trees, wine grapes, fruits and vegetables, millet, sunflowers, peas, etc.

Livestock: Beef, Pork, Dairy, Sheep, Goats, Poultry, etc.

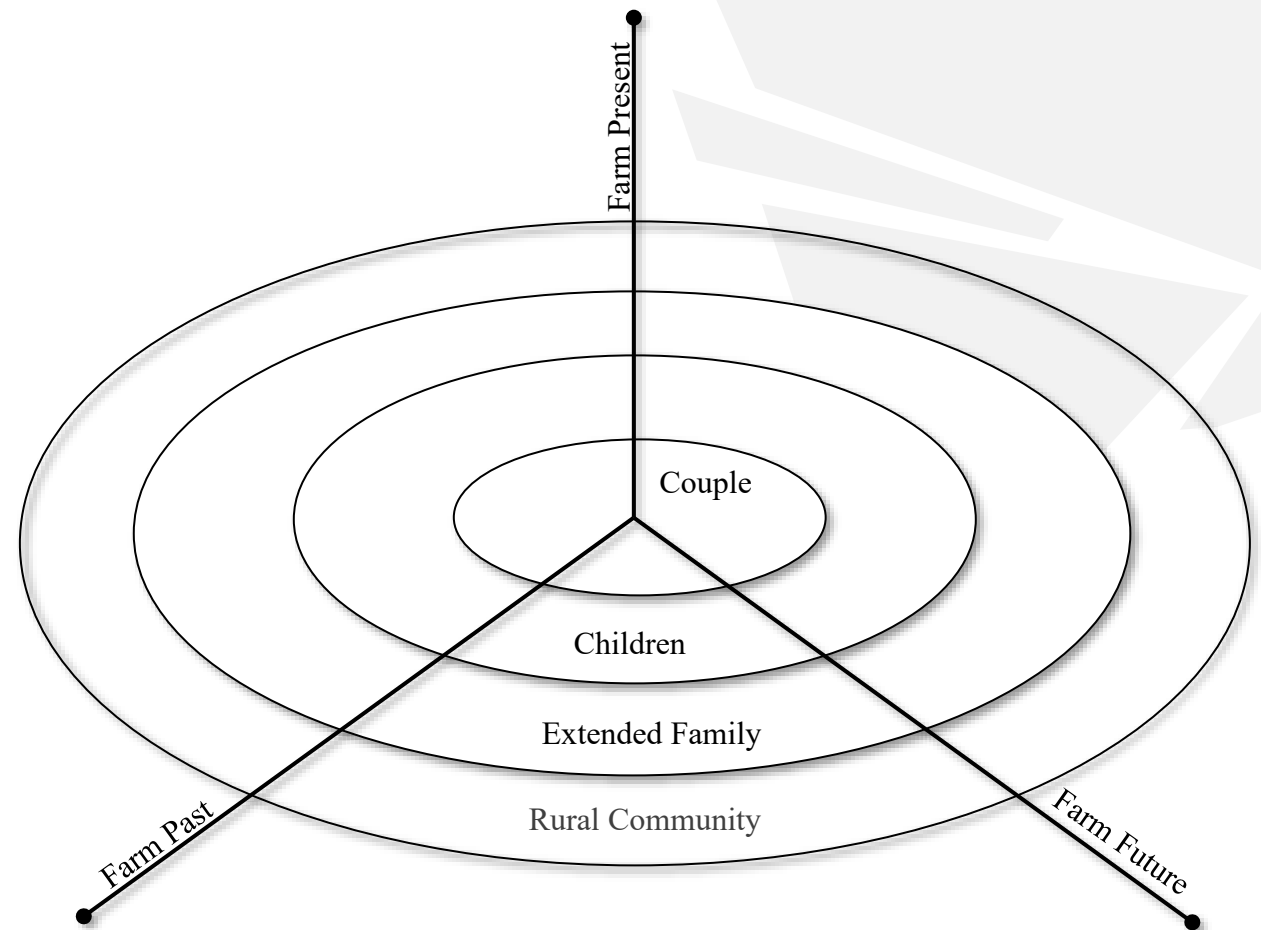
www.nda.Nebraska.gov

Your Logo or Name Here



The Farm as a Living Entity: Diagram of Ag Systems

This figure shows a representation of the systems affecting the marital relationship associated with farming operations. The farm is seen to have a past, present, and future that affects each subsystem (Hindman, 2015).



BENEFITS

- Provides Identity, Meaning, Purpose, and sense of accomplishment
- Tight-knit community setting with Kinship ties and community ties
- Historical family legacy
- Farm women with 2 chronic medical conditions found to be less likely to experience depression

(Cohn & Hastings, 2013; Imig, 2014; Janzen et al. 2020)





CHALLENGES

Aging population

Geographic isolation from personal and professional resources

High visibility (Cohn & Hastings, 2013; Werth et al., 2010)

- Unspoken competition among farmers
- Work is on display (although many factors outside of control)

Blurred boundaries between individual, family, and work environment

Retirement and succession planning

Divorce



Mental Health according to the World Health Organization

“Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community.”

