

Managing Stress on the Farm and Communicating with Farmers Under Stress

Dr. Jeff Dwyer
Director and Senior Associate Dean
Michigan State University Extension



Farm Stress: What We Know

Farming is a stressful, high-risk profession

- In 2016, 417 farmers and farm workers died from a work-related injury (fatality rate: 21.4 deaths per 100,000 workers)
(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018)
- Opioids are an issue in rural areas; 3 of 4 farmers say it would be easy to access opioids
(American Farm Bureau Federation and National Farmers Union, 2017, Dec. 8)



Farm Stress Situation

- Many farms are in financial distress
- Putting farm families under prolonged stress
- Causing mental and physical health issues

Price volatility will continue to exist and many agriculture markets are bearish for the near future

Many farms are struggling to cover cash flow

Photo: Copyright istock.com/JackieNix



OPIOIDS IN RURAL FARMING COMMUNITIES

The opioid crisis is having an impact on rural communities.

Opioid misuse, addiction and overdose have become serious public health issues. 70% of overdoses in the country have been affected by the misuse, abuse of drug-related devices or medical devices. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2017).

HOW DOES THE OPIOID CRISIS IMPACT RURAL FARMING COMMUNITIES?

- 30% of farmers and farm workers have shared their addiction
- 70% of farmers on farms indicate a need for more access opioid painkillers within a prescription. (Michigan Council, 2017)

WHAT DRUGS ARE OPIOIDS?

Opioid drugs block pain signals to the brain and are usually used to treat moderate to severe pain.



Some examples of opioids that can be prescribed to control chronic pain include Oxycodone (OxyContin, Roxicodone), Hydrocodone (Vicodin, Lorcet, Norco), Fentanyl (Duramorph, Invelevio), morphine (Omnopon), meperidine (Demerol), and others.

WHAT ARE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF OPIOID MISUSE?

- Taking or using medication prescribed for your doctor but in higher quantities or frequency
- Taking or using medication prescribed for your doctor for a time period longer than indicated
- Taking or using medication prescribed for someone else's doctor
- Taking or using medication without a prescription
- Taking or using medication in ways not intended by the doctor
- Taking or using medication in ways that are dangerous
- Taking or using medication in ways that are illegal
- Taking or using medication in ways that are socially unacceptable
- Taking or using medication in ways that are socially unacceptable
- Taking or using medication in ways that are socially unacceptable

COPIING WITH GRIEF AFTER LOSING THE FARM

We expect to go through the grief process when someone we love passes away, but it's not always expected for other types of loss and may catch us by surprise. Farm families across the nation are suffering the loss of their farms, or at least a working farm, and are experiencing grief that may not have been expected.

When we lose a loved one, we experience a sense of loss. In the case of a farm, the loss is not just the land, but the way of life, the memories, the sense of community, and the way of life. The loss of a farm can be a traumatic event, and it's important to recognize that it's a loss. It's not just the land, but the way of life, the memories, the sense of community, and the way of life. The loss of a farm can be a traumatic event, and it's important to recognize that it's a loss.

WHAT ARE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF?

- Feeling sad, lonely, or empty
- Feeling angry or resentful
- Feeling guilty or ashamed
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling confused
- Feeling numb
- Feeling restless
- Feeling irritable
- Feeling exhausted
- Feeling lonely
- Feeling isolated
- Feeling disconnected
- Feeling lost
- Feeling uncertain
- Feeling unsure
- Feeling unsteady
- Feeling unbalanced
- Feeling ungrounded
- Feeling unmoored
- Feeling unanchored
- Feeling unrooted
- Feeling unmoored
- Feeling unanchored
- Feeling unrooted

HOW TO CULTIVATE A PRODUCTIVE MINDSET

There are many factors in agriculture that farmers have no control over. Beyond the uncertainty of the weather, destructive crises such as disease outbreaks and short-term incidents such as machinery breakdowns or accidents can add to the stress. One powerful factor that we always have the opportunity to control, however, is our mindset.

Farmers and those within the agricultural industry face a constant stream of stressors, but with all of the variability in agriculture there are times when we can become overwhelmed and stressed more than normal. Having the right mindset can help increase productivity and resiliency, so we are better prepared when times are tough, and more able to manage our farms and take care of our families and ourselves.

Think of your mindset as a filter that you can use to save time and energy, and get the most out of what you do.

