

# Agricultural Stress and Mental Health

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**Thoughts and opinions expressed today are mine alone and do not reflect those of the University of Illinois, Illinois Extension, or supported funding agencies.**

**Do not substitute this information for medical guidance from a licensed provider.**







**Who grew up on family farm?**

**Still working on that farm  
today?**







**Who is working off the farm/ranch?**

**Who is managing multiple roles on the farm/ranch?**









**What types of farms and ranches are in the room?**



# Session Guidelines

- We respect the perspectives and opinions of our peers
- We feel encouraged to share our stories and situations
- We take space and time for ourselves as needed
- We participate – otherwise this will be a long 2 hours
- Vegas rules

# Keeping it all afloat

**I** ILLINOIS

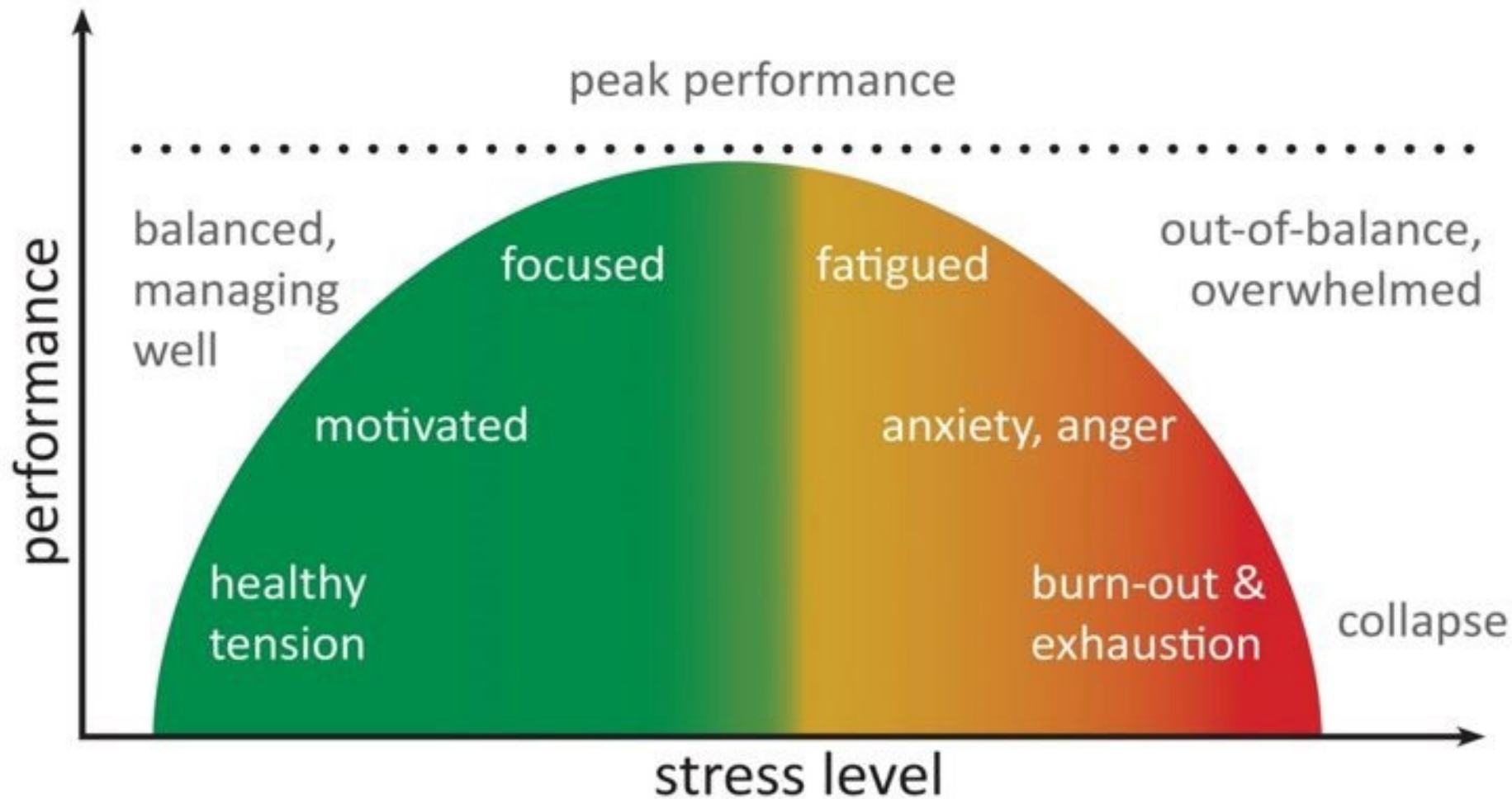


**At your table, identify one  
current stressor that is  
weighing on you.**

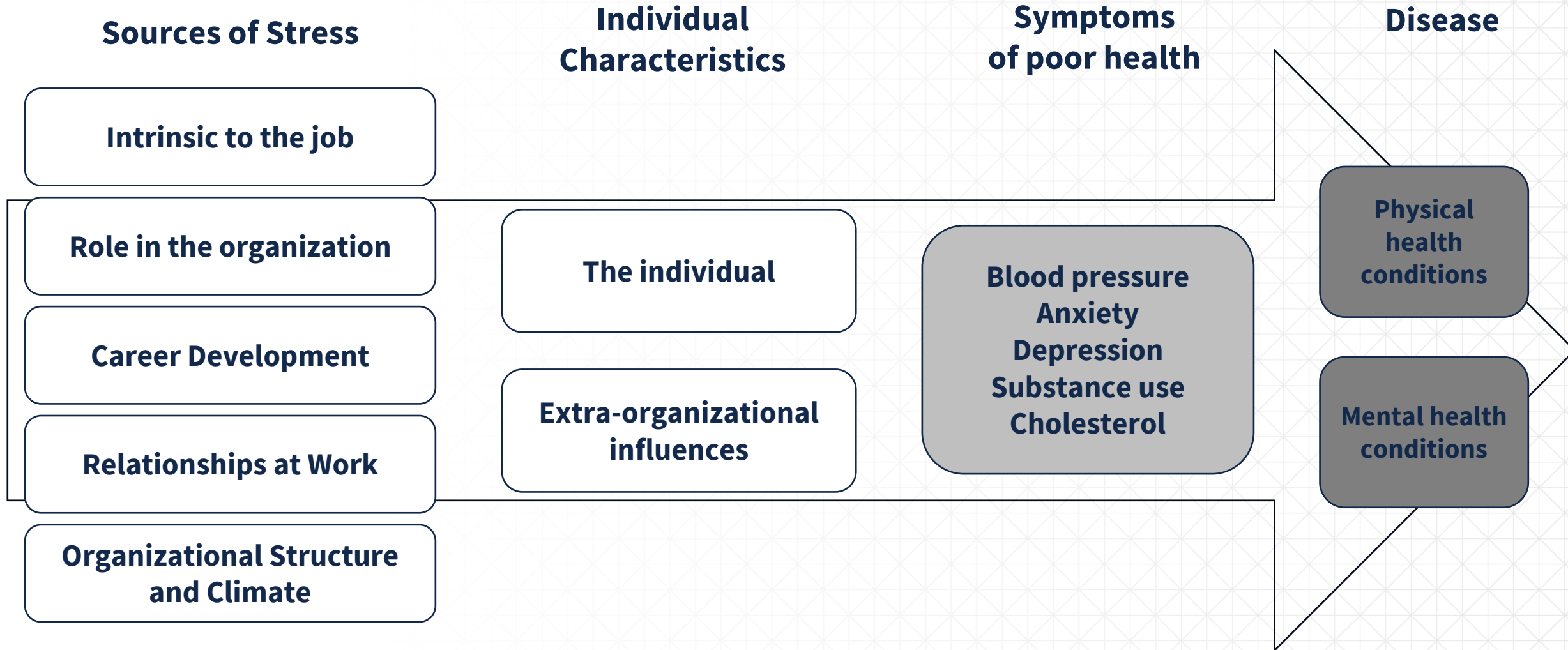
**Assign one person to blow  
up a balloon and write the  
stressor on this balloon.**



# The Stress Continuum



# Occupational Stress Model





# Mental Health: Research Findings



**Agricultural-related stressors have been associated with adverse mental health conditions.**

- A. True
- B. False







**WE HIT A 40-HOUR WORKWEEK  
BY TUESDAY AT NOON**



**DAD, WHAT'S A DAY OFF?**

**I DON'T KNOW SON,  
WE'RE FARMERS**





## Latest Update

### Gap Between Farm Costs and Prices Received Hits 10-Year High

U.S. farmers are facing one of the widest gaps in a decade between what they pay to produce food and what they earn from selling it. New USDA data released...

