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Resources for **DAIRYWOMEN**
without leaving the farm

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SIGNALS OF STRESS IN FARMERS AND WHAT TO DO

MICHAEL R. ROSMANN, PH.D.

DAIRY GIRL NETWORK WEBINAR

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We are Just Beginning to Understand Behavior

- Psychology is the science of behavior
- Behavior can be measured qualitatively and quantitatively
- Agricultural behavioral health combines:
 - agriculture and behavior to improve the behavioral well-being of the people and animals, plants and all organisms raised



Why Use “Behavioral” Instead of “Mental”



- Comprehensive and Holistic
 - addiction treatments, psychiatric care, psychological services, and any interventions that impact behavior
- Mental health care
 - necessitates medications or psychotherapy
- Behavioral health
 - understandable and makes us responsible for our thoughts and actions

The Agrarian Imperative

- Agrarian Personality
 - basic need to acquire territory and the necessary resources (e.g., capital, equipment, buildings, livestock) to produce food and shelter
 - this genetically programmed instinct drives farmers to hang onto their land at all costs
 - instills farmers to work incredibly hard, to endure unusual pain and hardship and to take uncommon risks



Commonly Diagnosed Behavioral Health Conditions of Distressed Farm People

- 40% of diagnoses
 - relationship problems, such as partner and marital problems, domestic and child abuse, quarreling with elders, blame and anger are usually the first symptoms
- 24% of diagnoses
 - adjustment problems - temporary exacerbations of anxiety, depression and other behavior problems that remit when stress diminishes
- 11% of diagnoses
 - Anxiety disorders, including excessive worry, panic, PTSD

Behavioral Health Problems of the Agricultural Population, cont.

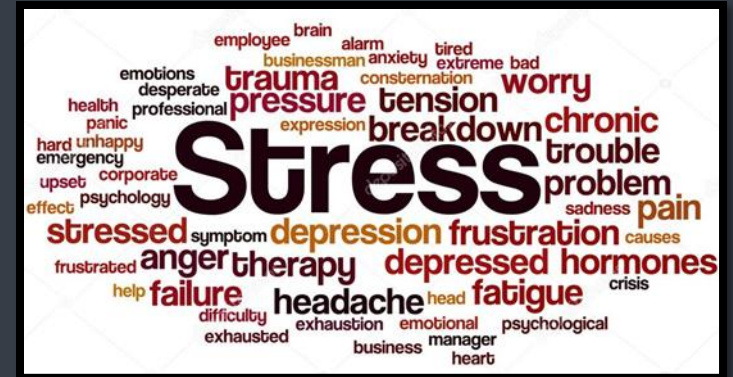
- 18-33% of diagnoses
 - forms of depression, with major depression more common than bipolar disorder
- 7% of diagnoses
 - substance misuse, either alcohol, street drugs or prescribed medications, but often co-occurs about 40% of the time with other diagnoses
- Personality disorders are uncommon, about 1.5%
- Psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia, <1%

*Rosmann and Delworth, 1993; Rosmann and Stucker, 2008.

Farmers' Behavioral Health Impacts Herd Health

- Stress increases farming-related injuries
- Healthy working conditions and good behavioral health of workers increases productivity
- 2011 study of owners, managers and workers on Swedish dairy and beef farms found
 - Stressful working conditions and symptoms are common
 - Workers reported more symptoms than owners/managers
 - Stressors included having to work fast, little influence over decisions/workloads, low sense of meaningfulness, and low sense of staff cohesiveness

Farmers' Mental Health Impacts Herd Health, cont.



- Stress symptoms
 - feelings of fear of retaliation, fatigue, insomnia, headaches, nervousness and abdominal pain
- Workers who felt their contributions to the farm operation reported fewer symptoms and greater pleasure from their work
- Behavioral health symptoms of the owners/managers and workers was positively correlated with the incidence of mastitis and the total number of cow diseases, as reported in veterinary records

Contributors to Farm Stress



- Stressors are those we can't control and threaten the loss of our farms
- Stress results from financial threats to the operation, but can occur due to unpredictable events like bad weather, disease outbreaks, personal health issues, market shifts and other factors beyond our control
- Most people can handle two stressors simultaneously, but three is usually beyond their capacity

Danger Signals of Excessive Stress, Depression and Suicide



- Verbalizations about hopelessness
 - Examples: “It’s no use, I feel like giving up, What’s the use in trying.”
- Verbalizations and loss of interest or pleasure in doing things that usually are fun, such as “I haven’t laughed in a long time.”
- Clear statements, like “I feel like letting all my cows go”
- “Lump in the throat phenomenon” when the person says “I wish I could cry but I can’t”

Danger Signals of Excessive Stress, Depression and Suicide, cont.

- Avoiding public events such as church or kids' sports activities and meetings that he/she usually attends
- Flat affect - retreating behaviors and isolation
- Deterioration in appearance or health of livestock, the farm, pastures overstocked, machinery and farm facilities unpainted and in disrepair
- Decline in personal appearance
- Exposure to farm chemicals could have occurred

What We Can Do to Help Distressed Farmers



- Visit them and offer help
- Don't leave them alone if they appear suicidal, but instead contact family members or others who are around to share concerns
- Provide options for addressing their concerns
 - outside consultants (e.g., farm business expertise)
 - behavioral health resources (e.g., hotlines for farmers, community meetings, educational programs, counselors who understand agriculture)

Managing Our Behavior

- Behavior, like a feed ration, has ingredients that can be varied to maximize our well-being
- Manage our behavioral well-being:
 - Our daily and weekly behavior rations include how much and how hard we work, sleep, recreate, pray, laugh, talk and engage in stress management

Specific Behaviors that Help Us Deal with Stress



- Talking with people who understand our/their dilemma
- Physical intimacy and comforting touches, such as stroking arms and hands
- Recreation and breaks away from the stressful environment
- Prayer and meditation, in the outdoors or any other comforting environment
- Interacting positively with pets and beloved animals

Remember That Someone Else Always has it Worse Than we do

- Our distress will diminish when we take charge of it
- Most problems are resolvable, but succumbing to them by suicide or giving up in other ways are permanent
 - Anxiety, depression, family issues and most behavioral health problems are resolvable
- The current attention in the national media to suicide require that we get help and prevent unnecessary deaths

Further Resources

- Literature about agricultural behavioral health, resources for healthcare, social, legal, family and many other farming and ranching topics are available from a website maintained by Iowa Farmer Today
- Local Extension offices and farm associations



Further Resources

- IOWA CONCERN HOTLINE 1.800.447.1985
- MINNESOTA FARM AND RURAL HELPLINE 1.833.600.2670
- NEBRASKA RURAL RESPONSE HELPLINE 1.800.464.0258
- NYFARMNET 1.800.547.3276
- VERMONT FARM FIRST 1.877.493.6216
- WISCONSIN FARM CENTER 1.800.942.2474
- NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE 1.800.273.8255

Contact Information

Michael R. Rosmann, Ph.D.
1027 1400th St
Harlan, IA 51537
Tel: 712-627-4679

Email: mike@agbehavioralhealth.com
Website: www.agbehavioralhealth.com





Having hope as agricultural producers goes a long way toward restoring faith in farming and ranching and charity among farmers and ranchers.

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Questions

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