MINDSET TACTICS

- **USE SELF-TALK**
The truth hurts, but the mind thinks it to choose your thoughts with purpose. Tell yourself that you can overcome any challenge. You can adapt. You can make the most of any situation. You can do it again. You can't always avoid difficult situations, but you can choose the thoughts you have when you experience them. Try changing these words to tell yourself to help maintain the mindset you need - like calm, capable, and resilient.
- **USE YOUR BREATH**
When faced with a challenge, breathe your breath. Deep breathing calms the mind and can help you focus on the task at hand.

FACTS

The human mind has 70,000 thoughts each day. That's 70,000 opportunities.

The human mind has 70,000 thoughts each day. That's 70,000 opportunities.

The human mind has 70,000 thoughts each day. That's 70,000 opportunities.

The human mind has 70,000 thoughts each day. That's 70,000 opportunities.

The human mind has 70,000 thoughts each day. That's 70,000 opportunities.

The human mind has 70,000 thoughts each day. That's 70,000 opportunities.

The human mind has 70,000 thoughts each day. That's 70,000 opportunities.

The human mind has 70,000 thoughts each day. That's 70,000 opportunities.

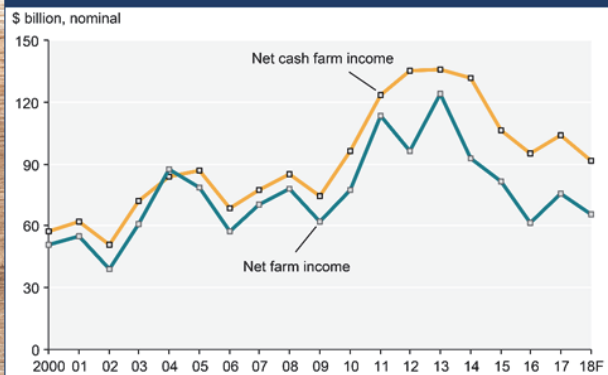


Net Farm Income and Net Cash Farm Income 2000–2018

Legend

- Boom years 2011-2013
- Declined by half since 2013
- 2.7% uptick in 2017
- Entering projected plateau period
- Dairy hit hard

Net farm income and net cash farm income, 2000-18F

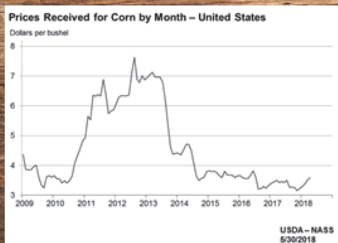


Note: F = forecast.
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service, Farm Income and Wealth Statistics.
Data as of August 30, 2018.



Dairy Isn't Suffering Alone: Cash Grain

CORN



SOYBEANS

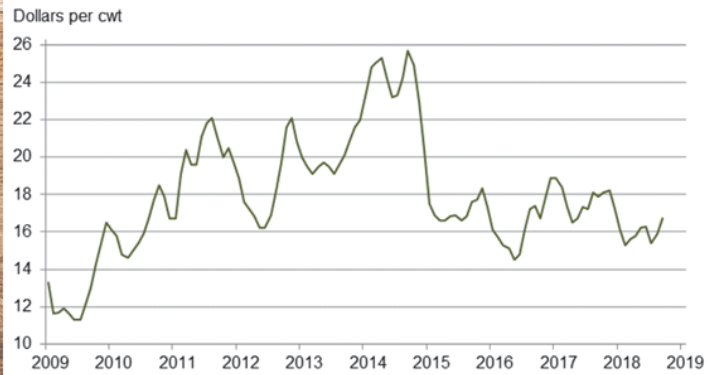


WHEAT



Dairy Farms Suffering From Low Milk Prices

Prices Received for Milk by Month – United States



USDA – NASS
10/30/2018



Communicating With Farmers Under Stress



Photo: Copyright istock.com/shobylclove



Objectives



Photo: Copyright iStock.com/MichaelBurrell

Build awareness around potentially stressful conditions affecting some farmers

Learn stress triggers, identify signs of stress and review helpful techniques for responding

Learn techniques for identifying, approaching and working with farmers who may not cope with stress effectively

Learn where to go for additional help



What Is Stress?