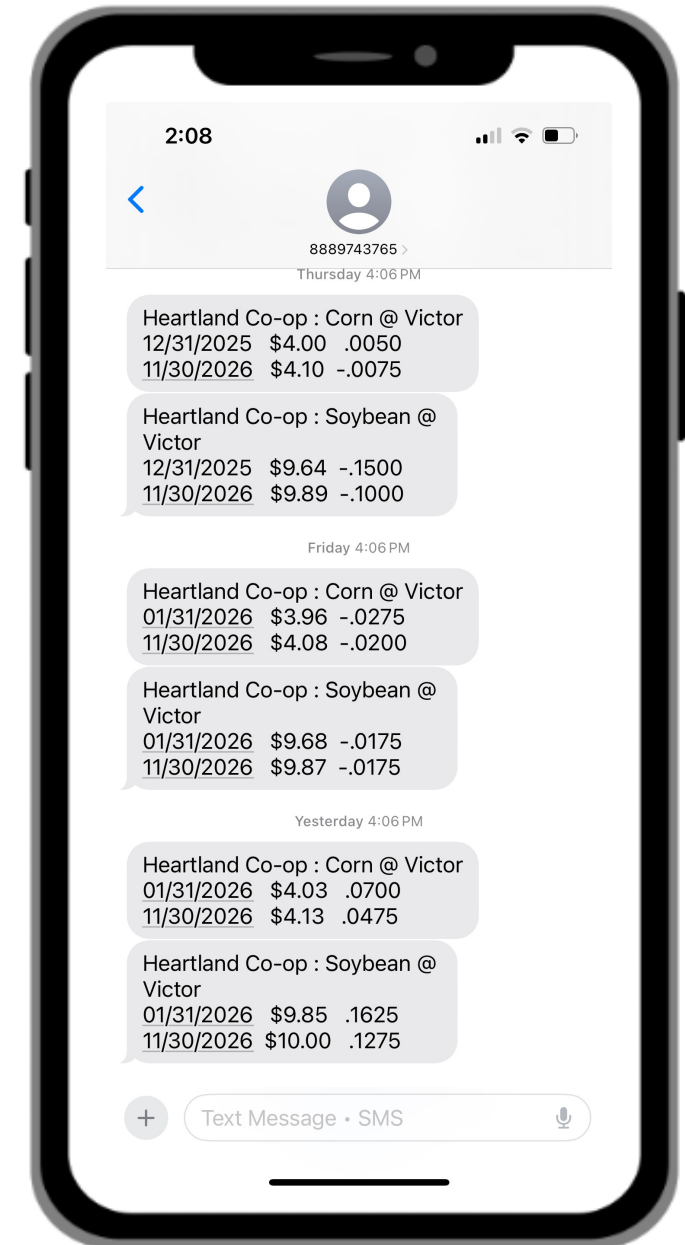
[Read more](#)

