



MEETING FARM STRESS NEEDS WITH TOOLS, RESOURCES AND EDUCATION

5,023

views of "Lunch Break" digital outreach sessions in 2020

2,785

participants reached with farm stress management education in 2020

816

participants enrolled in Rural Resilience Training

PRIORITY

A R E A S

- Supporting farmers through stressful times, such as financial and weather-related crises
- Connecting farmers and farm families with supports
- Helping farmers and farm families with resources to improve their mental health
- Providing tools to help farmers and agricultural professionals support those in need
- Reducing stigma surrounding mental health issues
- Strengthening Michigan's rural communities

IMPACTS

Agricultural professionals and their families face unique mental health challenges and often have limited access to mental health providers. Educational programs can help strengthen knowledge of mental health, including the warning signs of stress and suicide as well as healthy communication skills. Michigan State University (MSU) Extension has developed three programs on the topic of farm stress management. As a result of participating in these farm stress management programs:



96%

of participants increased awareness of stress issues and are taking steps to manage stress.



92%

of participants learned how to recognize warning signs of depression, suicide and mental illness.



97%

of participants learned where to send people for help.

“The heralding truth behind behavioral health is that often the effectiveness of the supports we are providing will not likely be publicized. Every connection and outreach made to someone that is struggling can have a lifelong impact. As friends, neighbors and supporters of MSU Extension, you are supporting the continued development of resources and tools further reducing the impact of stress, mental illness and the potential loss of life by suicide through our farm stress efforts.”

• Eric Karbowski, MSU Extension farm stress specialist

To support farm stress programming, contact Cheryl Eschbach at cheryl@msu.edu. To bring farm stress programming into your community, contact Eric Karbowski at karbows8@msu.edu.



TELETHERAPY PROGRAM FOR FARMERS EXPERIENCING STRESS

MSU Extension is now equipped to connect farmers experiencing stress and mental health issues with online counseling. Through a partnership with Pine Rest Behavioral Health, MSU Extension can link farmers with a licensed mental health therapist via teletherapy.

Traditional therapy is typically conducted during face-to-face meetings in an office. Teletherapy is a counseling session conducted through video chat between mental health care providers and clients. This advanced approach provides flexibility for people to access behavioral health supports in the comfort of their own environment — a particularly important offering in 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A number of uncontrollable risk factors are involved in farming and to get the full benefit of counseling, there must be a connection and relationship built on trust and empathy. One of the many highlights of MSU Extension and Pine Rest’s teletherapy offering is that all available therapists have a connection to agriculture.

“Having grown up on a farm, I am aware of some of the difficulties that can arise with rural and farm life. During the farm crisis of the 1980s, I worked as a support person for farm families as they struggled with losing their farms and their way of life, as they transitioned to a new way of life. Farming, in my view, is a valued and noble way of life and profession. We must do what we can to help farmers and their families navigate the ongoing difficulties and stressors that our times, particularly the pandemic, challenges them with.” - David Agee, LMSW

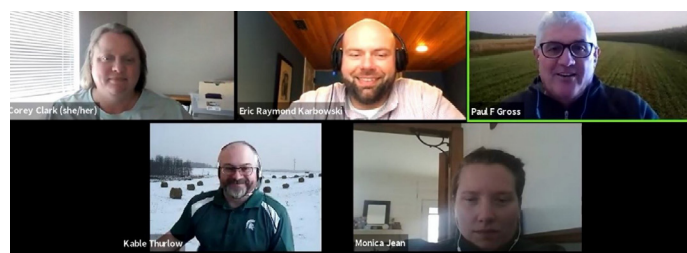


“Though I ended up as a psychologist, I grew up in the country and my first jobs were on farms. Thinning and picking fruit, baling and unloading hay, cleaning feeder pig barns. I have a love of farms and of farmers: the hardest working folks in America.” - Jon Weeldreyer, MA, CAADC, CCS-M, Limited Licensed Psychologist

“There is no better reward than seeing a person that was at a low point in their life take control of their stress and get back on a successful track. We are grateful to be able to come alongside individuals to help them with that first step of accessing the needed services, and from there to implement the tools they learned and accomplish their goals.” - Tiffany Brannen, Central Access Supervisor

Whether it's in the field, at home or on the farm, farmers can take control of their levels of stress by accessing these invaluable supports.

