Resources

- National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
  - www.niaaa.nih.gov
- National Institute of Drug Abuse
  - www.nida.nih.gov
- Screening for Mental Health, Inc.
  - (781) 239-0071
  - www.mentalhealthscreening.org
- Farmer Resource Network (Farm Aid)
  - 1-800-327-6243
Resources (cont.)

- Rural Assistance Center
  - www.raconline.org
  - 1-800-270-1898

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
  - www.samhsa.gov
  - 1-800-662-4357

- Carroll Davidson Generalized Anxiety Disorder Screen

- National Alliance on Mental Illness (Champaign)
  - http://namichampaign.org/

Resources (cont.)

- Crisis Text Line
  - Text “GO” to 741741

- Veterans Crisis Line
  - 1-800-273-8255
How to Talk About Mental Health

- You seem a little different lately. If you ever want to talk, I'm here for you.
- I've been worried about you. Can we talk about what you are experiencing? If not, who are you comfortable talking to?
- I am someone who cares and wants to listen. What do you want me to know about how you are feeling?
- Who or what has helped you deal with similar issues in the past?
- Sometimes talking to someone who has dealt with a similar experience helps. Do you know of others who have experienced these types of problems who you can talk with?
- You know, I've been through some tough times. If you ever need a friendly ear, I'm here.
- How can I help you find more information about mental health?
- I'm concerned for your safety. Have you ever thought about harming yourself or others?
Many of the factors that affect agricultural production are largely beyond the control of the producer. Good health, including mental health, is a key factor that contributes to one's ability to keep farming. Twenty percent of any population has mental health complications, including farmers and ranchers. Stigma and privacy concerns associated with mental health issues may mean that many people do not seek out available behavioral health services.

**SYMPTOMS OF POOR MENTAL HEALTH**
- Persistent worry and fear
- Apprehension and uneasiness
- Avoidance of others
- Feeling sad
- Lack of interest or pleasure in activities
- Significant weight change or changes in appetite
- Problems sleeping
- Slow or fidgety body movements
- Low energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Frequent thoughts of death or suicide
- Substance misuse
- Unexplained changes in physical appearance or behavior

**EXPERIENCING ANY OF THESE SYMPTOMS?**

**Take the Two Question Self-Assessment Tool:**

1. During the past two weeks, have you often been bothered by feeling down, depressed, or hopeless?
   
   □ Yes  □ No

2. During the past two weeks, have you often been bothered by little interest or pleasure in doing things?
   
   □ Yes  □ No

*If you have a positive response to either of these questions, consider talking to your health care provider about further assessment. You can also access self-screening tools by visiting*

http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/mental-health-screening-tools

**WHEN YOU TALK TO YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER:**

- Be pro-active; ask about potential signs of stress, anxiety, or depression
- Speak openly about stressful issues in your work and home life
- Be familiar with your family medical history related to depression or other contributing behavioral issues
- List any prescribed and over-the-counter medications you take
- Be aware of smoking habits and alcohol intake
- Inquire about a referral to a mental health specialist
- Know what your insurance coverage may (or may not) be for evaluation of mental health care
**Factors Impacting Wellness**

**Stress** is our response to anything that threatens our physical, emotional, or financial health or survival. A stressor is an event, series of events that harms or threatens an individual and causes him or her to respond. When we suffer from too much stress, for too long a period of time, it is called distress. Persistent, extended periods of negative stress can precede other issues impacting mental wellness. It is often difficult for people to distinguish between depression and stress.

**Depression** is a disorder that affects the biochemical balance of the brain and causes symptoms such as low energy level, sadness, physical impairments, low self-esteem, and problems thinking. Depression may be diagnosed when multiple symptoms are present for more than two weeks.

**Anxiety** disorders are the most common of all behavioral health conditions. Anxiety includes fears, apprehensive mood, feelings of dread and worried thoughts and behaviors. Some types of anxiety disorders include panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and phobias. Untreated anxiety can lead to depression, substance abuse and poor self-esteem.