Mental health

MENTAL HEALTH IN RURAL AREAS

Any Mental Illness

- Approximately 22.7% of nonmetropolitan adults reported having AMI according to the [Results from the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables](#)
- AMI data comparable to Urban Areas

Suicidal Ideation

- 4.8%, of adults in nonmetropolitan areas reported having serious thoughts of suicide during the year.
- Higher rates of death by suicide in a rural area

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE AG COMMUNITY

- Increased mental health issues and higher mortality rates from suicide among Ag population (Roy et al. 2025)
- Stigma associated with seeking care
 - Farmers who had a positive experience with BH professional more likely to return for help
- May be more likely to self-medicate and isolate when experiencing stressors

Challenges of Farming and Ranching



Weather

Extreme Weather Patterns -
hail, blizzards, flooding,
droughts, etc.



Unknown Factors

Loss of cattle unexpectedly
weather events
pests



Work/Life Integrated

lack of communication
disagreements
financial stress
Divorce on a Farm



Politics

Media's influence
Inheritance Tax
Import and export trade



Market Volatility

Trade is up and down
Fluctuation of prices
Price floor and price ceiling
Supply and demand

How to meet a need



Overall Wellbeing

8.7% reported mild, moderate, or severe depressive symptoms

21/172 would seek out services if facing a mental health crisis

13.3% reported that life was not worth living at least some of the time



Farmers would feel comfortable seeking information from:

Family member (87.2%)

Friend (68.6%)

Pastor (19.8%)

Counselor (12.2%)

Bjornestad, Brown, & Weidauer, 2019

Receiving Services

Discussing Mental Health with the Farming population

- Preferred
 - medical providers, spouses/family members, and friends
 - Farm newspapers/magazines and in person (one-on-one)
 - Farmers prefer to use established connections with Ag Professionals (veterinarians)
- Less receptive to receive information from attorneys, agricultural bankers, and commodity groups

(Rudolphi, Berg, & Marlenga, 2019, Stanley-Clark, 2018)



Warning Signs in Ag Population

- Changes in routines/activities
- Increase in illness or other chronic conditions
- Increase in farm accidents
- Decline in the appearance of the farmstead
- Children struggling in school
- Decline the care of domestic animals
- Increased Drug and alcohol use
- Isolation



Farmer Suicide

- Overall we are seeing an increase in suicides nationwide
 - Suicide rate is higher among farmers than general population
 - Farmers are more likely to experience a suicide attempt in the Spring and Summer months
 - Financial issues
 - Physical Issues – more so than nonfarmer population
 - Male, white, and widowed farmers particularly at risk
- Ward & Blosnich, 2025

WHAT ABOUT WELLNESS



PREDICTING HAPPINESS

Relationships and social activity are primary factors in predicting wellness
(Hodgkin, Warburton, & Hancock, 2018)

Questionnaires Study

- Friends versus strangers
(Cooper, Okamura, & Gurka, 1992)



Encouraging Social Support

Support between spouses and others

Social Support

Lower social support scores were significantly related to higher depression scores

(Bjornestad, Brown, & Weidauer, 2019)

- Encourage support systems both on and off the farm
- Exploring opportunities both together and separate from one another

Examples

- Tractor Club
- Coffee groups
- Ice cream trips
- Consider sharing responsibilities - asking a family/friend/neighbor to take care of operation

Farming and Leisure

Leisure both on and off the Farm



Leisure and Marriage

Partners may be happier in their marriage when they are happy with their time spent on leisure

(Plunkett, Henry, & Knaub, 1999; Johnson, Zabriskie, & Hill, 2008)

Leisure and Farm Families

Qualitative study that interviewed farm wives

- Themes that emerged
 - men and women's division of labor
 - Importance of facilitating children's leisure
 - frustrations of one-day family excursions
 - family vacations

(Trussell & Shaw, 2007)

Integrating Leisure

Focus on Quality versus Quantity

Religion

Farm as a medium to preserve way of life

- 4-H involvement
- Fairs
- Dances

Integration of work, family, and leisure

- Tractor rides
- Family get togethers at harvest/branding/weaning, etc.
- Checking pivots together

Heightened sibling leisure experiences

Leisure opportunities and losses with extended family members

STRATEGIES WHEN UNWELL

What to do for yourself and others

Self-care

Reach out to
others

Counseling

Take a shower,
get dressed, and
ready for the day

Sleep

Eat

Positive Self-
Talk

Safety Plan-
Who is your 3
am?

What to do when someone is hurting

What to DO

- Be there
- Listen
- Reach out
- Ask them to dinner
- Step Towards, not Away

What to SAY

- Responses
 - I'm here for you.
 - I am so glad you shared that with me.
- Self-disclose
 - Share your story... cautiously

INTRODUCTORY COUNSELING SKILLS

SOLER Model



- Squarely face the person
- Open body posture
- Lean forward slightly
- Eye contact (appropriate)
- Relax

Reflecting

- Reflecting Content
 - A brief summary of the speaker's content shared
 - More objective (based on words)
- Reflecting Feelings
 - Acknowledging feelings shared
 - More intuitive (based on emotions)

Why do we reflect content?