MSU EXTENSION TEAM CREATES NEW TOOL TO ENGAGE WITH THE FARMING COMMUNITY DURING PANDEMIC



MSU Extension’s team of educators engage participants during “Lunch Break” meeting on Facebook Live and share new ideas, tools and resources in their areas of expertise.

Staying connected with peers is an important part of mental health and wellness. Opportunities to remain engaged are becoming less available for farmers and agricultural workers. As a result of the shift to virtual programming brought on by the pandemic, a team of MSU Extension educators created “Lunch Break,” a virtual segment offered on Facebook Live every Wednesday at 12:30 p.m. to keep the farming community connected and engaged. In the segments, each educator provides updates in their areas of expertise, from field crops to farm finances.



In the “Mental Health Minute,” tools and resources are shared to help the farming community create self-awareness, improve their fundamental knowledge of mental health and learn coping mechanisms centered around behavioral health.

“Women play an active and important role in agriculture and through the Lunch Break meetings. It has been encouraging to see the interests and investment from the women that participate in the weekly meetings. Through this approach, we are able to connect to a broad audience, support camaraderie, and the women especially love the Mental Health Minute.” – Corey Clark, PhD CFP, Farm Business Management Educator

“I find the podcast very informative — from what is available for farm programs to frost seeding for the first time to keeping my sanity in these trying times.” – Ed Nogaski, Farmer/Agricultural Producer

Lunch Break began in February 2020 and continues to gain traction each month — reaching more than 5,000 views last year.

MENDING THE STRESS FENCE: A NEW MSU EXTENSION FARM STRESS PROGRAM SHORTER IN LENGTH WITH NATIONAL REACH

Reduced farm sales, farm loss and consolidation of farms is creating stress on farmers and their agricultural communities all across Michigan. In an effort to support farmers and agricultural workers, MSU Extension created a new farm stress program “Mending the Stress Fence.” This short, virtual program can be delivered in 30 minutes and helps participants create self-awareness and provides them with tools and resources to help those in need. Topics highlighted in the three-unit course include identification and response to signs of stress, strategies for managing stress and suicide prevention resources.

In addition to Mending the Stress Fence’s implementation in Michigan, the materials are now available for Extension educators across the nation through access to MSU’s train-the-trainer course. As of 2020, MSU Extension farm stress programs are implemented in 21 states with farm stress facilitators who are trained in the MSU programs.

MSU Extension’s original farm stress programs – Communicating with Farmers Under Stress and Weathering the Storm: How to Cultivate a Productive Mindset – repeatedly produce positive evaluation results. As a result of attending one of these two programs:

- 100% of participants increased awareness of the signs and symptoms of stress.
- 98% of participants improved understanding of the eight dimensions of wellness.
- 96% of participants improved understanding of the warning signs of suicide.
- 94% of participants increased their confidence in how to ask open-ended questions.

FREE ONLINE COURSE SUPPORTS THE FARMING COMMUNITY

Recognizing the high levels of stress affecting America’s farmers and ranchers, MSU Extension partnered with others from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Cooperative Extension System, Farm Credit, American Farm Bureau Federation and National Farmers Union to create a free online course that became available in June 2020 and open to the public nationwide.

Rural Resilience: Farm Stress Training is a free online course that brings together the knowledge of agricultural conditions and evidence-based approaches in behavioral health to help people recognize the signs of stress and better equip farmers and the agricultural community with tools and resources to help in time of need. This course was designed to provide an opportunity to interactively learn about farm stress and how to help others manage stress through an online platform that consists of three units: Managing Stress, Communicating with Distressed Farmers and Suicide Awareness. The engaging self-paced content offers a number of voice-over slide presentations, videos and downloadable resources. Interest so far has been wide, with more than 800 participants enrolling in the course.

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