**Suicide** comments should never be discounted. Always respond immediately. **If you or someone you know is contemplating suicide, call 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) or 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).**

**Assistance with Mental Health Issues:**

For a medical or life-threatening emergency, call 9-1-1

Mental Health America -
www.mentalhealthamerica.net

US Department of Health and Human Services -
Toll-free Crisis Hotline: 1-800-273-8255

---

**For Agricultural Populations, Stressful Events Might Include:**

- Financial concerns (ie: equipment purchases, borrowing for farm operations, mortgages or rent, insurance)
- Personal or family concerns (ie: death of someone close, illness, marital relationships, family demands)
- Work-related injuries
- Change in farm policies
- Chemical exposure
- Loss of crop or livestock
- Weather

**Warning Signs Indicating a Person May Be at Risk to Harm Self or Others Include:**

- Talk of suicide
- Changes in sleep and/or eating patterns
- Stopped taking medication as prescribed or hoarding medication
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol
- Preoccupation with death
- Making last arrangements, giving away possessions
- Obtaining firearms
- Withdrawal from family, friends and routines that were pleasurable
- Aggressive and disruptive behavior
- Increased irritability and criticism
- History of suicide of family member or friend

This material was produced under a grant (SH-26280-SH4) from the Occupational Safety & Health Administration, U.S. Department of Labor. It does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Labor, nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products, or organization imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.
**SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS**

**BEHAVIOR SIGNS**
- Worrying about things you didn't worry about before
- Loss of interest in things you used to enjoy (hobbies)
- Poor concentration, confusion; forgetfulness
- Uncertainty or trouble making decisions
- Relationship problems
- Sad mood
- Feeling anxious
- Change in personality, irritability
- Negative thinking
- Wanting to withdraw from people and activities
- Increased smoking/drinking

**WHAT CAN YOU DO?**
See the back of this card for help and suggestions - for you or someone you know!

**PHYSICAL SIGNS**
- Poor or disturbed sleep
- Weight loss or gain
- Changes in appetite
- Stomach or gastrointestinal problems
- Clenching or grinding teeth
- Chest pain
- Poor hygiene

**Minnesota Farm & Rural Helpline: (833) 600-2670**
*It's free, confidential and open 24/7*

Revised August 2018

UMASH Agricultural Safety and Health Center
umash.umn.edu

Department of Agriculture
mda.state.mn.us

UMASH is funded by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health cooperative agreement U54 OH010170 (2009-2021).
Signs and Symptoms of Stress

What Can You Do?

Do you recognize the signs and symptoms in yourself or someone you know?

**Yourself**
- Reach out to a loved one. Talk about how you are feeling.
- Talk to your friends, clergy, or medical provider.
- Reach out to a mental health counselor.

**Someone You Know**
- Listen attentively and without judgement. Try to understand where they are coming from.
- Share your concerns about his/her behavior, mood, appearance, etc. Ask questions about changes you observe.
- Encourage them to reach out/tell a family member.

Minnesota Farm & Rural Helpline: (833) 600-2670
It's free, confidential and open 24/7

Revised August 2018

UMASH is funded by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health cooperative agreement U54OH010170 (2009-2021).
Manage stress to increase farm safety

Farming often is listed as one of the most stressful occupations, yet most farmers say they wouldn’t trade it for any other job. The love of farming, in spite of all the hassles, indicates farmers must be doing something right to manage their stress.

However, stress that goes unrecognized and is not managed well can play havoc with the farm family and the farm operation. When stress levels get too high, farmers are more likely to make poor farming decisions and be involved in farm injuries. Relationships between spouses and between parents and children also suffer during stressful times, as can health.

This publication will help you recognize things many farmers consider stressful, common symptoms of stress, and effective ways to manage stress. “Stressor” refers to the things that may cause stress; “stress” is the reaction you may have to that stressor.

Common stressors

Farming has many ongoing situations that can cause stress, such as large debt loads, the presence of government regulations, high interest rates, and lack of control over the weather. Farmers also face daily hassles including machinery breakdowns, long work hours, weather delays, livestock problems, unexpected interruptions, crop yield uncertainty, and disagreements with other family members in the operation.

No event or situation by itself is stressful. However, some kinds of events are likely to add more stress than other kinds of events.

Negative events are most likely to produce stress. Although all change can bring stress, situations considered undesirable, such as bad weather or trouble with livestock, are more likely to cause stress than situations viewed as less negative.

Uncontrollable or unpredictable events are stressful. Many situations in farming are beyond human control, such as the weather, prices, government policies and operating costs.

Ambiguous events are often stressful. Stress is more likely to occur when it isn’t clear what the problem is or how you can cope with it. (For example, how global events will change farm profits.)

Long lasting problems are more dangerous than short-term ones. Most families can get by for a while with a difficult situation. When the stress continues to build over months and years, it’s harder to handle.