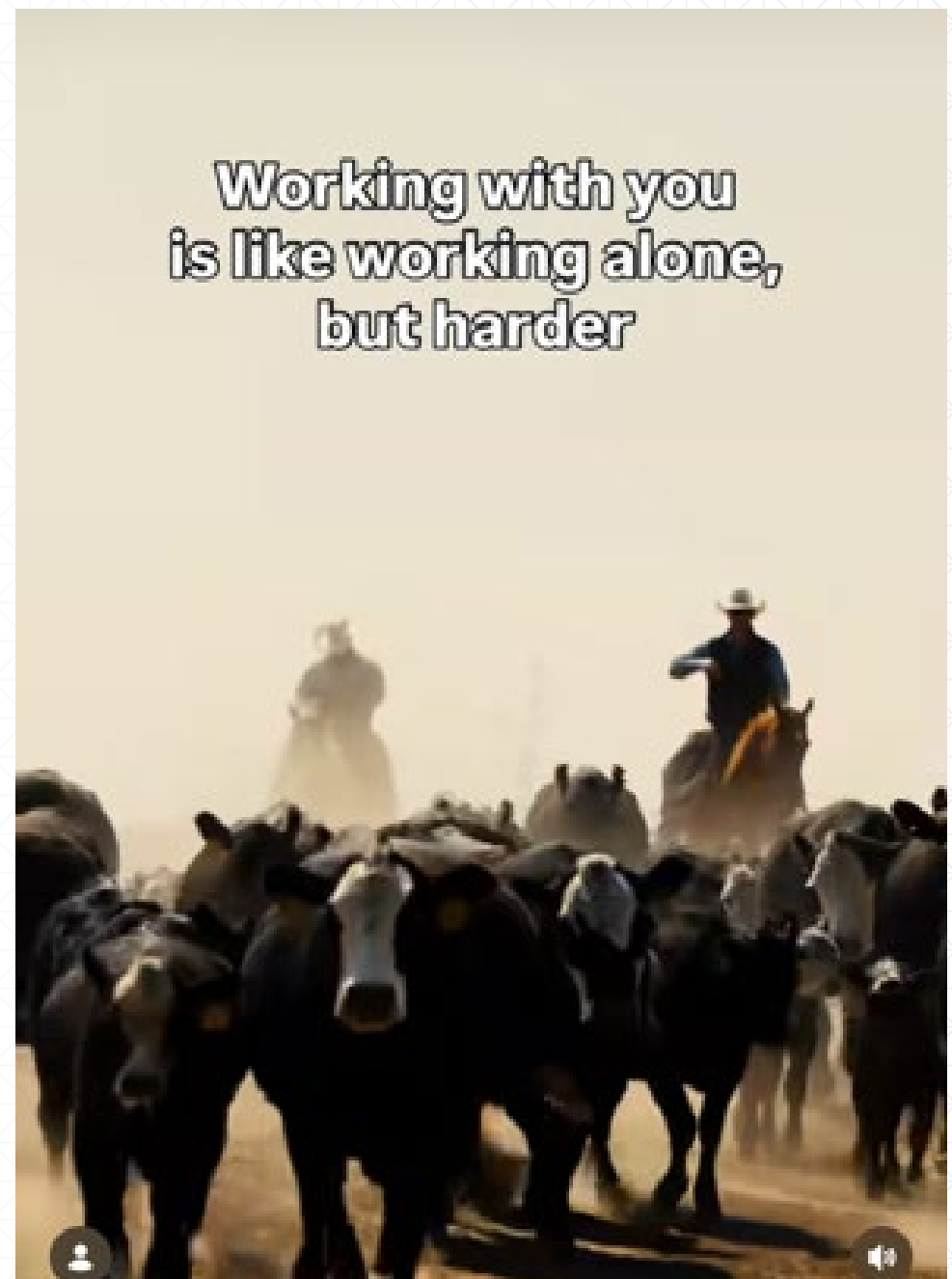
Ag News

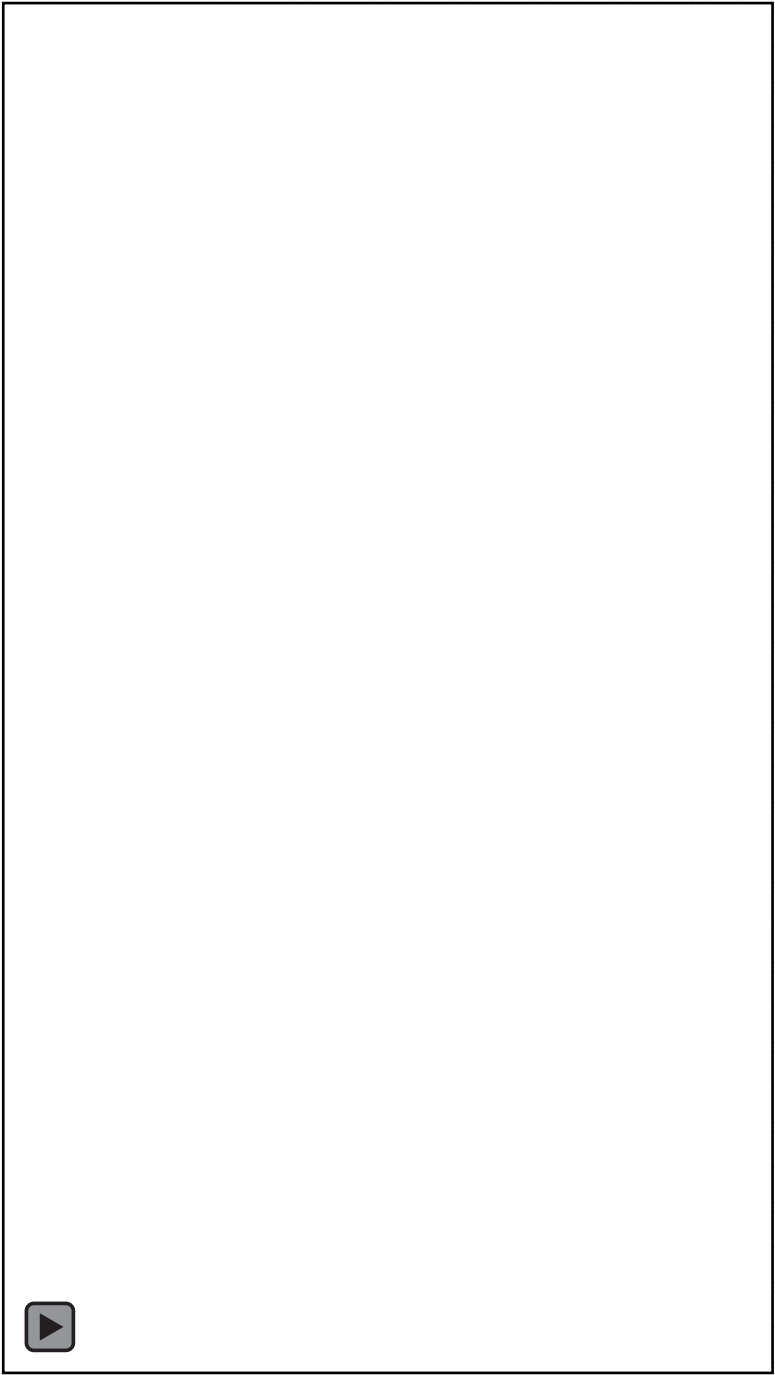
## Climbing Farm Debt

News Release Posted: January 6, 2026

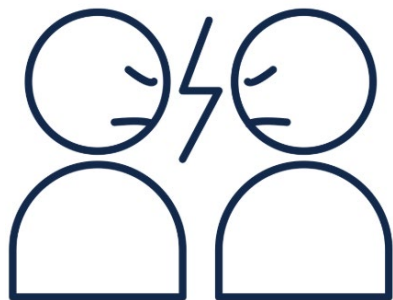
Share:











**Agricultural producers experience more symptoms of anxiety and depression than the general population.**

- A. True
- B. False



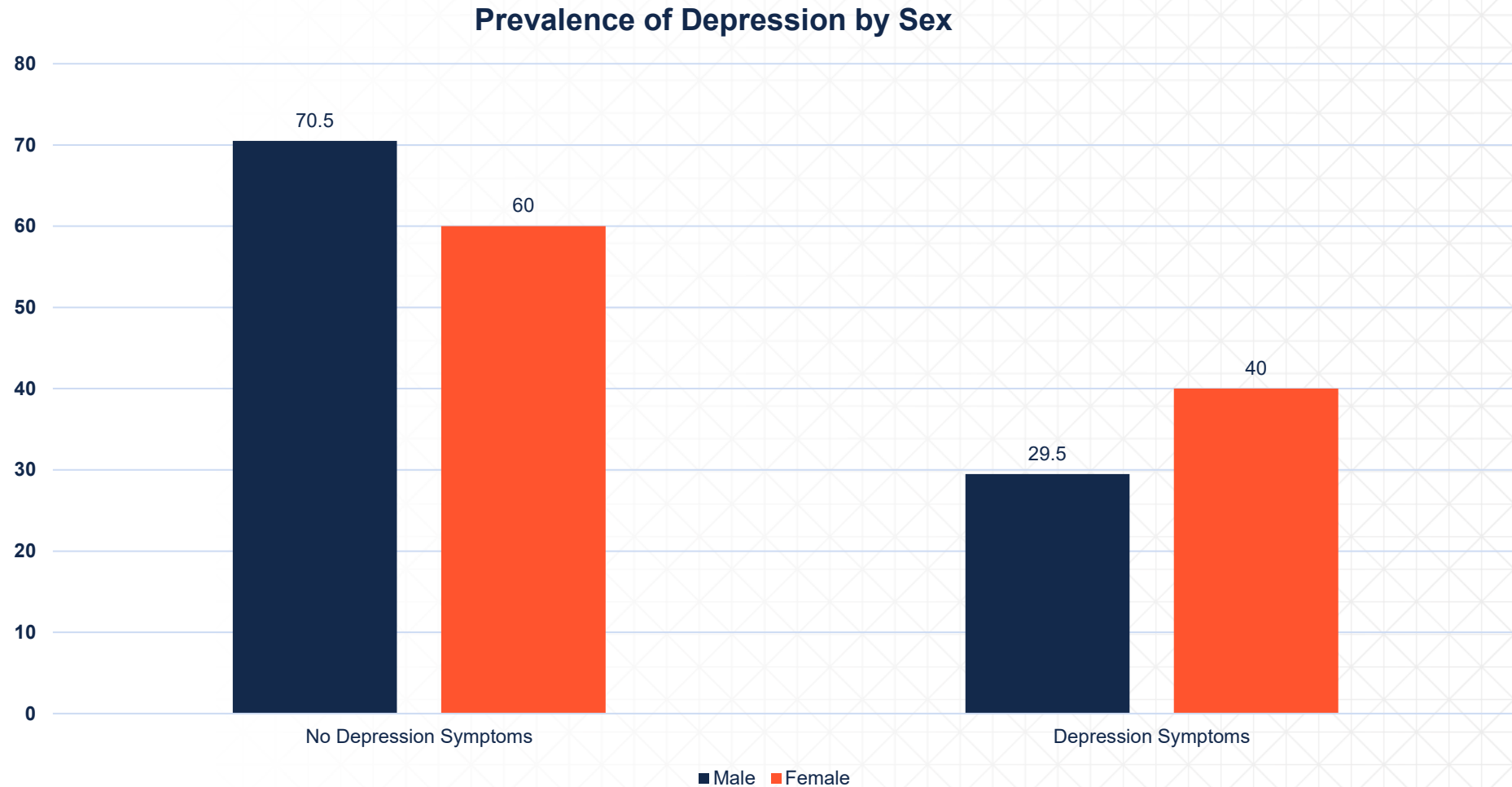
# Depression and Anxiety

	Agricultural Producers	General Population
Depression	6-50%	13.1%
Anxiety	27-71%	18.1%





# Depression among Farmers in Illinois



# Associations between economic indicators, anxiety, and depression

	Mean (SD)	Score Range	Symptoms of Depression			Symptoms of Anxiety		
			PHQ-9 ≤ 4 Mean (SD)	PHQ-9 ≥ 5 Mean (SD)	P-value	GAD-7 ≤ 4 Mean (SD)	GAD-7 ≥ 5 Mean (SD)	P-value
<b>Difficulty paying bills</b>	2.20 (0.92)	1 – 4	1.51 (0.77)	2.48 (0.83)	<0.001	1.55 (0.76)	2.51 (0.83)	<0.001
<b>Money left at end of month</b>	2.24 (0.91)	1 – 4	1.67 (0.84)	2.46 (0.84)	<0.001	1.74 (0.80)	2.47 (0.86)	<0.001
<b>Unmet material needs</b>	2.50 (0.81)	1 – 5	2.03 (0.85)	2.68 (0.72)	<0.001	2.10 (0.83)	2.69 (0.73)	<0.001
<b>Financial cutbacks</b>	0.27 (0.24)	0 – 0.97	0.16 (0.21)	0.31 (0.24)	<0.001	0.16 (0.21)	0.32 (0.24)	<0.001
<b>Negative financial events</b>	0.18 (0.20)	0 – 0.78	0.10 (0.15)	0.21 (0.20)	<0.001	0.09 (0.13)	0.23 (0.21)	<0.001
<b>Financial stress</b>	2.95 (0.98)	1 – 5	2.10 (0.88)	3.29 (0.79)	<0.001	2.19 (0.91)	3.31 (0.79)	<0.001
<b>Debt to asset ratio</b>	0.43 (1.46)	0 – 19.4	0.12 (0.18)	0.55 (1.69)	<0.001	0.16 (0.27)	0.56 (1.75)	<0.001

