

The Farm's Most Important Asset

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For farmers and ranchers, the daily grind can be monotonous, as if reliving the same day repeatedly. A typical day begins with an alarm set early for morning chores, heading out to the field, or going on part runs. There is always a task to be done or something to be fixed. Producers are often pulled in multiple directions, especially during the busy seasons. Overtime, the day-to-day farm tasks build up, and overwhelm creeps in.

According to Sean Brotherson, Ph.D., a Family Science Specialist from NDSU Extension, farming is one of the most stressful and dangerous occupations in the US. Additionally, the National Safety Council found agriculture to be one of the two most hazardous occupations. Farmers, ranchers, and their families endure a unique level of stress due to the extreme work environment in which they live. At times, stress is out of the producer's control. For example, producers are impacted by severe weather, debt load, economic factors, work, and health conditions. In a job that can be extremely demanding, it is important for producers to learn to put themselves first, and understand their health is the operation's most important asset.

In the NDSU Extension publication, *Farming and Ranching in Tough Times*, by Brotherson, Ph.D., it was found in 2021, 16 accidental deaths occurred per 100,000 agricultural workers. Compared to the national average of 3.6 deaths per 100,000 workers for all industries. This data helps display the high probability of death when farming and ranching. According to the CDC, in 2019, suicide among farmers was 3.5 times higher than the national average and has been increasing over the past decade. It is important to understand that farm stress does not only impact the producer, but their families and partners as well.

In 2021, Morning Consult conducted a National American Farm Bureau Poll and discovered 52% of rural adults and 61% of farmers and farm workers were experiencing more stress and mental health challenges compared to the previous year. Furthermore, farmers and farmworkers reported a 22% increase in social isolation, which impacts farmers' mental health, an important finding given the long hours many farmers work alone. In recent years the stigma attached to seeking help for mental health has improved; however, it is still a factor in why individuals choose not to address mental health concerns. Farmers and farm workers reported they are more comfortable talking to friends, family and their doctors about stress and mental health than they were in 2019. This tells us producers are reaching out to their support networks and are taking the first steps in seeking help.

Additional data disclosed in the NAFB poll discussed that younger rural adults are more likely than older rural adults to admit they are experiencing more stress and mental health challenges compared to a year ago, and they are more likely than older rural adults to disclose they have personally sought care from a mental health professional. This data is displaying the younger generation is more aware of self-care and the importance of addressing mental health. The next step is to educate producers of all ages on the importance of self-care and resources for doing so.

If you're a farmer or rancher feeling the pressure from the daily stressors that farm and ranch life brings, here are some tips for reducing the build-up of stress and anxiety. .

While some stressors are outside of your control, preparation and planning can play key roles in managing predictable stressors.

- Reduce the pile up of too many stressful events by planning and not procrastinating offseason repairs.
- Discuss who's available in the busy seasons for parts runs and other important tasks.
- Plan out your and set priorities by determining what needs to be done today and what can wait until tomorrow.
- Say no to extra commitments.
- Identify stressors and determine which of those you can change and which you can be at peace with.
- Switch your way of thinking from worrying to problem solving.
- Set realistic goals and expectations. Remember, it is not a sign of weakness to ask for help.

The first step in improving your operation is checking in on your own well-being through controlled responses. How is this done? Here are a few tips.

- Take breaks when you start to feel worked up.
- Calm down by taking three deep breaths.
- Relax your body and mind by doing some stretches.
- Listen to soothing music or read a book before bed to unwind from the day.
- Get enough sleep every night.
- Think positively and find humor in life.
- Find someone to talk to. This can be a friend, coworker, spouse, etc. to talk through your worries and frustrations. It is never good to bottle up emotions. Know when to seek help for extra support. Learning to manage stress and how to balance your lifestyle is vital.

It is important to take care of your mental health because it can impact your physical health as well. Stress and depression increase the risk of injury and accidents, along with increased risks of heart disease, stroke, and chronic pain. Your operation cannot function properly if you are not taking care of yourself. Always put yourself first.

If you are feeling stressed, depressed, or having thoughts of suicide:

- Call 2-1-1, the statewide 24-hour crisis intervention hotline
- Call or text 9-8-8, National Suicide Prevention Hotline
- Text "Hopeline" to 741741, National Suicide Hopeline Network
- Mental Health America Resources: www.mhanational.org/live-b4stage4
- North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center Recourses: www.farmstress.com
- Contact your local health care provider or local mental health care provider

For more information about farm stress and coping with stress please refer to NDSU's website about farm stress www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/ag-hub/ag-topics/farm-safety-health

While the Farm Management Education Program cannot lift the burden of the many stressful factors involved in farming and ranching, We can assist in understanding your records better, finding more efficient ways of recording keeping and ways to allow your dollar to go

farther. Contact your local Farm Management Education instructor for more information. The North Dakota Farm Management Education Program provides lifelong learning opportunities in economic and financial management for persons involved in the farming and ranching business. Visit www.ndfarmmanagement.com, Facebook @NDFarmManagementEducation, or contact Craig Kleven, State Supervisor for Agricultural Education, at crkleven@nd.gov or 701-328-3162 for more information. The ND Farm Management Education Program is sponsored by the North Dakota Department of Career and Technical Education.

References

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