- Shows listening more definitively than attending behavior
- Establishes initial rapport
- Demonstrates understanding, or at least an attempt to understand (a characteristic of empathy)
- Maintains focus on speaker while allowing helper to play an active role
- Potentially helps a jumbled speaker organize thoughts
- Allows a speaker to correct misunderstanding or false impressions

REFLECTING CONTENT



Reflecting content is listening accurately to another person and **reflecting** the essence of the **content** of the communication to the other in your own words. In **reflecting content**, you focus on the **content** of what a speaker is saying to you, including thoughts, ideas, beliefs, facts, data, etc.

- Things are really looking rough right now. If it doesn't rain soon, the crop won't make this year. It's like I just can't catch a break. Last year the hail took out my crop and now this year I don't know if the wheat is going to come up.
- *Helper:* You've had a rough go at it lately with last year's hail and this year's drought.

Reflecting Feelings

- **Reflection of feelings** is determining the **feelings** and **emotions** in a person or client's verbal and body language, and stating (or **reflecting**) those **feelings** back to the person. ... Three purposes of **reflecting feelings** are: Validating a person's **feelings**. Making a person feel understood and listened to.
- When reflecting feelings, it is also important to be mindful of the tone of the emotion.

Why do we reflect feelings?

- communicating empathy by showing you're not merely listening to the stated story, but you are trying to more deeply understand by considering underlying feelings and perspective (the importance of being understood cannot be overstated!);
- encouraging trust and self-disclosure, and deepening the relationship between the helper and the speaker;
- helping an individual become aware of feelings that are hidden, ambivalent, or unclear;
- maintaining focus on the speaker (as with paraphrasing), allowing speaker to organize thoughts, and providing an opportunity to correct misunderstandings.

Showing Empathy by Reflecting

Farmer: I am just so tired of it all. I have to cook, clean, and care for the children on top of managing the farm. No one appreciates me or even knows how much I contribute to the day-to-day operation. Do they think the branding supplies are just going to magically be there?

Other: “Sounds like you are feeling overwhelmed and unseen. There’s a lot that you do for the farm that seems to go unnoticed. ”

Farmer: "I just can't figure out why things have been so difficult recently. It's gotten worse and worse the past few years. John's gone more and more now. I used to be able to go check fields with him but now he doesn't even want me to go.

Other: “Sounds like you are feeling frustrated and lost in how things have changed. It must be hard not spending as much time with John anymore. You just want things to go back to how they were.

Let's try Reflecting

- "Every time I turn around, there's another problem staring me in the face. The weather, the prices, the equipment breaking down—it's like the whole world is working against me. I used to love this work, but now it feels like I'm drowning in it, and no matter how hard I push, I can't seem to catch up."
- Reflecting Content
- Reflecting Feeling

Crisis

- "Every time I turn around, there's another problem staring me in the face. The weather, the prices, the equipment breaking down—it's like the whole world is working against me. I used to love this work, but now it feels like I'm drowning in it, and no matter how hard I push, I can't seem to catch up. **Maybe the family would be better off without me.**"

During a Crisis

- Question – Ask the Question
- Persuade – Persuade the person
- Refer – Refer to Resources
- [QPR \(Question, Persuade, Refer\) - AgriSafe Network](#)

Questions during a perceived crisis

Open ended Questions

- Open-ended questions: cannot be answered minimally and allow more freedom in response from the speaker. They typically begin with “what,” “why,” “how,” “could you explain,” or “tell me more.”
 - Tell me a bit about your Family.
 - Tell me about your relationship.
 - What’s going on with the farm?
- Useful When:
 - encouraging expression in the speaker’s own words
 - Requesting elaboration about a topic
 - Facilitating reflection or self-exploration

Direct, Closed ended Questions

- Closed questions: can be answered in a few words or less and may be used to gather specific, factual information.
 - Have you been thinking about killing yourself?
 - If the answer is yes, “Don’t do it. You matter to much. Who can I call to help you with this?” Provide resources
 - Wellness check

Crisis

- "Every time I turn around, there's another problem staring me in the face. The weather, the prices, the equipment breaking down—it's like the whole world is working against me. I used to love this work, but now it feels like I'm drowning in it, and no matter how hard I push, I can't seem to catch up. **Maybe the family would be better off without me.**"
- Q-This sounds serious. Are you thinking about killing yourself?
- P-Don't do it. Sara and the girls would be lost without you. I'd be devastated too.
- R- There's help available. You can call or text 988 and/or call the counseling agency here in town.



RESOURCES



988- call or text



Make an appointment
with a behavioral
health provider



Rural Response
Hotline

**1-800-
464-
0258**

After a Crisis

- Be mindful of words we use
 - Try not to say- committed suicide
 - Rather say, 'Died by Suicide'
- Support
 - Food
 - Reaching out
- Offer Resources
 - 988 and Rural Response Hotline
 - Positive referral to a behavioral health provider
 - Know providers in area who have a connection to ag world

THANK YOU

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