Note: Higher mean values indicate more financial strain

# Depression Screening Instrument

In the past two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following:	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3
Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	0	1	2	3
Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	0	1	2	3
Feeling tired or having little energy	0	1	2	3
Poor appetite or overeating	0	1	2	3
Feeling bad about yourself — or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	0	1	2	3
Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	0	1	2	3
Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed? Or the opposite — being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual	0	1	2	3
Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way	0	1	2	3



# Stress & isolation: Farmers face higher risk of suicide



by Nick Stonesifer

June 18, 2025

Farmer optimism in freefall: Financial stress showing in Ag Economy Barometer survey

Farm News Media

## A Silent Truth Hidden in the Farm Economy: Farmer Suicides Are on the Rise

With 259 farm bankruptcies filed between April 2024 and March 2025, it's clear the financial stress on farmers is mounting. There's a growing concern that the number of farmer suicides is rising.

## Why are America's farmers killing themselves?



# Suicide

	Agricultural Producers	General population
Suicide rate (men) (per 100,000)	36.1	27.4

## Risk factors for farmers and ranchers:

- Age (65+)
- Chronic health condition
- ~~Legal problems~~
- ~~Family problems~~
- ~~Financial problems~~

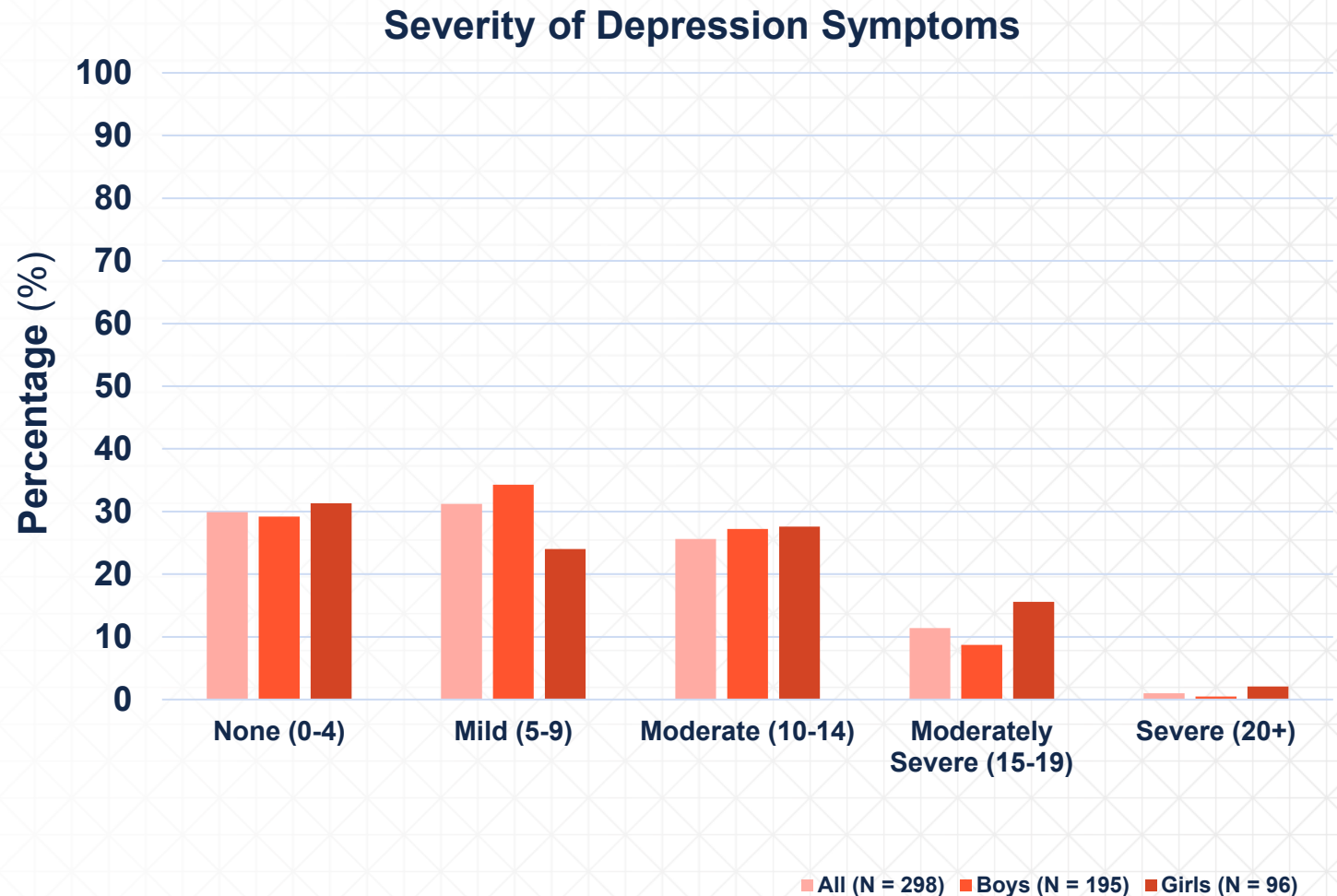
**Agricultural youth experience have better mental health than non-farm youth.**