Symptoms of stress

People experience stress in different ways. Some people react to stressful situations physically, others have emotional responses, and some respond with changes in behavior or relationship-ships. Most people react to stress in more than one way at the same time. High levels of stress can affect several areas of people’s lives.

Stress can show itself in physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomach problems, or in emotional symptoms, such as angry outbursts or depression. Behavior changes, like increased smoking or drinking, also can be a reaction to stress. In most people, stress affects their relationships with others, such as having difficulty getting along because of irritability or feelings of sadness.

Differences among farmers

Even under similar circumstances, farm operators vary in the amount of stress they experience. Some people may have many negative stressors, but experience low levels of stress because they have developed effective ways to cope. For other farm men and women, however,

Farm safety and stress

Check your stress level

Take this quiz to find out how stress may affect your life. For each statement, consider whether you feel that way:

a) rarely

b) sometimes, or

c) often.

1. I feel tense or anxious.

2. People or animals make me feel irritable.

3. I drink, smoke, or take drugs to relax.

4. I have tension headaches or pain in the neck or shoulders.

5. I have trouble going to sleep or staying asleep.

6. I find it difficult to concentrate on what I’m doing.

7. I have a difficult time finding time or being able to relax.

8. I feel sad or depressed for no good reason.

9. I feel tired even after I rest or sleep.

10. I argue with family or coworkers.

11. I give others the “silent treatment” when I’m upset.

See box on back for scoring.
pressures may exceed their coping resources and they may show signs of chronic stress.

How farmers and their spouses experience stress is influenced by factors like these:

- Age and past experience with stressful times
- Type of farming operation
- Time and energy demands from off-farm jobs
- Availability of opportunities for supplementary income
- Emotional support from family members
- Shared goals of spouses
- Flexibility and adaptability

**Ways to manage stress**

- First, recognize your symptoms of stress and decide to do something about them.
- Brainstorm with your family members about alternatives and options that might reduce stressors in your life.
- Watch what you eat. Just as machinery needs top quality fuel, your body needs nutritious food. Breakfast is an important meal for farm operators.

Breaks for mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks are helpful, especially during field work.

- Take time to talk, especially to your family. Let them know if you are feeling pressured or stressed. Find a friend who can listen to your problems.
- Do something relaxing every day. During busy times you may be able to relax for only a few minutes. During less hurried times, take at least a half hour every day to do something for yourself.
- Do some form of aerobic exercise at least three times a week. Even though farmers get a lot of exercise, vigorous exercise is needed to get the heart pumping. It also will help lower your stress level.

Making these changes may seem difficult at first, but the investment of time and energy can really pay off in feeling better and having a more productive farming operation.

Prepared by Colleen Jolly, extension family life specialist; and reviewed by Charles Schwab, extension farm safety specialist, with Iowa State University.

---

**Safe Farm**

Safe Farm is an Iowa State University Extension and Outreach project helping to make Iowa farms a safer place to work and live. For more safety information, check the web at www.abe.iastate.edu.

---

For more information

Other ISU Extension and Outreach publications may help you develop guidelines for working with animals, or address other related issues. Go to https://store.extension.iastate.edu. This publication covers only some aspects of stress management for farmers. Other fact sheets are available at the Extension Online Store. Search for: Stress: Taking Charge series. For confidential assistance and referral with financial and legal questions and family transitions call the Iowa Concern Hotline 1-800-447-1985, or visit www.extension.iastate.edu/iowaconcern.
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 breaking down or accidents can and do occur. One powerful factor that we always have the opportunity to control, however, is our mindset.

Farmers and those within the agricultural industry have a tendency to be eternal optimists, 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 free tool you can use to save time and energy, and get the most out of what you do.

MINDSET TACTICS

USE SELF-TALK
The body hears what the mind thinks. So choose your thoughts with purpose. Tell yourself that you can overcome any challenge. You can adapt. You have come through rough times before. 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 choosing three words to tell yourself to help maintain the mindset you want – like calm, capable and controlled.

USE YOUR BREATH
When faced with a challenge, first use your breath. Deep breathing calms the mind and can help you focus. It can also reduce chronic pain and improve sleep. Try breathing deeply five times, releasing the air slowly. Combine deep breathing with self-talk to boost productivity and stay on task.

USE ACCEPTANCE
When things are beyond your control, the most productive step you can take is to accept it. Making acceptance a part of your mindset can save you time and energy by letting you focus on the solution instead of getting frustrated by the problem. Try making the word “accept” a part of your self-talk and using deep breathing as a time to pause, accept and begin problem solving.

