

# Emotional Stress on the Farm

Monica McConkey, MA, LPC  
Prairie St. John's





## Objectives:

1. Identify stressors related to the farm crisis.
2. Become aware of specific warning signs related to a behavioral health crisis.
3. Learn skills to communicate support and access help for individuals of concern.



## Stress on the Farm

- Uncontrollable factors
  - Weather/disaster
  - Commodity Markets
  - High Interest Rates
- Illness/injury
- Isolation
- Competition
- Increased need for competency
- Irregular/uncertain income
- Long/solitary work hrs
- Barriers to help
  - Lack of services
  - Attitudes & perceptions
  - Insurance



## Common BH Diagnoses

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Adjustment Disorder
- Substance Use Disorders



## Warning Signs

- Isolation
- Mood Changes
- Abrupt sale of land/livestock
- Equipment or farmstead falling into disrepair
- Physical illness and/or injury
- Sleep patterns altered
- Increased substance use

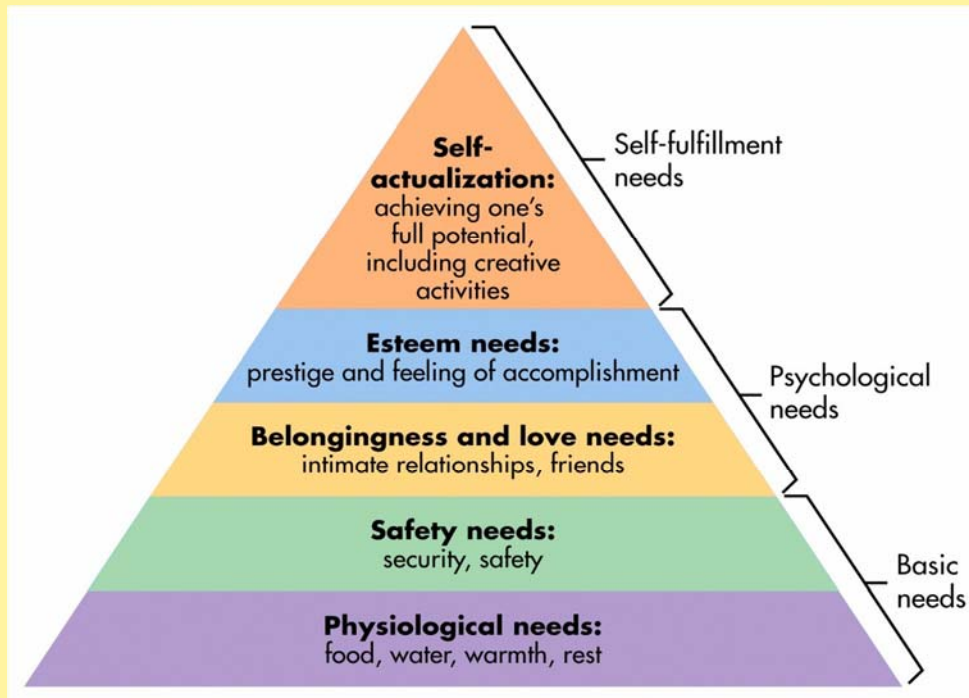


## Warning Signs cont'd

- Lack of motivation
- Less productive
- Unpaid bills
- Statements of hopelessness or giving up
- Spouse/children exhibiting stress



## Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



## Barriers to Seeking Help

- Lack of resources
- Stigma
- Cost
- Lack of understanding among MH providers
- “workaholism”



# Serenity

- Farmers' mental health: A review of the literature, Alison Goffin, ACC Policy Team, 2014.

Table 1: Farmers' mental health: Influencing factors across a continuum

Global	Out of farmers' control			Within farmers' control		
	National	Regional	Community	Local Farm	Families	Farmer
Climate change Global economy New Zealand dollar Fewer dairy farms with larger herd sizes Greater financial responsibility New technology	Government laws and regulations Taxes and expenses High interest rates Commodity markets Decline in rural infrastructure and subsequent opportunities for social connection Environmental sustainability Animal welfare Quality and safety of food products	Weather/climate Seasonal conditions Disease outbreaks Pests Decline in rural infrastructure Environmental considerations and sustainability	Weather/climate Lack of skilled labour Lack of access to services Lack of appropriately trained professionals Lack of awareness and knowledge of mental health issues, what it is and how to provide support Stoic attitudes Reinforcement of stereotypes Stigma associated with mental illness Lack of anonymity/confidentiality when accessing services	Weather/climate Seasonal conditions and peak work times Machinery breakdown Hazardous working conditions and dangers such as physical, biological, chemical and mechanical hazards <b>Traditional dairy farming:</b> Isolation and solitary work Long hours None or very few employees Limited opportunities to take leave or a holiday Home and work combined limiting relaxation time away from work Lack of support <b>Industrial dairy farming:</b> Monitoring new systems such as automatic and robotic milking More employees creating a new kind of professional role as an employer including extended supervision of staff, and wider responsibility for Occupational Health and Safety More use of foreign/migrant workers who can experience long work hours, away from family and friends and social isolation caused by linguistic and cultural barriers New skills and knowledge needed such as good leadership Economic - stable farm income/irregular and uncertain income, financial debt Record keeping and paper work	Structure of the family – inter-generational Living on or off the farm Family problems Working with multi-generational family members	<b>Worrying about work</b> Long hours Work load and production performance Transformation from family farmer to entrepreneur Social and environmental responsibility Time pressures and personal efficiency Control of work Understanding new technology Paper work <b>General</b> Financial worries - irregular and uncertain income and financial debt. Having a job off the farm to supplement income Personal health and fitness Hearing problems leading to communication difficulties and social isolation, frustration, anxiety, stress, fatigue and depression Work-life balance Lack of time off work Lack of social support Poor personal attitude and low self-esteem Mental strain causing sleeping and concentration problems, psychosomatic disorders and increased injury rates



# How to Help

- Reach out
- Listen
- Avoid minimizing
- Encourage individual to seek help
- Ask questions
- The sooner, the better
- Engage the family
- Provide Resources



## Resources

- Medical providers
- Mental Health Providers
- Clergy
- County Social Services
- Extension offices
- Crisis/Suicide Hotlines –

<https://www.mda.state.mn.us/about/mnfarmerstress>