- A. True
- B. False



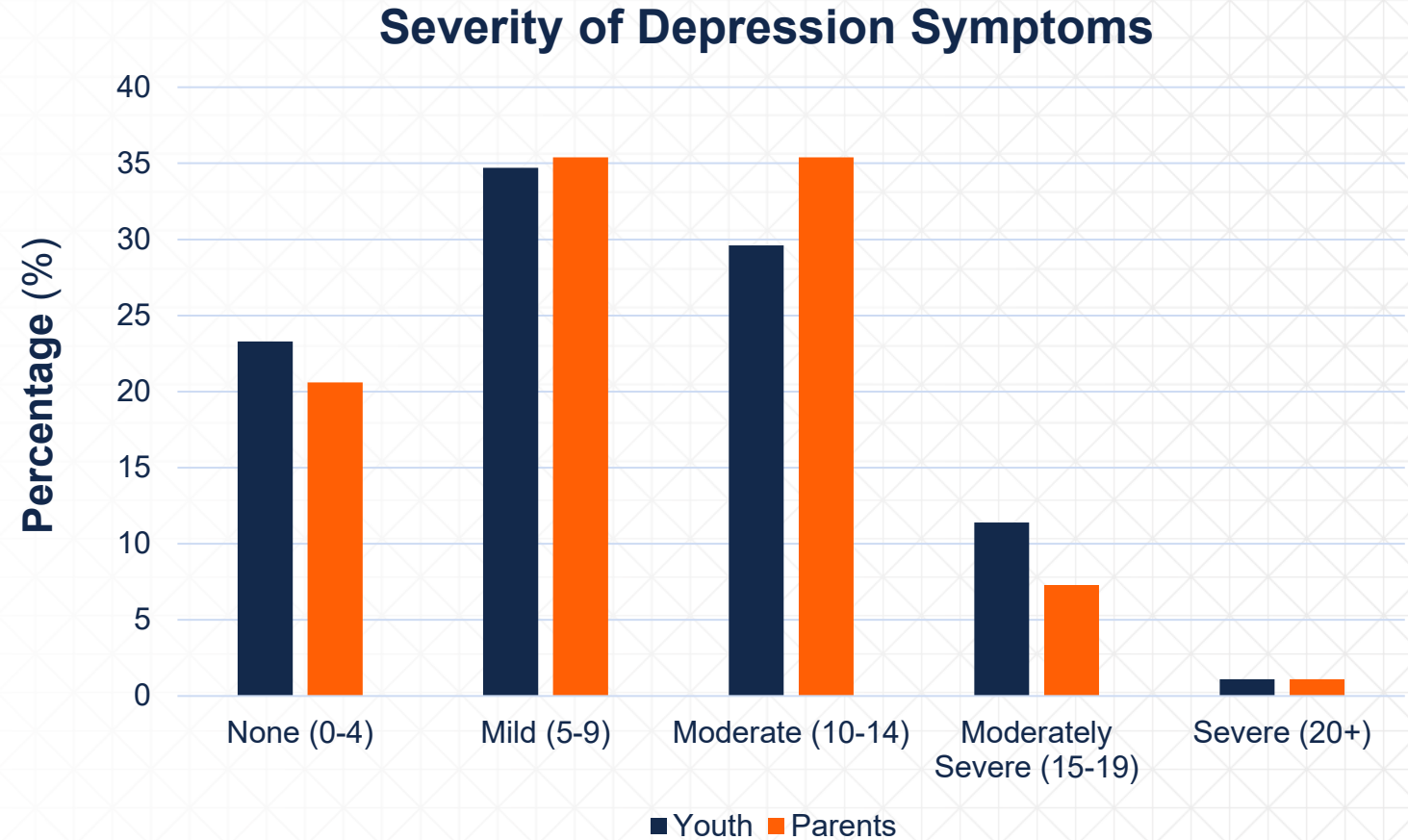
# Farm youth mental health

- **60.3%** of farm youth met the criteria for depression, **45.1%** for GAD.
- In the U.S., **20%** of adolescents meet the criteria for depression annually.



# Farm parents and farm youth

- There is a strong correlation between farm parent mental health and farm youth mental health.



# Signs and Symptoms



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# Physical Symptoms

- Aches and pains
- Stomach ulcers
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Headaches
- Chest pain
- Frequent colds



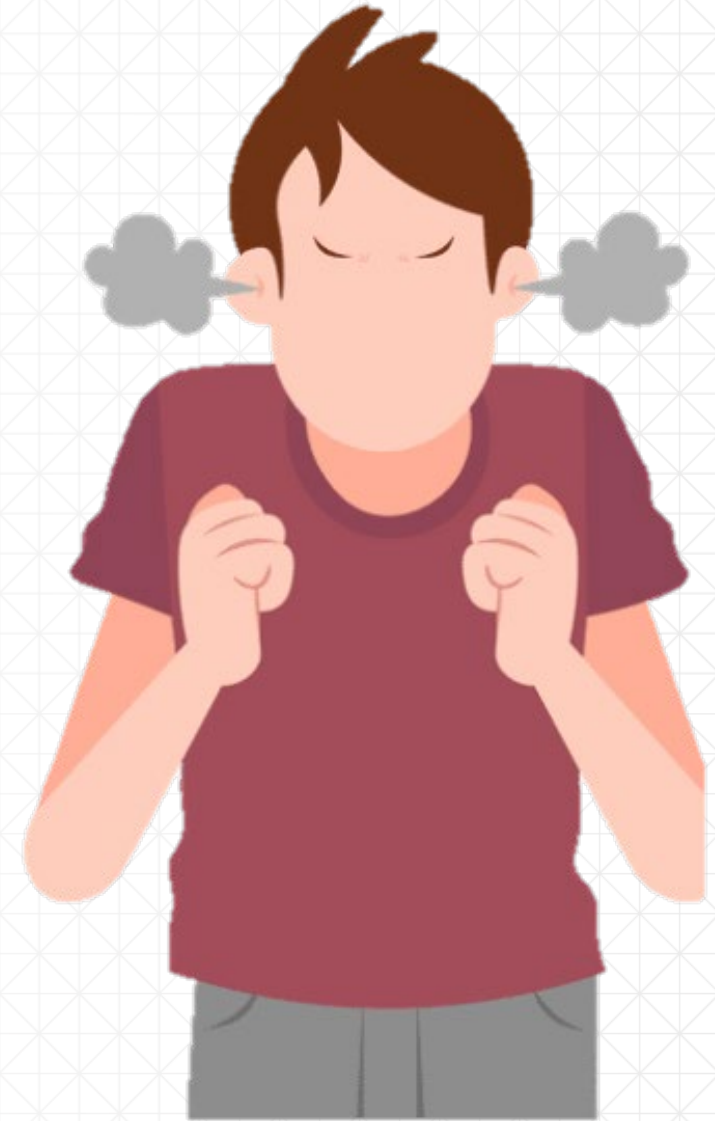
# Behavioral Symptoms

- Eating too much/ too little
- Sleeping too much/ too little
- Substance use
- Increase gambling
- Procrastinating or neglecting
- Lack of concentration
- Forgetfulness



# Emotional Symptoms

- Irritability, short-tempered
- Agitation, inability to relax
- Sense of loneliness
- Isolation
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Depression
- Constant worrying





## MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM MODEL

HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Normal mood fluctuations</li><li>• Calm and takes things in stride</li><li>• Good sense of humor</li><li>• Performing well</li><li>• In control mentally</li><li>• Normal sleep patterns</li><li>• Few sleep difficulties</li><li>• Physically well</li><li>• Good energy level</li><li>• Physically and socially active</li><li>• No or limited alcohol use / gambling</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Irritable / impatient</li><li>• Nervous</li><li>• Sadness / overwhelmed</li><li>• Displaced sarcasm</li><li>• Procrastination</li><li>• Forgetfulness</li><li>• Trouble sleeping</li><li>• Intrusive thoughts</li><li>• Nightmares</li><li>• Muscle tension/headaches</li><li>• Low energy</li><li>• Decreased activity / socializing</li><li>• Regular but controlled alcohol use / gambling</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Anger</li><li>• Anxiety</li><li>• Pervasively sad / hopeless</li><li>• Negative attitude</li><li>• Poor performance / workaholic</li><li>• Poor concentration / decisions</li><li>• Restless disturbed sleep</li><li>• Recurrent images / nightmares</li><li>• Increased aches and pains</li><li>• Increased fatigue</li><li>• Avoidance</li><li>• Withdrawal</li><li>• Increased alcohol use / gambling is hard to control</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Angry outbursts / aggression</li><li>• Excessive anxiety / panic attacks</li><li>• Depressed / suicidal thoughts</li><li>• Over insubordination</li><li>• Can't perform duties, control behavior or concentrate</li><li>• Can't fall asleep or stay asleep</li><li>• Sleeping too much or too little</li><li>• Physical illnesses</li><li>• Constant fatigue</li><li>• Not going out or answering phone</li><li>• Alcohol or gambling addiction</li><li>• Other addictions</li></ul>

# Table Talk: Scenarios

- At your tables (groups of 4-6) review one of scenarios.
- Discuss the following questions
  - What are the physical signs of distress?
  - What are the behavioral signs of distress?
  - What are the emotional signs of distress?

# Why do we care about agricultural producers' mental health?



# Poor mental health at home

- Poor interpersonal communication
- Increased conflict between partners
- Increase stress in children
- Poor mental health among children



**A poor mental  
health day costs  
employers \$340 per  
employee per day.**



# Poor mental health at work

- Absenteeism
- Presenteeism
- Decision fatigue
- Poor management
- Increased conflict
- Mistakes
- Injuries



# Challenges to Mental Health Care in Agriculture



- **Accessibility**
- **Availability**
- **Affordability**
- **Acceptability**

# Building your toolbox



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# 4 Steps to Building a Toolkit

1. Identifying Triggers
2. Coping strategies and Grounding Techniques
3. Social Support and Connection
4. Professional Resources



# Identifying Triggers

- What typically or routinely causes you stress?
- Of those, which can you eliminate?
- Of those, which can you control?





