

# **Stress Management + Mental Health Awareness**

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# Objectives

- Talk about managing and identifying signs of stress in yourself and in others.
- Learn how to build resiliency, and remind yourself of the helpful tools and techniques you can turn to during tough times.
- Breaking down the mental health barriers and how to talk about mental health challenges
- How to have difficult conversations - related to talking with your farm customers, as well as talking with a friend, family member, or neighbor when you are concerned about their well-being.



# Agrarian imperative

“...impels farmers to hang onto their land at all costs. The agrarian imperative instills farmers to work incredibly hard, to endure unusual pain and hardship, and to take uncommon risks.”

- Rosmann, 2010, p. 72

“The land means everything to farmers ... Losing the family farm is the ultimate loss.”

- Rosmann, 2008, p. 39



# Stress

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

(Peralin 1989, Thoits 2010, Dimsdale 2008, Chen & Miller 2007, Keller et al. 2012)



# Stressors

## External

- Family challenges
- Major life changes
- Positive: new marriage, pregnancy, promotion, new house
- Negative: loss, death of a loved one, divorce, bankruptcy

## Internal

- Fear
- Lack of control or uncertainty
- Expectations
- Worry
- Chronic health challenges



# Stress hormones

## Cortisol

- Released in times of fear or stress
- Motivates us to act
- Elevated levels can impact our health
  - Immune system
  - Digestive system
  - Reproductive systems
  - Heart disease
  - Sleep problems
  - Memory issues
  - Weight gain
  - Anxiety
  - Depression

## Adrenaline

- Increases heart rate
- Elevates blood pressure
- Boosts energy supplies

## Norepinephrine

- Raises blood pressure



# Types of stress

## Acute

- Most common form - thrilling or exciting in small doses
- Short term
- Prepares you for fight or flight
- Most recognizable - it's life
  - Fender bender, deadline, starting a new job
- Very treatable and manageable

## Chronic

- The grinding stress that wears on people
- Long term
- Is not thrilling or exciting
- It's the stress of poverty, trauma, oppression, stressed families, chronic illness, etc.
- Many times professional help is needed



# What does stress look like?





# Signs + symptoms of stress

| Physical  | Emotional   | Behavioral  |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Headaches</li><li>• Stomach issues</li><li>• Increased blood pressure</li><li>• Clenched teeth, jaw</li><li>• Muscle tension</li><li>• Sudden perspiration</li><li>• Rapid heart beat</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Impatience</li><li>• Yelling more</li><li>• Frustration</li><li>• Depression</li><li>• Difficulty controlling emotions</li><li>• Anxious</li><li>• Angry blow ups</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased substance use</li><li>• Difficulty adapting to change</li><li>• Verbal abuse</li><li>• Increased anger</li><li>• Communication problems</li><li>• Physical abuse</li><li>• Difficulty relaxing</li><li>• Sleep issues</li></ul> |



# Signs + symptoms of chronic stress

- Change in routines
- Care of self, livestock declines
- Decreased home appearance
- Increase in illness and/or injury
- Obsessive or compulsive or impulsive behaviors
- Excessive weight gain or loss
- Constant feelings of being overwhelmed or overloaded



# Health concerns of stress

## Acute

- Persistent muscle tension
- Headaches
- Migraines
- Hypertension
- Chest pain
- Heart disease
- Stomach issues

## Chronic

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Suicide
- Adrenal exhaustion
- Decreased stress tolerance
- Progressive mental and physical exhaustion, illness, collapse



# Advantages

- Enables concentration
- Increased performance
- Energizes you into action

# Disadvantages

- Loss of motivation
- Reduces effectiveness
- Physical, mental, and behavioral problems



# Stress management techniques

- Change your thinking
- Relaxation and meditation
- Share your thoughts, feelings, struggles with someone
- Move your body
- Eat a healthy diet
- Healthy sleep patterns
- Set boundaries - learn to say “no”
- Get organized
- Take a break, press pause
- Find activities or hobbies you enjoy
- Find humor - laugh



# **Building resiliency -** ***In yourself and others***



[illegible]

# Resilience

“An ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change”

-Merriam Webster Dictionary

“Maintenance of positive physical and emotional functioning in spite of significant difficulty or challenge”

-JA Sturgeon

“Effective functioning despite the exposure to stressful circumstances and internal distress”