FACTS
- The human mind has 70,000 thoughts each day. That’s 70,000 opportunities.
- The typical brain is about 2 percent of your body weight but uses 20 percent of your energy.
- 80 percent of repetitive thoughts are negative. But they don’t have to be.
- A brisk 10-minute walk reduces the amount of cortisol (stress hormone) in the brain by 50 to 70 percent.

To learn more visit msue.msu.edu/managingfarmstress
Further Reading

- “Stress Free For Good: 10 Scientifically Proven Life Skills for Health and Happiness” by Fred Luskin and Ken Pelletier
- “Full Catastrophe Living” by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- “Mindfulness: Finding Peace in a Frantic World” by Mark Williams and Danny Penmanship
- “The Book of Forgiving” by Desmond and Mpho Tutu
- “The Miracle of Mindfulness” by Thich Nhat Hanh

Suicide Prevention Resources

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Crisis Text Line: Text “GO” to 741741
- Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255
- Michigan Association for Suicide Prevention: 734-624-8328

Acknowledgements

- Developed by Suzanne Pish and Tom Cummins for MSU Extension.

MSU Extension Mindfulness and Stress Management Programs

**Stress Less with Mindfulness**

The “Stress Less with Mindfulness” series introduces participants to the experience and practice of mindfulness to reduce stress. Research has shown that practicing mindfulness is effective in reducing stress-related symptoms such as worry, depression and physical tension, and may be helpful in managing chronic conditions such as cardiac disease and diabetes.

To learn more about Stress Less with Mindfulness or register for a class visit msue.msu.edu/stressless

**RELAX: Alternatives to Anger**

How individuals handle their anger and stress affects a radius of people around them. The goal of “RELAX: Alternatives to Anger” is to help young people, parents and caregivers foster healthy relationships so they can live, learn and grow in a safe, affirming and fair environment free from violence, abuse, bullying and harassment. Youth, parents and caregivers will learn to better manage their anger and stress at home and in the workplace.

This multisession program can be provided in a variety of community educational settings. The “RELAX: Alternatives to Anger” series is also available online.

To learn more about RELAX: Alternatives to Anger or register for a class visit msue.msu.edu/relax
and eat well-balanced meals. Limit your intake of stimulants like coffee, colas and tea.
- Avoid smoking cigarettes or marijuana.
- Avoid using tranquilizers, sleeping pills.
- If your health allows, tense and then relax each part of your body from toes to head, one part at a time.
- Shake away tensions as you work by vigorously shaking each of your limbs.
- Take a break. Climb down from your tractor and do a favorite exercise.
- Take three deep breaths - slowly, easily. Let go of unnecessary stress.
- Stop to daydream for 10 minutes. Close your eyes and take a short mental vacation to a place you really enjoy. See the sights; hear the sounds; smell the smells. Enjoy. Then go back to work feeling refreshed.
- Think positive thoughts: “I will succeed.”
- Look for the humor in everything you do.
- Balance your work and your play. Do both well.
- Find someone with whom you can talk about your worries and frustrations.
- Get help when you need it. There are times when all of us can benefit from professional help.
- Unwind before bedtime. Do stretching exercises. Listen to soothing music, practice relaxing deeply, and be thankful for any blessings received today. Then sleep well.

Farm family members can manage their stress well - even during planting and harvesting. The key is to be flexible and to maintain a balanced lifestyle. Make time daily to take care of yourself, for your work is vital to all of us.

Learning to control events, attitudes and responses day-in and day-out will help you manage those hectic, stressful times.

Perhaps you have noticed that some farmers crumble under the pressures of events that you find easy to handle. Or perhaps you have wondered how other farmers can go on in spite of the stress load they carry.

Why is it that some farmers can handle lots of stress and others very little? Researchers who have examined differences between successful and unsuccessful stress managers have identified three key factors. First, individuals vary in their capacity to tolerate stress. For example, prolonged exertion and fatigue that would be only mildly stressful to a young farmer may prove very difficult for an older farmer or someone with a heart defect. Emergencies, delays and other problems that a confident farmer takes in stride may be a stumbling block for one who feels inadequate. While part of an individual’s stress tolerance is inborn, a crucial part depends on the quality of skills practiced. Learning to cope successfully with a stressor once makes it easier the next time.

A second factor is feeling in control. Successful stress managers know how to accept those stressors out of their control - the weather, their height, stock market fluctuations, and how to worry effectively (problem-solve) about those within their control - neck tension, temper flare-ups, record keeping.