A need or demand people confront, that is perceived as burdensome or threatening, and can lead to physical or mental health problems



Photo: Copyright iStock.com/aldemunillo





Weather



Large debt loads



Government regulations

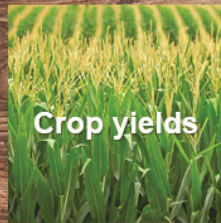
- REGULATIONS
- RULES - LAW
- REQUIREMENTS
- COMPLIANCE
- STANDARDS
- TRANSPARENCY
- POLICIES



Equipment breakdown



INTEREST RATES
High interest rates



Crop yields



Livestock disease



Commodity prices



Family disagreements

Photos: Copyright istock.com/Raissa, Gejzer99, crystal.eyegorov, crystal, JulianneGentry, monkeybusinessimages, Pashatginslov, Dajkar



Signs and Symptoms of Stress

Physical	Emotional	Behavioral	Cognitive	Self-worth
Headaches	Sadness	Irritability	Memory loss	Feel like a failure
Ulcers	Depression	Backbiting	Lack of concentration	Can't do anything right
Backaches	Bitterness	Acting out	Difficulty with simple decisions	Not being able to fix things
Eating problems	Anger	Passive-aggressive		
Sleeping problems	Anxiety	Anger		
Frequent sickness	Loss of spirit	Increased drinking		
Exhaustion	Loss of sense of humor	Taking drugs		
		Isolation		
		Violence		



Photos: Copyright istock.com/rohan022



Signs and Symptoms of Chronic, Prolonged Stress

- Change in routine
- Care of livestock declines
- Increase in illness
- Increase in farm accidents
- Appearance of farmstead declines
- Children show signs of stress

Photo: Copyright i-stock.com/franar023

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION | COMMUNICATING WITH FARMERS UNDER STRESS
Copyright 2018 Michigan State University Board of Trustees.



Review

Farmers can have stress due to experiencing extreme economic conditions, weather-related emergencies, and other reasons, and may not seek help, in part due to lack of medical resources.

Chronic stress is a common response to challenging economic conditions.

Listening empathetically is the most helpful thing you can do for someone going through extreme stress.

Positive self-talk, mindful breathing and acceptance are proven coping skills.

Never leave a distressed person alone. Call a friend, family member or 911.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION | COMMUNICATING WITH FARMERS UNDER STRESS
Copyright 2018 Michigan State University Board of Trustees.



Why Extension?

Addressing the mental health of farmers and agricultural workers in Michigan is essential.

Over 50,000 farms in Michigan produce more than 300 commodities, making our ag industry is the second most diverse in the country.

Food and agriculture contribute over \$100 billion to the state's economy and employs 22% of the state's workforce.

Photo: Copyright istock.com/JackieNix



Why Extension?

Trusted organization with a history of working with agricultural producers and stakeholders.

Providing workshops to farmers has been shown to be effective in reducing their stress.

Extension is a neutral party needed at times of high stress, able to cross programming lines to assist families with education about farm business management.

Photo: Copyright istock.com/JackieNix



Working With Farmers Who May Be Struggling With a High Level of Stress



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION | COMMUNICATING WITH FARMERS UNDER STRESS
Copyright 2018 Michigan State University Board of Trustees.



Two Community Programs

1. Weathering the Storm – 300 farmers

- 90% increased knowledge of current ag financial situation
- 90% improved in recognizing warning signs of mental illness and suicide
- 93% increased knowledge of mental health resources if needed

2. Communicating with Farmers under Stress – 1,000 service providers

- 85% reported the workshop increased their understanding of the impact of stress on our bodies
- 91% reported they were better able to recognize warning signs of depression, suicide and mental illness

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION | COMMUNICATING WITH FARMERS UNDER STRESS
Copyright 2018 Michigan State University Board of Trustees.



Mental Health First Aid

Learn signs and symptoms of mental health crises

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Psychosis
- Substance misuse



MENTAL
HEALTH
FIRST AID®

Build skills in how to communicate with someone experiencing a crisis

Learn about resources to which you can connect distressed individuals

mentalhealthfirstaid.org



Mental Health First Aid

Over 400 people have taken *Mental Health First Aid* through MSU Extension since 2016

mentalhealthfirstaid.org



MENTAL
HEALTH
FIRST AID®





Farm Stress Summit

**Build a network of support
for farmers and their families**

**January 23-25, 2019
Kellogg Conference Center
Michigan State University**

events.anr.msu.edu/farmstress



Questions?

msue.msu.edu/managingfarmstress

