

Down on the Farm: Supporting Farmers in Stressful Times

Background

Stress factors are on the rise for Minnesota farmers. Many face financial problems, price and marketing uncertainties, farm transfer issues, production challenges, and more. In 2018 multiple agencies across Minnesota partnered to offer *Down on the Farm: Supporting Farmers in Stressful Times* across the state.

This workshop was originally created and delivered at six locations in 2018 by Meg Moynihan, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Randy Willis, Minnesota Sheriffs' Association, Michelle Page, Minnesota Farm Service Agency, and Ted Matthews, Minnesota Rural Mental Health Specialist. AgCentric – Northern Center of Agricultural Excellence at Central Lakes College subsequently adapted the workshop into this curriculum, which may be used in whole or in part without permission. **When using the curriculum please credit Minnesota Department of Agriculture and AgCentric – MN State Northern Center of Agricultural Excellence and SARE.**

Some of the topics we covered were:

- Maybe you want to help, but aren't sure what to say or do.
- Maybe you find yourself having to deliver difficult news to farmers.
- This three hour workshop will help you recognize and respond when you suspect a farmer or farm family member might need help

The workshops were for professionals to learn how they can help farmers through stressful times.

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OBJECTIVES:

1. Recognize the causes of stress in farming.
2. Identify signs of mental and emotional distress in the farmers and farm families
3. Learn to use active listen skills.
4. Recognize how and why to take care of your own emotional and mental health in stressful situations
5. Identify and increase awareness of local and regional resources available.

TIME FRAME

The workshop is recommended for a three hour time frame, but can be adapted to other time frames with small adjustments.

Sample workshop agenda (3 hours)

Time	Topic	Duration
9:00	Introductions	15 minutes
9:15	Farm economics	15 minutes
9:30	Sign of stress	30 minutes
10:00	Active Listening and Strategies for helping.	60 minutes
11:00	Protection Yourself ***	15 minutes
11:15	Identification and discussion of resources	45 minutes

*** This section should be facilitate by Law Enforcement see below

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

Anyone who interacts with farmers on a regular basis, including county, state and federal agency staff, veterinarians, bankers, crop consultants, clergy, farm organization staff and board members, social service workers, nurses and other medical professionals, farm management and high school ag instructors, Extension staff, and others.

NOTE: this workshop is not designed for farmers. You may have farmers in the audience.

RECOMMENDED FACILITATORS:

It is strongly recommended a minimum of two presenters deliver the workshop and local law enforcement.

- One presenter should have a background in agriculture – Recommend Farm Business Management instructors, extension educator or local agriculture lender. In Minnesota see <https://agcentric.org/what-we-do/education-training/farm-business-management/deans-and-instructors/> for FBM instructors near you.
 - This person should focus on **slides 5-11**
- One presenter should have a strong background in mental health including stress - could be clergy, mental health professional, Rural Mental Health Specialist.
 - This person will focus on **slides 12-29**
- Local law enforcement –. **At Slide 30 can be expanded**
 - Important to have local law enforcement. Sheriff or deputy preferred if you can get them, rather than local police or campus security. – should speak about:
 - Security in office settings (where you control environment) and
 - On-farm visits (more variables out of your control).
 - De-escalation tips. They train on this a ton and much of what they say will reinforce other parts of DOTF.
 - NOTE - If you put them at beginning or end, they can come, do their thing for 20 minutes, and go.

BEFORE THE WORKSHOP

Workshops PowerPoint and resources can be downloaded from

<https://agcentric.org/what-we-do/education-training/farm-business-management/rural-mental-health/>

Materials to prepare:

- Down on the Farm Power Point –
 - Needs to be adapted for your area and your time frame and your facilitators.
- Handouts – suggested
 - UMASH Signs and Symptoms of Stress
 - Michigan Extension – How to talk with Farmers Under Stress
 - NDSU Extension – Responding to distressed people

- Print practice scenarios for active listening at the end
- Post it notes
- Pens/pencils
- Resource directory signage – listed below is suggested.
 - Clergy/Pastoral Care
 - Counseling/Mental Health
 - Employment/Careers
 - Farm Transition
 - Financial/Business
 - General Info
 - Health Care
 - Human Services/Basic Needs
 - Legal/Law Enforcement
 - Other
- Below is how AgCentric has given access to the resource Directories generated from the 2018 Down on the Farm Workshops.
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- <https://agcentric.org/what-we-do/education-training/farm-business-management/rural-mental-health/>

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ADAPTING FARM ECONOMICS FOR YOUR AREA:

- Farm economics for your area can be searched at <https://finbin.umn.edu/>
- Identify any specific farm stress issues in your areas – natural disasters, closure of elevator, plant etc.

WORKSHOP TIPS

1. Provide a resources table – request supporting materials from MN Department of Agriculture – <https://www.mda.state.mn.us/about/mnfarmerstress>
2. Start and end on time
3. Have a sign in sheet with pens ready when participants arrive
4. Provide name tags – ask them to only use their first name.
5. Distribute handouts or set them up on a table for pick up.
6. At the beginning of the workshop after introduction identify location of restrooms, snacks, etc.
7. Allow time for introductions of presenters with brief bio's
8. Allow time for introduction of participants. See slide deck for suggestions on how to do this.

Active listening practice scenarios

We just got back from the doctor, Mom's forgetfulness is getting worse and the doctors said we should start looking for a memory care facility. I don't know how we're going to afford this. And I don't know what's going to happen to dad.

The vet was just here. Only 10 percent of our cows are bred. I don't know what I'm going to do.

I got another letter from the county feedlot lady, about manure on the road. I have been up and down the freaking road and I don't see where there is any spill. It that #*%&&# neighbor complaining again.

Oh my god. The school just called. They did one of those locker searches this morning and found pot in Brian's locker and evidently now the sheriff is on his way out to see me. My wife/husband is going to hit the roof. I don't know if I'm more afraid of the sheriff or my wife/husband.

We are behind on everything. The balances are piling up. The late charges are piling up on top of the balances. We getting nasty letters from people we've done business with for years and years. I just feel like we're being crushed.

I haven't slept more than a few hours for weeks, but I just can't seem to get everything done.