-P. Karoly





# Resilience is NOT:

- Simply manning (womanning) up
- Pulling yourself up by your bootstraps
- Just keeping going
- A binary state between resilient and not resilient
- The same for everyone



# What are some ways we can build resilience in ourselves and those around us?

- Confront reality head-on



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- Perspective



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- Confront reality head-on
- Believe that life has purpose
- Adaptability & flexibility
- Perspective
- Healthy habits



# 10 minute break



# Talking about mental health and suicide





**What do you think of when you hear the words mental health, mental illness, substance use disorder, or suicide?**



# Normalizing mental health

- Talk openly about it
- Be conscious of the language you use
- Educate yourself and others
- Encourage equality between physical and mental illness
- Show compassion
- Choose empowerment over shame
- Be honest about treatment
- Don't harbor self-stigma



# Talking about suicide

- Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.
- Be willing to listen, non-judgmentally.
- Allow for expressions of feelings. Accept the feelings.
- Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether feelings are good or bad, or the value of life.
- Get involved - be available, show interest and support.
- Don't dare them
- Don't act shocked.
- Don't promise secrecy
- Offer hope that alternatives are available, but don't make empty promises
- Take action. Remove means, like weapons or pills.
- Get help



# Risk factors

- Mental health disorders, particularly mood disorders, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, and certain personality disorders
- Family history of suicide
- Substance use disorder
- Intoxication
- Previous suicide attempts
- Access to firearms
- Stigma in seeking help
- A serious or chronic medical illness
- Gender
- A history of trauma or abuse
- Prolonged stress
- A recent tragedy or loss
- Job or financial loss
- Lack of social support and sense of isolation
- Exposure to others who have died by suicide (in real life or via the media and Internet)



# Suicide warning signs: example statements

Clear to friend: "I'm going to kill myself."

Coded to son: "Don't be surprised if I die in a tractor rollover."

Clear to banker: "If you foreclose, you'll be seeing my obit next week."

Coded to friend: "If I should pass away, I want you to have my old Winchester 12-gauge."

Coded to financial advisor/loan officer: "What happens to my debt if I die?"

To doctor: "Is this enough medicine to kill someone?" (indirect/coded).

To adult son: "I'm going to be leaving you nothing I'm afraid, just my burdens." (indirect/coded)

To adult daughter: "You'll need to look after your mother when I'm gone." (indirect/coded)

To a best friend and pastor: No warning signs sent

To his wife: "Why don't I just shoot myself and let the bank have this place?" (direct/uncoded)

*Compliments of the QPR Institute (Question, Persuade, Refer [QPR] for Farmers and Ranchers)*



# Having difficult conversations



# Examples of difficult conversations

- Concern Over Animal Welfare or lack of upkeep on Farm
- Client/Farmer Owes Agribusiness Money
- Concern for health of Client/Farmer



# Questions to Ask

- Am I the right person for the job?
- Am I the only person aware of the situation?  
Should others be brought in?
- Are they willing to meet?
- When is a good time?





# Helpful Tools for Successful Communication

- Be Prepared



# What kind of help is needed?

## Professional

- Licensed counselors, therapists, psychologists or psychiatrists
- Medical doctors
- Lawyers
- Clergy
- Financial counselors

## Non-professional

- Family – spouse, sibling, parent, adult child
- Friends
- Church community– clergy, friends within the church
- Other farmers
- Neighbors



# Helpful Tools for Successful Communication

- Be Prepared
- Be Empathetic



# Empathy vs. sympathy

## Empathy

A person's ability to recognize and share the emotions of another person.

- Sitting with someone in their darkness.
  - "I hear you, and I'm sorry. This really sucks."

## Sympathy

A feeling of care and concern for someone, often someone close, accompanied by a wish to see them better off or happier.

