Three Studies and What They Tell Us About the Way Forward

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A Crisis in Farmer Well-Being

• CDC study revealed Farming, Fishing, Forestry had 3rd highest suicide rate of any occupation (CDC, 2018).

• In Georgia, rate was nearly 51 per 100,000, compared with 14.9 per 100,000 for overall population of workers (Lavender et al., 2016).

• See this globally as well.
Three Studies

• CDC data on farmer suicides in GA  2005-2017
• GA Farm Bureau Conference survey Dec. 2019
• Sunbelt Ag Expo October 2021
Why talk about these studies?

• Difficult to hear
• Important to acknowledge reality
• Give us information on ways to intervene
• Give us hope for the future
CDC Study on Farm Suicides 2005-2017

• 137 cases from VDRS

• What factors associated with the deaths?
  • Relationship issues: 38%
  • Health issues: 35%
  • Mental health issues: 29%
  • Finances: 12%

• Signs and signals of suicide: 21%
  • Words
  • Feelings
  • Behaviors
Implications? If we can...

• Learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of farmers at high risk of suicide;

• Have caring people who know the signs at sites where farmers might feel the most stress; e.g.
  • Faith leaders
  • Funeral homes
  • Lawyers
  • Primary care
  • Financial institutions

• We can help farmers before a crisis occurs,
GA Farm Bureau Study

• 118 attendees of GA Farm Bureau Conference

• How high are farmer stress levels in GA (1=very low, 5=very high)
  • 4.13 on average. Men= 3.89   Women=4.21

• Compared to last year, stress levels are (1=much lower, 5=much higher)
  • 3.81 on average. Men=3.51   Women=3.94

• How confident are you in knowing how to help someone with very high stress, even suicidal?
  • Confident/Very Confident=36%
Implications?

• Stress levels in GA farmers are high.
  • This is *before* COVID!
• Women experience/acknowledge stress more than men.
  • Women may be more open to the conversation
  • Outreach
• Nearly two thirds of respondents are not confident they could help someone experiencing extreme stress.
  • *Training is needed*
Sunbelt Ag Expo Survey (220 responses)

• Who will notice when a farmer is experiencing extreme stress?
  • Spouse: 91%
  • Friend: 33%
  • Other Farmers: 33%
  • Child: 32%

• Who will a farmer talk with and trust when experiencing extreme stress?
  • Spouse: 72%
  • Friend: 42%
  • Other Farmers: 39%
  • Faith Leader: 36%
  • Doctor: 25%
Sunbelt Ag Expo Survey

• What are the best methods to get information to a farmer about stress?
  • Other Farmers: 51%
  • Ag Publications: 48%
  • Social Media: 40%
  • Sites of Worship: 38%
  • Extension: 30%
  • Radio and TV Spots: 29%

• Farmers and non-farmers differ in how they perceive a farmer’s support network (# of categories of people a farmer would trust)
  • Farmers: 2.13 on average
  • Non-Farmers: 2.53 on average
Implications?

- There are certain people who will notice farmer stress and who farmers are more likely to trust and talk with—we need to connect with, support, provide training and tools to these people.

- There are preferred modalities for communication—peers, newsletters (commodity groups, Farm Bureau, others), churches, social media and traditional media, and extension classes and agents are important allies in education on stress and coping.

- Non-farmers over-estimate how farmers see their support network—talking with farmers and not making assumptions is important.
Hopeful Take Home Lessons

• The community is filled with people who can be allies in the work to address farmer and farm family stress.
  • Formal: doctor, financial professionals, faith leaders
  • Informal: friends, other farmers, spouses
  • Women may have important and unique perspectives
  • Providing information, training, tools, strategic support to allies (like you, like today) is an important step in supporting farmers and farm families.
  • Extension can be a hub for this training and support.