Farm Stress Hits Home – Drought & Mental Health

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Farming ranks in the top ten most stressful occupations in the United States.
Why So Much Stress?

❖ King Kong-size Sources of rural stress
❖ **Weather** – drought
❖ **Prices** – crop prices drop by a third to half
❖ **Costs** – fuel costs; fertilizer costs rise
“Last of the Water” – Clark Price
England

Australia

New Zealand

Managing Stress on the Farm
What are you seeing as **key issues** related to the topic of farm & ranch stress in your areas?
Rural Stress and Individual / Family Wellness

- Ag pressures
- Farm and family financial stresses
- Impacts on children, community, etc.
- Relational stresses or conflict
- Personal stresses (physical, emotional)
Increased attention to the issue of farm stress and suicide rates among farmers

Suicide rate of farmers high among occupational groups

“Preventing Farmer Suicide: Collaboration and Communication” (5 minutes)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPDlyVAkeEo

(RHIHub – UND)
Key Sources of Rural Stress – Farm Financial Situation

- Net farm/ranch income decline
- Debt/asset ratio – meeting debt payments
- Cash flow on the operation
- Arranging financing
- Complicated or strained decision making – tendency to make worse decisions under stress
Key Sources of Rural Stress – Family Financial Situation

• Ability to meet family living expenses
• Long hours, two or three jobs, balancing work and family
• Sense of inadequacy due to economic difficulties
• Facing the challenge of having to leave the farm (generational legacy)
Implications of Rural Stress Perceptions for Mental Health

❖ Most surveyed attribute the crisis to factors beyond their control (weather, market price, farm policy).

❖ Factors beyond one’s control may create a sense of challenges beyond resolution.

❖ Resulting feelings = helplessness, victimization, anger, isolation, depression.

…Otherwise, a recipe for mental, emotional, behavioral and relational health
Why is Rural Stress Hard on Individuals?

❖ Individual levels of stress are linked to how a person perceives the source of stress - their orientation to the stressor.

❖ Many persons see it not as a change of job, but as a loss of self.

❖ Many practice the 11th Commandment orientation - “Thou shalt farm!”
What is Another Issue? The “Born to Farm” Mindset . . .

❖ The impact of a farming or ranching economic crisis on families is about more than making money; it is about the continuance of a generational way of life that is rooted in history.

❖ This is known as the “agrarian imperative” – “born to farm” mindset.

❖ This requires more than a “technical” solution (an infusion of income).
Which Matters More?
Tractor Maintenance vs. Farmer Maintenance

"THEY MAINTAIN THEIR TRACTORS, THEY MAINTAIN THEIR PUMPS AND EVERYTHING BUT THEY DON’T MAINTAIN THEMSELVES."

Harry, male farmer on farmer’s mental health in Judd, et al, 2006

#ElevateTheConvo
Photo Credit Derek Gavey
Key Messages on Rural Stress

• Your **health is your most important asset** as a farmer, rancher or agricultural worker.

• Farmer and farmworker **health and safety is the most important priority in managing any farm or ranch operation**. **Good stress management is good farm management!**
Your Health =
Your Horsepower
What is Stress?

**Stress definition:**
A state of physical, mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from difficult or demanding circumstances

- How do you know you are feeling stressed?
- Physical, mental, emotional, social signs
Warning Signs of Stress

Stress signs are **warning signals** to slow down and focus on wellness.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Signs of Stress</th>
<th>Emotional Signs of Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Head aching</td>
<td>• Irritable about little things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Back/neck muscles tense, aching</td>
<td>• Sense of frustration, anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stomach upset, distressed</td>
<td>• Impatient, restless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Breathing short, labored</td>
<td>• Feeling discouraged, hopeless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low energy</td>
<td>• Withdrawal from others, isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Body fatigue, tiredness</td>
<td>• Anxiety, panic feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Aggravated health issues</td>
<td>• Difficulty concentrating</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Stress Signals – Behavioral and Relationship

## Behavioral Signs of Stress
- Difficulties with sleep
- Inability to relax, concentrate
- Getting angry easily
- Trouble making decisions
- Increased use of alcohol or other drugs
- Difficulty being flexible
- Overeating or loss of appetite

## Relationship Signs of Stress
- Communication difficulties
- Conflict with family members, others
- Lack of satisfaction
- Verbal or physical outbursts, abuse
- Strained interactions
- Avoiding others
- Lack of time with spouse, children, others
Coping Strategies – What’s in your toolbox?

“Tools are designed to do very different jobs. Find the right coping strategy (tool) to fit the situation, and remember to change strategies (tools) if the one you are using isn’t working!”
Responding to Rural Stress

- **Development of Social Support** - Does the family take steps to build social support both internally and externally? How can this be fostered?
  - Within-family social support
  - Other sources of informal social support
  - Formal social support
Where Do Farmers Get Social Support?
Asking for Help – How to Make It Easier

• **Build rapport** – people are more likely to ask for help from someone they trust and perceive as warm, empathetic, and genuine.

• **Confidentiality** is key.

• **Avoid labels** or **minimizing** the situation.

• Know your **resources** and be prepared to refer.

• **Always follow up**.
Where to get help?

- Visit your doctor. Just get checked!
- Seek counseling with a mental health professional.
- Call 2-1-1 for confidential listening and support, in addition to information and referral. Call specialists are trained in crisis intervention, including suicide intervention.
What is the North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center?

Funded by a USDA Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network grant, North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center is composed of lead agencies representing 12 states. We want to make sure that you, your family, and the people you work with have access to the resources needed, when they are needed. We believe in working together to cultivate rural supports, mental health resources, and community to help farmers, ranchers, and other agriculture workers as they navigate increasing stress.
North Central FRSAN Resources - Online

Training & Professional Services

Resource Clearinghouse

Telephone Helplines

Support Groups

Online: www.farmstress.org
NDSU Extension + Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center

New 3-Year Project

- NDSU Extension
- Lutheran Social Services (counseling options)
- FirstLink (suicide prevention & mental health training)
  - Mental Health First Aid
  - Online suicide prevention training
  - Educational workshops
Farm Stress Management Resources

- Training in Mental Health First Aid
- Two deliverable workshops – MSU
  - Communicating with Farmers Under Stress
  - Weathering the Storm in Agriculture: How to Cultivate a Productive Mindset
Information Online

NDSU Extension – Related Websites
- Farm/Ranch Stress
  - https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/farmranchstress

- Drought Stress
  - https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/drought

- Mental and Behavioral Health Resources
  - https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/cff/resources-for-emotional-and-mental-health
Peer Support Efforts

• Farmer to Farmer Discussion Groups
  • Proactive emphasis on marketing, management, integrating wellness into management practices
Programs at a Distance

• Wellness Coaching (THRIVE Montana)
• Telehealth options
• Podcast series

FIND YOUR PATH TO WELLNESS.

Are Worth It.
Discover what makes you thrive through group and individual coaching.

QUESTIONS? CALL 994-5497
or email healthadvancement@montana.edu
Connect with Others via Their Stories – TransFarmation Podcast

The TransFarmation Podcast series – by MN Dept. of Agriculture; Red River Valley Farm Network

https://www.rrfn.com/transfarmation/
Join the FarmStrong Initiative

New Zealand FarmStrong Initiative – focus on living well in agriculture

https://farmstrong.co.nz/
There’s An App for That . . .

Calm in the Storm – Mobile Stress app
http://calminthestormapp.com/
“HEALTH is the most important ASSET to any operation.

If it is the most important ASSET, it also needs to be the most important PRIORITY.”

—Sean Brotherson, family science specialist for North Dakota State University.
Support Sources – What can we do?

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