- The silver lining effect
  - "At least you have a family"



# Helpful Tools for Successful Communication

- Be Prepared
- Be Empathetic
- Be a Good listener





# Communicating through conflict

- Ask open ended questions
- Describe the facts and impacts on yourself and others without judgment or blame.
- Explain the outcome needed
- Ask often for the other person's views
- Ask for clarification whenever in doubt
- Paraphrase what you are hearing
- Restate: Is this what you said, or meant?
- Reframe the situation with a mutual purpose
- Brainstorm to come up with an accurate assessment of what is truly needed
- Develop an action plan
- Summarize what you both agreed on
- Written follow-up



# Helpful Tools for Successful Communication

- Be Prepared
- Be Empathetic
- Be a Good listener
- Be Honest & Direct





# Depression warning signs

- Change in sleep patterns
- Isolating from others
- Unusually sad mood
- Increased risky behavior
- Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities that used to be enjoyable
- Lack of energy and extreme tiredness
- Feeling worthless
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Moving slowly or becoming agitated and unable to settle
- Thinking often about death or wishing to be dead



# Suicide warning signs

- Change in sleep patterns
- Isolating from others
- Extreme mood swings
- Increased risky behavior
- Talking or writing about death or wanting to die
- Increased pain or hopelessness
- Seeking a resolution
  - Giving away prized possessions
  - Sending goodbye messages
  - Putting affairs in order



# Asking about suicide

- Ask that person directly

**Are you having thoughts of suicide?**

**Are you thinking of killing yourself?**

- Asking directly DOES NOT increase the risk of suicide, and may provide the person with relief that someone sees their struggle.

**What if someone says “yes”?**

- Ask them if they have a plan
- Do not leave them alone
- Call for help



# **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

## **1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

# **Suicide/Crisis Texting Lifeline**

## **Text - HELP to 741741**

**\*Some counties in New York have mobile units available, so be sure to check out your local resources.**



# Don't take their problems on as your own

You're there to help, not solve.

Help them come up with options



# Resources

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** – call **1-800-273-8255** for free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.
- **Veterans Crisis Line** – veterans and their loved ones can call **1-800-273-8255 and Press 1**, chat online, or text **838255** to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.
- **Crisis Text Line** – free, 24/7 support for those in crisis. Text **GOT 5 to 741741**
- **Trans Lifeline** – call **1-877-565-8860** for a hotline staffed by transgender people for transgender people. Trans Lifeline volunteers are ready to respond to whatever support needs community members might have.
- **Disaster Distress Helpline** – call **1-800-985-5990** for a 24/7 national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster.
- **The Trevor Project** – call **1-866-488-7386** to connect with a national 24-hour, toll free confidential suicide hotline for LGBTQ youth.
- **The LGBT National Help Center** – call **1-888-843-4564**. Provides peer-counseling, information, and local resources.
- **911**



# NY FarmNet

- 1-800-547-3276 | [www.nyfarmnet.org](http://www.nyfarmnet.org)
- Available to any farmer or farm family in NYS
- Provide free, confidential, on-farm/phone/virtual consulting
- Holistic approach
  - **financial** – help with financial analysis, business decision making, identify options for improved efficiency, how to plan a farm sale
  - **family consulting** – family communication, interpersonal developing a resume relationships, conflict management, coping with loss and grief
- Educational workshops – stress management and mental health, business planning, succession planning



# North East Resources

## New York

- NY FarmNet 1-800-547-3276 | [www.nyfarmnet.org](http://www.nyfarmnet.org)
- NYS COVID-19 Emotional Support Line 1-844-863-9314

## Pennsylvania

- Center for Dairy Excellence  
<https://www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/programs-resources/stress-wellness-resources/>
- PA Dept. of Human Services:  
<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Mental-Health-In-PA/Pages/default.aspx>
- Charlie Gardner, DVM - intergenerational conflict

## Vermont

- Farm First [www.investeap.org/farmfirst](http://www.investeap.org/farmfirst) or 1-877-493-6216
- Department of Mental Health  
<https://mentalhealth.vermont.gov/services/emergency-services/how-get-help>





# North East Resources

## Maine

- Maine Statewide Crisis and Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-888-568-1112
- Maine Suicide Prevention Program
- Maine Warm Line: Telephone support during challenging times and non-crisis situations  
1-866-771-9276
- NAMI Maine: Monday – Friday 8 am – 4:30 pm 1800-464-5767 or 207-622-5767

## New Hampshire

- University of New Hampshire Extension - family resiliency  
<https://extension.unh.edu/topics/youth-family-resiliency>

## Connecticut

- U Conn Farm Risk Management <http://ctfarmrisk.uconn.edu/agstress.php>
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- NAMI CT: <https://namict.org/find-support/crisis-resources/>

## Rhode Island

- Mental Health Association of Rhode Island <https://mhari.org/resources/>
- 211



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