# Coping Strategies and Grounding Techniques

- Techniques to manage stress, difficult situations, and emotions in healthy ways.
  - Hobbies
  - Exercise
  - Relaxation (deep breathing, meditation, etc.)
  - Distraction (diversions, mental shifts, reframing)

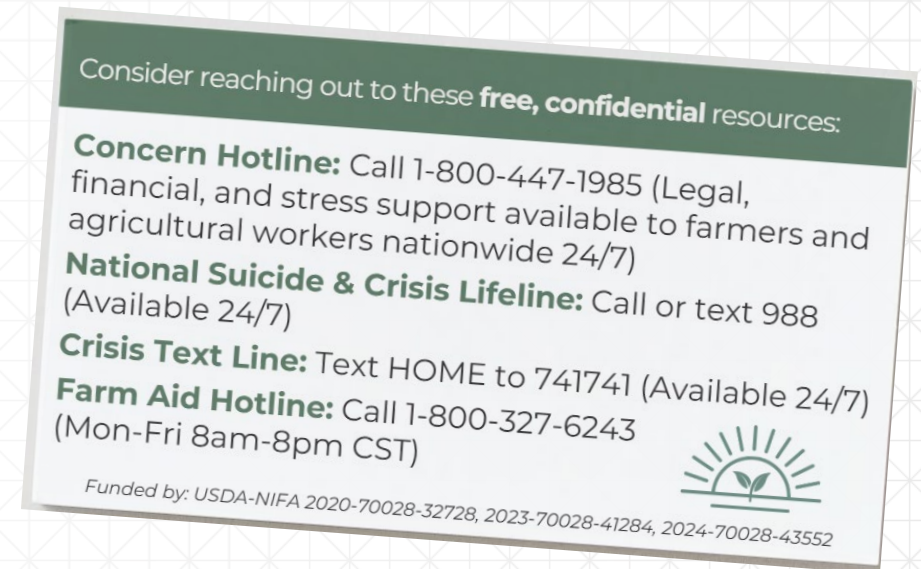
# Social Support

- Nurturing relationships and strong social networks protect against poor health.
  - Who can you call inside your family?
  - Who can you call outside of your family?
  - Who can you call in your community?



# Professional Resources

- Knowing when and how to enlist professionals who can help.
  - Hotlines, crisis lines
  - Health professionals
  - Spiritual leaders / clergy

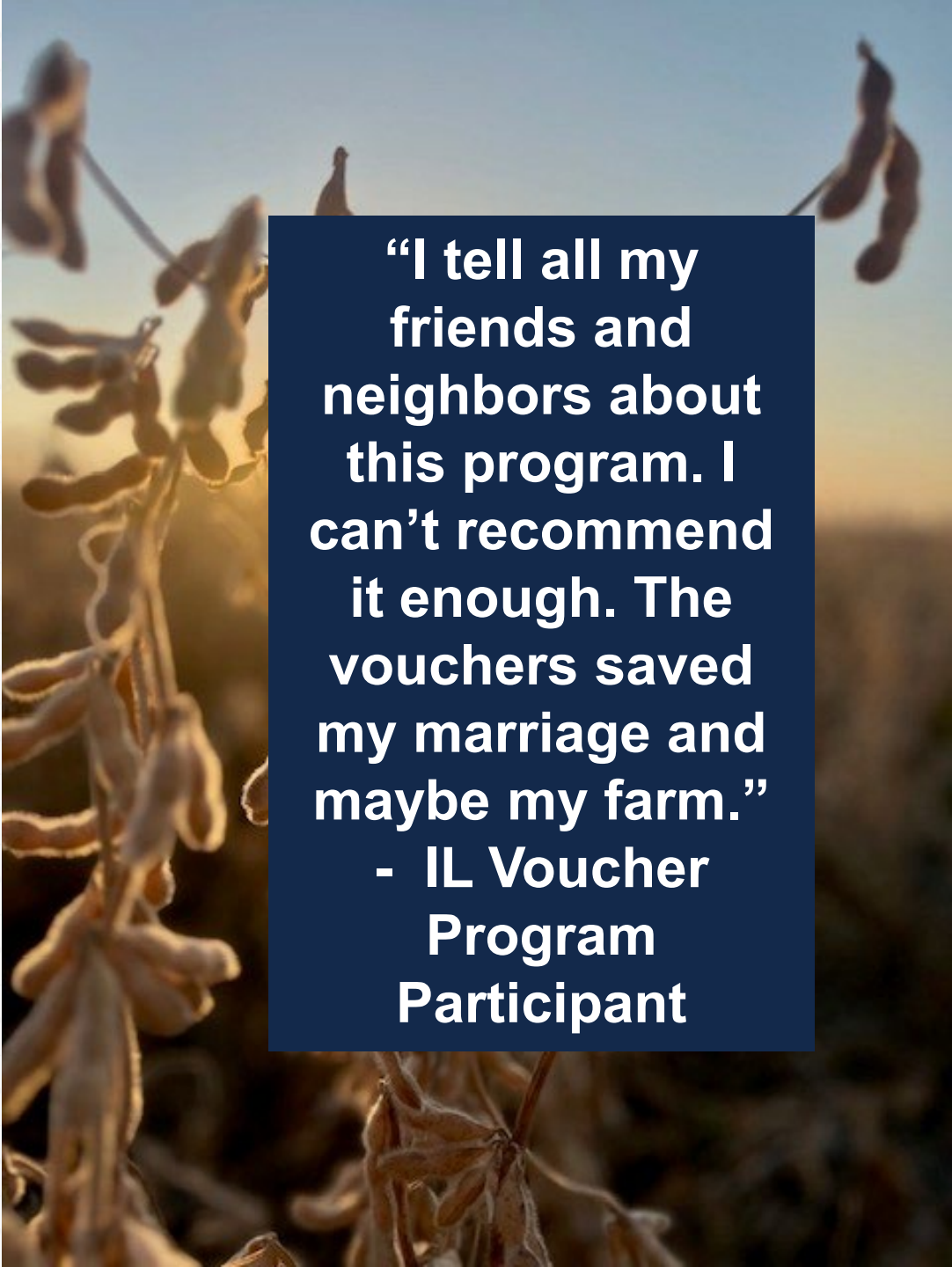


# Health Professionals

- Primary care providers
- Mental health specialist
  - LPCs / LCPCs
  - MSWs

- Find a therapist:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>



**“I tell all my friends and neighbors about this program. I can’t recommend it enough. The vouchers saved my marriage and maybe my farm.”**  
**- IL Voucher Program Participant**



# Helplines and Hotlines



911: Medical and Public Safety Emergency  
Free, Available 24/7

988: Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
Free, Available 24/7, talk or text

211: Resource Support Line  
Connects to local resources re: housing,  
food, etc.

1-800-447-1985: Ag-Specific Concern Line  
Free, Available 24/7, legal, stress, financial  
guidance.

# The Differences Between 911 and 988 for Mental Health



## Emergency

- Active suicide threat.
- Threatening harm to self or others.
- Self-injury that needs medical attention.
- Severe intoxication.
- Inability to care for oneself.
- Apparent drug overdose.

**911**



## Crisis

- Thinking about suicide or planning to harm oneself.
- Talking about harm to self or others.
- Non-life-threatening self-injury
- Overuse of alcohol or drugs.
- Depression, anxiety, or other mental illness symptoms.

**988**

# Supporting Others



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**“ I see the stress, and I hear  
about the stress. I want to  
help, I think we all do, I just  
don’t know how. ”**

---

**Agribusiness professional, Wisconsin**



# Supporting Others



**Approach and assess**



**Communicate non-judgmentally**



**Reassure**



**Encourage support and assistance**

# Approach and Assess

- Find a safe, private time or place to talk.
- Ask direct questions: are you considering hurting yourself or someone else? Are you thinking about killing yourself?
- Assist with immediate crisis intervention:
  - I don't feel safe leaving you, is there someone we can call?
  - I don't feel comfortable leaving you, is there somewhere I can take you



# Table Talk

- How can you **approach** the individual in your scenario? What could you say to get the conversation going?
- How can you **assess** for danger with the individual in your scenario? Does the background information and/or your experience with the individual warrant an assess for danger?




# Communicate Non-Judgmentally

- Ask open ended questions.
- Highlight observable changes.
- Listen without interruption.
- Show empathy and be accepting, even if you do not agree with them.
- Ask open ended questions
- Lead with love



# Communicate Non-Judgmentally



It has been a hard  
year, how are you  
doing with  
everything?

