Weathering the Stress Storm

What is Stress?

Stress is an inevitable and necessary part of life. Positive stress helps us to achieve goals, grow personally and adapt to new circumstances. However, too much stress for too long can harm our physical and mental well-being. When we talk about stress, we are usually referring to negative stress or the distress that happens when people feel overwhelmed by demands in their lives or by other threats to their well-being. We cannot always avoid negative stress, but we can improve our responses to it. A little stress can be good for our bodies too though.

Negative stress (stress that has an impact) can range from mild to intense and from short-lived to chronic. Short-lived episodes of stress are not harmful to health and often promote adaptation and growth. Stress that continues for long periods can predispose people to well-being issues (mental or physical). Intense stress, if left untreated, can cause stress-related psychological conditions, such as post- traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Activity: How Does Stress Impact My Health?

Physical - Body/Health	Example: Heart racing, feel tired	
Emotional/Mental - Mind and thoughts	Example: Feeling overwhelmed, anxious	
Relationships with others	Example: I get irritable, I seek help	
Behaviors/Lifestyle	Example: I don't go out or do fun things	

Activity: Identifying Life's Stressors & the Levels of Stress they Create

Light	Moderate	Severe
Dirty dishes in the sink Winter driving Misplaced tools	Equipment breakdowns Hailstorm Finances	Long term drought, losing a heifer Physical illness

Questions to ask/review:
- What would I rate my stress level right now, from 1 being low to 10 being high?
- What are the stressors that are impacting my stress level?

Activity: Checklist – Preventative (Before), During and After

How do you support yourself before and after stressful times?

	What you might do for self care, or do to mitigate against the impact
PREVENTATIVE/MAINTENANCE:	
Light:	
Medium:	
Severe:	

	What you might do for self care during the stress to mitigate against the impact
DURING:	
Light:	
Medium:	
Severe:	

Incorporating mental health on the farm

In farming, we know having a plan can positively impact us, especially when things get tough. Our mental health is no different. That's why incorporating mental health into the farm and creating a mental wellness plan can be significant. No two farms are the same so how your farm prioritizes mental health may look and feel different than another farm. But starting is key and making and doing small changes can have an everlasting impact on the family and farm.

Here are some examples:

- Creating a mission and vision for the farm: It's the guiding star, purpose, and strategy of the business
- Developing culture principles: It involves and creates open communication, mutual respect, shared goals, and a commitment to growth and development
- Prioritizing and setting meetings: Regular farm meetings strengthen communication
- Create ways to talk about mental health, stress, wellness:
  - An understanding of your mental wellness. Check out different trackers to gauge how you and others are doing.
  - Identifying your triggers and major stressors that challenge your ability to maintain your mental health.
  - A daily routine of mental wellness activities to create balance for your health. ie: Morning stretch, journaling, etc
  - A list of coping strategies that help you cope with stress you may face.
  - A list of support you can reach out to when you need some help.
- Establish a network/team of support through family, friends, areas of expertise and those in and outside of agriculture
  - Business partners - accountants, lawyers, farm financial advisors, agronomists, marketing advisors, etc
  - On-farm help, employees, delegate
- Establish a daily routine of mental wellness activities to create balance for your health. ie: Morning stretch, journaling, etc
- Incorporating other supports that are needed, depending on the seasons of farming
  - Breaks/rest
  - Volunteering/service clubs
  - Community social events