



Michigan's Response to Stress within Farming Communities



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Issue

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health recently examined 130 occupations and found laborers and farm owners had the highest rate of death due to stress-related conditions like heart and artery disease, hypertension, ulcers and nervous disorders. In 2016, the CDC reports that out of every 100,000 farmers, 90 commit suicide, and that is six times higher than the National rate of suicide for non-farmers. Michigan has seen an increase in suicides and suicide attempts over the last year since the commodity prices have fell drastically.

Response

Phase one:

Mental Health First Aid training is a full-day, hands-on, certification course that can help those people working with farmers and farm families to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness and emotional crisis. Two classes were offered during 2016 and 35 MSU Extension and Industry professionals are now certified in Mental Health First Aid.

Phase two:

MSU Extension has developed a workshop specifically designed for people who work with agricultural producers and farm families who want to know more about managing farm-related stress and learn ways to approach and communicate with those in need. Educators will be discussing the present agricultural market situation with an overview of how this has affected a farm's financial situation and cash flow, communication techniques, highlighting impact of stress on our body and state of mind, providing information on how to recognize some warning signs of depression, self harm and mental illness.

Target Audience

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The workshop was developed specifically for people who work farmers and their families. The fact sheet was developed to be used directly with the farmer and farm family.

Where program has been used

Since October 2016, eight *Communicating with Farmers under Stress workshops* were offered which included 160 participants.

County location of workshops in Michigan: one in Branch; one in Isabella; three in Ingham; one in Antrim; one in Lenawee; and one out-of-state workshop in West Lafayette, Indiana.



Results

As a result of the program:

- 68% of participants increased their understanding of the current agriculture financial situation; 32% of participants self-reported already being very informed on the issues facing Michigan agriculture.
- 85% increased their understanding of the impact that stress has on their own bodies.
- 92% were now able to recognize warning signs of depression, suicide, and mental illness.
- 97% learned where to send people for help in the community, and of those, over 50% said their awareness of community resources greatly increased.

There was high satisfaction with the workshop and Extension in general.

- 95% of participants will use MSU Extension resources and training in the future.
- 94% of participants were already familiar with MSU Extension prior to this workshop; 68% had previously participated in an MSU Extension workshop on a different topic.
- 89% of participants left the workshop more aware of MSU Extension resources and opportunities.

As a result of those attending the *Communicating with Farmers under Stress workshop*, 19 people reported they will share the information with 44 additional people. This means another 845 farmers receiving the information as an outcome of the workshop

Participant Quotes

Something I learned.....

"Signs to look for with our stressed families."

"Use the financial situation and market trends and projections to have a discussion with family, friends, and co-workers."

"Be more mindful of personal stresses."

"Look for folks isolating themselves."

"To be prepared before you go out on the farm—have materials with me."

"What stresses people in relation to market changes."

"More techniques of how to de-stress."

"Listen better."

"Ask questions."

"How to express empathy and how important that can be to the producers I serve."

Contact information

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