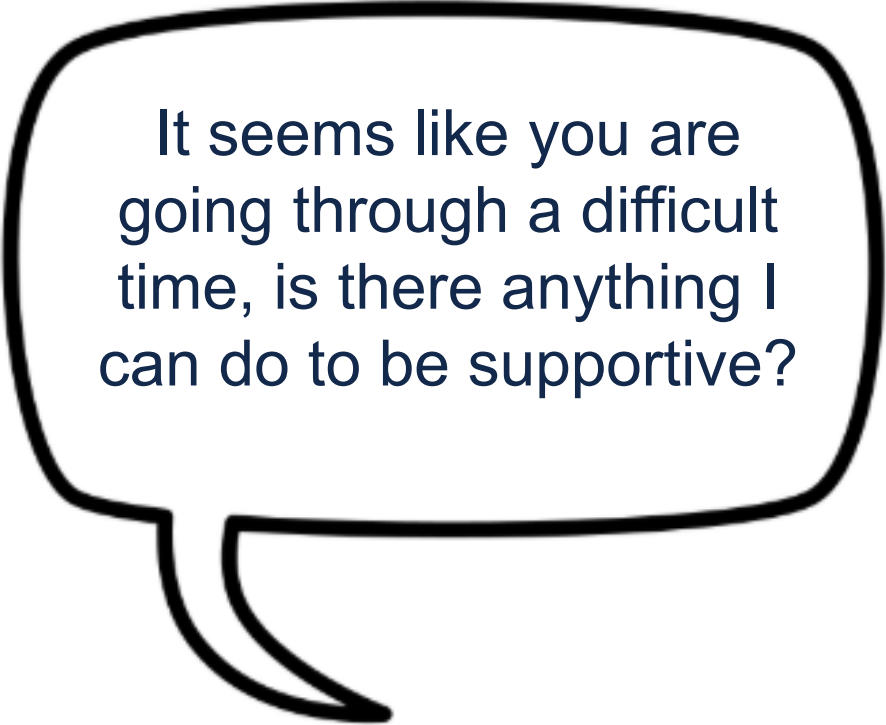
OR



This too shall pass.

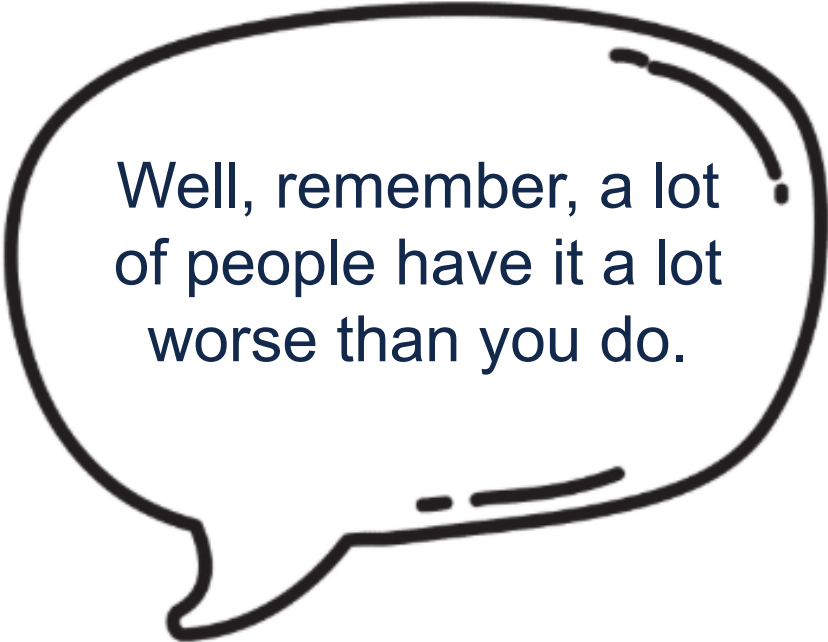


# Communicate Non-Judgmentally



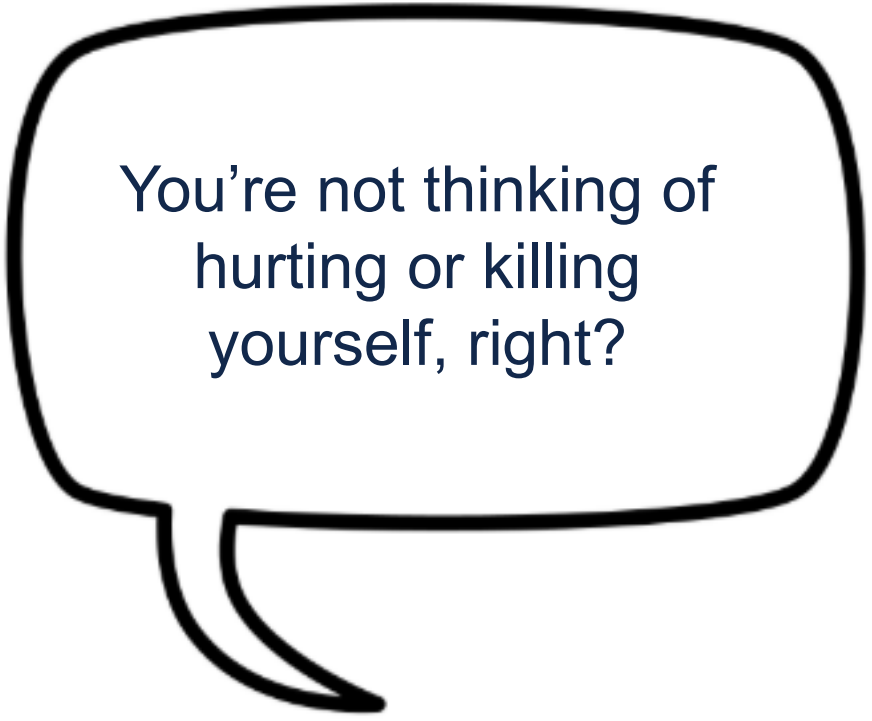
It seems like you are going through a difficult time, is there anything I can do to be supportive?

OR



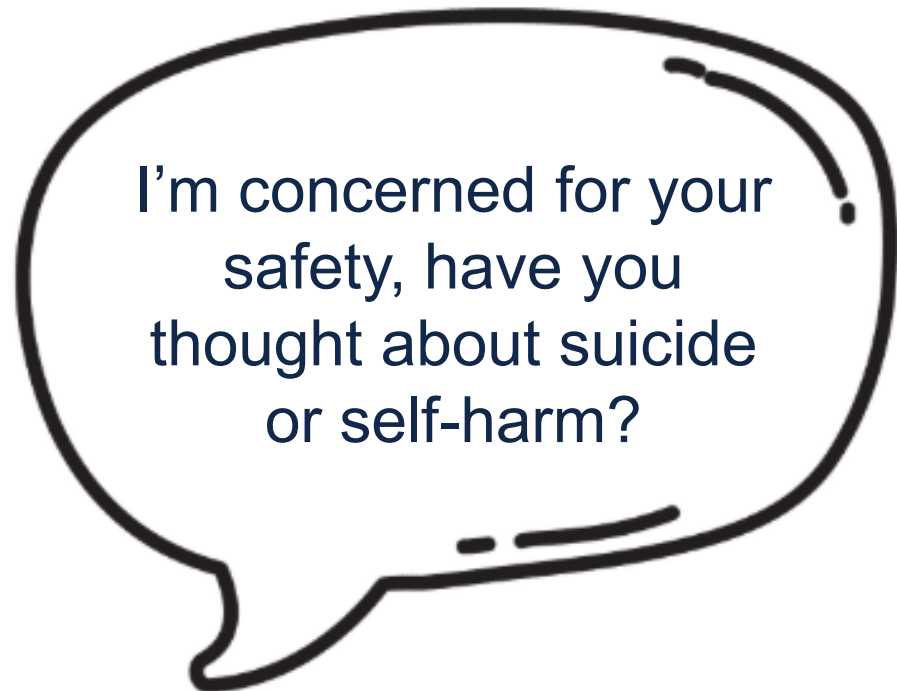
Well, remember, a lot of people have it a lot worse than you do.

# Communicate Non-Judgmentally



You're not thinking of hurting or killing yourself, right?

OR



I'm concerned for your safety, have you thought about suicide or self-harm?



# Table Talk

- How can you **communicate non-judgmentally** to the individual in your scenario?
- What is one thing you can say in response to something they told you in your brief conversation?





# Reassure

- Remind them they are not alone
- Express concern and care – honestly.
- Remind them there is help, they are not in this alone.