Finally, the attitudes, perceptions, and meanings that people assign to events determine a large part of their stress levels. A person has to perceive a situation as stressful or threatening in order to experience stress. If you think your dog is barking in the middle of the night because of a vandal, you will experience more stress than if you suspect a skunk has wandered into your yard.

Stress can be defined as energy in a blocked or chaotic state. It is an absence of calm, free flowing energy that promotes harmony and balance in a person’s body, psyche and soul. To achieve the relaxation response during peak farm stress seasons - planting and harvesting - takes discipline and daily practice at controlling events, attitudes and responses. Following are some techniques individuals may adopt to gain control.

**Control events.** To reduce the pile-up of too many stressful events at one time, farmers can control some situations.

- Plan ahead. Don’t procrastinate. Replace worn machinery parts during the off season.
- Before the harvest discuss who can be available to run for parts, care for cattle, etc.
- Set priorities about what has to be done today and what can wait until tomorrow. Plan your time.
- Say no to extra commitments that you do not have time for.
- Simplify your life. If possible, reduce your financial dependence on others.
- Postpone stressful events within your control, such as elective surgery.

**Control attitudes.** How farm family members view situations is a key factor in creating or eliminating unwanted stress.

- See the big picture: “I’m glad that tire blew here rather than on that next hill.”
- List all the stresses you now have. Change those you can; accept the rest.
- Shift from worrying to problem solving.
- Turn your crises into challenges.
- Notice what you have accomplished rather than what you failed to do.
- Set realistic goals and expectations daily. Give up trying to be perfect.

**Control responses.** The past is gone. The future is not here yet. Right now you have the choice to feel stressed or to feel relaxed. Start here.

- Relax. Whether you are walking, driving or phoning, do it slowly and relax. Keep only that muscle tension necessary to accomplish the task.
- Tune into your body. Notice any early signs of stress and let them go.
- Take care of your body. Exercise regularly
12 Tools for Your Wellness Toolbox in Times of Farm Stress

1. **Physical**
   - Exercise 20 minutes or more daily (walk, swim, ride a bike, etc.).
   - Physical activity enhances feeling good.

2. **Physical**
   - Get a medical checkup with a local health-care provider.
   - Stress can cause or add to physical challenges.

3. **Mental**
   - Spend 10 minutes to plan your day and priorities.
   - A few minutes of planning reduces stress and helps you stay focused.

4. **Mental**
   - Take regular five- to 10-minute breaks in your day to relax and recharge.
   - Doing this multiple times a day renews your energy.

5. **Emotional/Spiritual**
   - Write down three things that you are grateful for daily.
   - Conscious gratitude calms your mood.

6. **Emotional/Spiritual**
   - Share concerns with a counselor or other professional.
   - A listening ear helps lift your burdens.

7. **Personal/Relational**
   - Take 15 minutes each day for uninterrupted conversation with a spouse or family member.
   - A few minutes of planning reduces stress and helps you stay focused.

8. **Personal/Relational**
   - Get involved or stay connected with a friend or group of friends.
   - Doing this multiple times a day renews your energy.

9. **Work/Professional**
   - Discuss needs of the farm operation but do not let them occupy all other aspects of life.
   - Plan other daily work tasks to shift your focus.

10. **Work/Professional**
    - Seek constructive feedback on your farm operation and ways to grow or improve.
    - Others can share ideas or assist in new ways.

11. **Financial/Practical**
    - Create a family budget and seek to live within your means.
    - This helps give you a sense of financial control.

12. **Financial/Practical**
    - Select three healthy habits you will try to practice daily.
    - Start today!

---

**My Wellness Commitment**
Circle or list at least three wellness tools you can begin doing today and post this in your home, office or vehicle as a reminder.

1. 
2. 
3. 

For more information on wellness tools and farm stress, visit our NDSU Extension website at [www.ag.ndsu.edu/drought/stress-resources](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/drought/stress-resources)

Sean Brotherson, Ph.D., Family Science Specialist

**NDSU Extension**

SEPTEMBER 2017

County commissions, North Dakota State University and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) does not discriminate in its programs and activities on the basis of age, color, gender expression, gender identity, genetic information, national origin, marital status, mental or physical disability, race, religion, sex, sex discrimination, sexual orientation, or veteran status. Inquiries may be directed to Equity Compliance, 302 W. University Ave., Fargo, ND 58102. For more information or to report a concern, call 701-231-7098.

IM-9-17