Recognizing and Applying Tools to Alleviate Stress

Josie M. Rudolphi, PhD
National Farm Medicine Center
Marshfield, WI
Overview

- Stress in agriculture
- Stress and health
- Signs of stress and mental health disorders
- Dealing with stress
- Recommendations to improve mental health of rural and agricultural communities
Background

- Raised in east central Iowa
- BS -- Agricultural Communications, ISU
- MS -- Agricultural Education, ISU
- High school agricultural educator
- PhD -- Occupational & Environmental Health, University of Iowa
- Associate Research Scientist at the National Farm Medicine Center
Agriculture

- Physically hazardous industry

- Mentally hazardous industry

"Being a farmer isn't stressful at all"

Peter, 25 years old
Agricultural Stressors
Stress

Stress; anticipation, energizing, motivating

Distress; hazardous, unrelenting stress with no relief.
Stress

Mental Health conditions

Physical Health conditions
Mental Health Conditions

• 20% of US population experiencing a mental health condition.
• Most common conditions – anxiety and depression
• Mental health conditions are commonly:
  • Transient
  • Easily resolved
  • Treatable
  • Preventable
Self-report of symptoms

Recent sample of young adult farmers in the Midwest:

**Anxiety**
- None: 25%
- Mild: 35%
- Moderate: 15%
- Severe: 5%

**Depression**
- None: 25%
- Mild: 20%
- Moderate: 10%
- Moderately Severe: 5%
- Severe: 5%

34.7% vs. 18.1% in general population

29.4% vs. 9.7% in general population
Voices from Agribusiness

What have you observed or noticed regarding the mental health of farmers?

They are in a state of depression. Finances are bad so they are struggling right now trying to just keep afloat.

(long pause) I’m just seeing and hearing that a lot of people are pretty depressed, upset. I haven’t heard of anybody that wants... um, to pull the trigger yet.
US farm belt tries to head off another surge in suicides

June 10, 2018 by Juliette Michel

Why are America's farmers killing themselves in record numbers?

Their dad killed himself on the farm where he was born. They hope his story will save others

Story by Jessica Ravitz, CNN

'It feels like an epidemic': Suicides up among farmers

 Suicide Is Rising Among U.S. Farmers As They Struggle To Keep Afloat

May 16, 2018 - 4:19 PM ET
Heard on All Things Considered
Who can Help?

- Farm Bureau
- Agribusiness
- Agribusiness
- Friends, social groups
- Farmer

Figure 1. The Social Ecological Model.
How to help?

• Know the signs and symptoms of distress
• Provide social support
• Encourage acceptance and awareness
• Encourage self-care
• Encourage professional care
Know the signs and symptoms
Signs of Distress

Physical:
- Headaches
- Stomach problems
- Chest pain
- Rapidly beating heart
- Fatigue
- Impulsiveness
Signs of Distress

Emotional:
- Increased angry blow-ups
- Impatience
- Difficulty controlling emotions
- Low self-esteem
- Loss of interest in things once enjoyed
- Short tempered
Signs of Distress

Behavioral:
- Overeating or not eating
- Increased substance use
- Change in sleeping habits
- Restlessness
- Lack of concentration
- Withdrawn from others
- Forgetfulness
HEALTHY
Normal Functioning


REACTING
Common & Reversible Distress


INJURED
Significant Functional Impairment


ILL
Clinical Disorder. Severe & Persistent Functional Impairment.

Provide Social Support

- Ask questions – even when it seems awkward
- Normalize the conversation – get “nosey” before you’re concerned.
- Express concern when it’s there.
- Offer suggestions for self-care
Encourage Acceptance & Awareness

Acceptance

• Acceptance skills can change attitudes towards controllable and uncontrollable stressors
• Be reflective and keep some perspective
  • Has this happened before?
  • Are my fears or worries realistic?
  • What do I tell a friend in this situation?