# Table Talk

- How can you **reassure** the individual in your scenario?
- What is one thing you can you say in response to something they told you in your brief conversation?



# Encourage support and assistance

- Share resources and services:
  - Share community resources.
  - Share websites with useful resources.
  - Share numbers of crisis and help lines.
- Ask to connect them with someone who can help:

# Table Talk

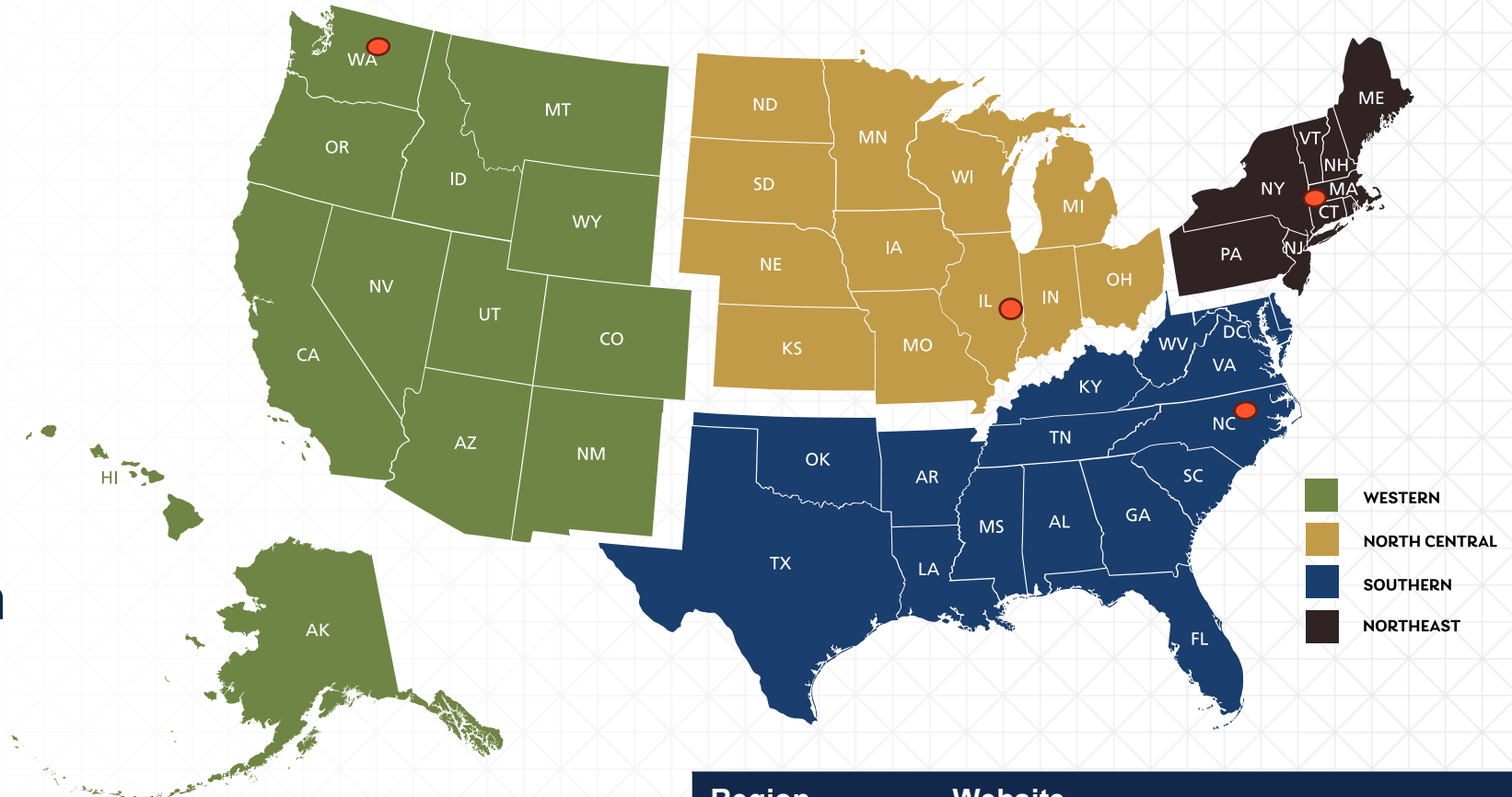
- What **resources** or **recommendations** can you offer the individual in your scenario?



# Regional and National Resources

# Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN)

- 2018 Farm Bill authorized funding for 4 regional farm stress assistance networks.
- Increased resources and services for farm stress management and mental health.

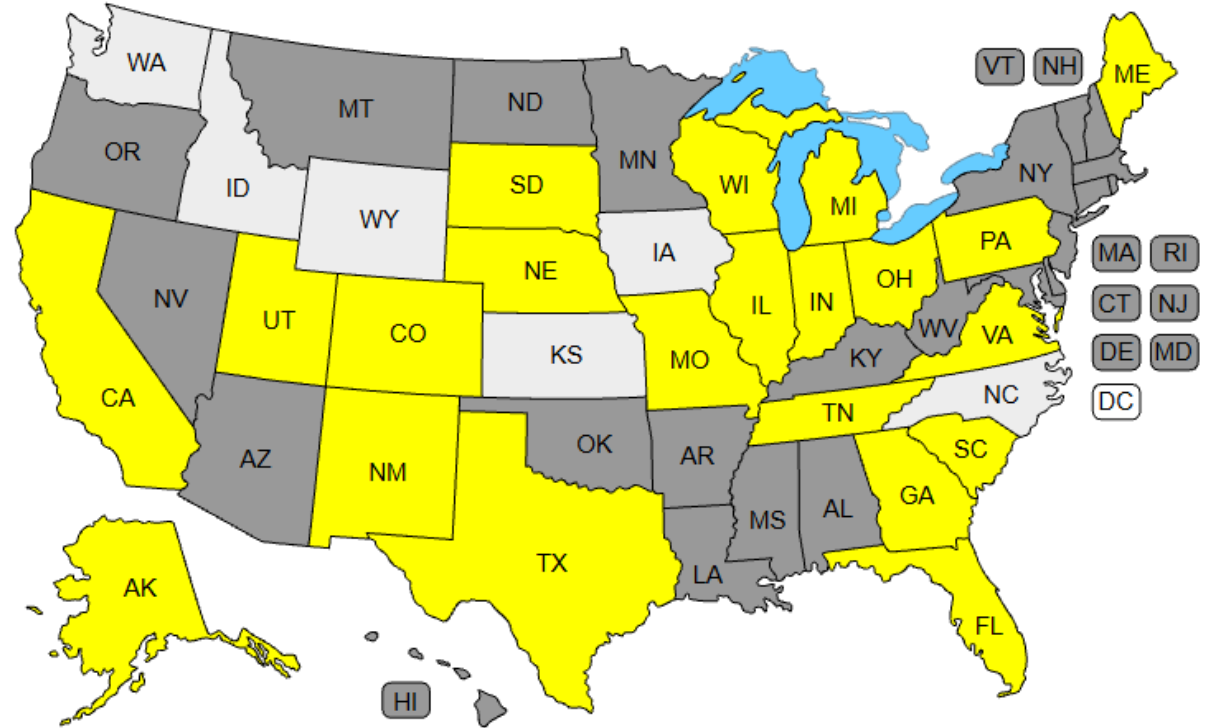


Region	Website
North Central	<a href="http://www.farmstress.org">www.farmstress.org</a>
Northeast	<a href="https://www.cultivemos.org/resources/">https://www.cultivemos.org/resources/</a>
South	
West	<a href="https://farmstress.us/">https://farmstress.us/</a>





- Resources and services for farmers and ranchers with disabilities.
- Provides consult, work-plans, assistive technologies, other assistance.
- Website:  
<https://www.agrability.org/>



STATE/REGIONAL PROJECT

## AFFILIATE PROJECT

NO PROJECT

# Farm Rescue™

- Provides farm and ranch families with the operational support they need in times of crisis.
- Assisted over 1,000 farms in 20 years.
- Website:  
<https://farmrescue.org/>





# Farm Bureau Farm State of Mind

- Resource directory – state and national
- Website:  
<https://www.fb.org/initiative/farm-state-of-mind>



**Are there additional  
organizations or resources  
you are aware of?**