Awareness

• Recognizing stressors is powerful
  • Plan ahead
  • Use time efficiently
  • Limit commitments and say NO
Encourage Self Care

- Coping skills are methods used to handle or deal with stress.
- Beneficial to physical and mental health.
- Help reduce stress.
4 Healthy Coping Activities

1. Exercise
2. Hobbies
3. Diversions
4. Relaxation
Barriers to Exercise?
92. Free clubs

I used to make fun of club-hoppers, but honestly, it’s kinda fun and you totally work up a sweat. Just don’t take drinks from strangers, ladies.

93. Gold Panning

Don’t judge me, but I’ve done this recently. Nice for bending, squatting, and getting out there to enjoy nature (and maybe find a nugget).
96. School track

Most middle and high schools have tracks around the football field and welcome visitors to use it. An interesting change of scenery, for sure.

36. Yard sale equipment

Most people give up on lifting weights. I bet ya’ you’ll find some good stuff in driveways on Saturday mornings.

29. Youtube Workouts

There are probably millions of YouTube workout videos. Here’s one, for example.
1. Exercise

2. Hobbies
   - Walking
   - Dancing
   - Sport leagues
   - Take your feet instead of the gator

3. Diversions

4. Relaxation
1. Exercise
2. Hobbies
3. Diversions
4. Relaxation

- Gardening
- Woodworking
- Hunting
- Traveling
- Music
1. Exercise
2. Hobbies
3. Diversions
   - Reading the newspaper
   - BBQ with friends
   - Church
   - Calling a friend
4. Relaxation
1. Exercise
2. Hobbies
3. Diversions
4. Relaxation

- Taking a walk
- Taking a nap
- Getting away
- Vacations – make them ag related!
Recommendations for the Future

1. Reduce stigmatizing attitudes towards mental illness
2. Increase awareness and response to mental crisis
3. Get back in people’s business
4. Accept and encourage healthy coping
Contact Information

Josie Rudolphi
1000 N Oak, ML-1
Marshfield, WI 54449
Phone: 725-389-3794
Email: Rudolphi.josie@marshfieldresearch.org


## Results – Symptoms of Anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GAD-7 Score</th>
<th>% (n)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 4</td>
<td>29.4 (50)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 - 9 – Mild</td>
<td>35.9 (61)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 - 14 – Moderate</td>
<td>18.2 (31)</td>
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<td>15 + 21– Severe</td>
<td>16.8 (28)</td>
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GAD affects 6.8 million adults, or 3.1% of the U.S. population.¹²


## Results – Symptoms of Depression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHQ-9 Score (range 0-27)</th>
<th>YFR % (n)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>47.1 (80)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-9 – Mild</td>
<td>23.5 (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 14 – Moderate</td>
<td>14.7 (25)</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 - 19 – Moderately Severe</td>
<td>10.0 (17)</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 – 27 – Severe</td>
<td>4.7 (8)</td>
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</tbody>
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During 2013–2016, 8.1% of Americans aged 20 and over had depression in a given 2-week period. \(^\text{13}\)
Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems? Please select the most correct response to each problem by clicking the appropriate box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all (0)</th>
<th>Several days (1)</th>
<th>More than half the days (2)</th>
<th>Nearly every day (3)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge</td>
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<td>2. Not being able to stop or control worrying</td>
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<td>3. Worrying too much about different things</td>
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<td>4. Trouble relaxing</td>
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<td>5. Being so restless that it is hard to sit still</td>
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<td>6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable</td>
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<td>7. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen</td>
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Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems? Please select the most correct response to each problem by clicking the appropriate box.

<table>
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<th>Problem</th>
<th>Not at all (0)</th>
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<th>More than half the days (2)</th>
<th>Nearly every day (3)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things</td>
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<td>2. Feeling down, depressed or hopeless</td>
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<td>3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much</td>
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<td>4. Feeling tired or having little energy</td>
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<td>5. Poor appetite OR overeating</td>
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<td>6. Feeling bad about yourself- or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down</td>
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<td>7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching TV</td>
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<td>8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people have noticed, or the opposite- being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual</td>
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<td>9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way</td>
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