

# Agricultural Stress and Mental Health

Josie Rudolphi, PhD

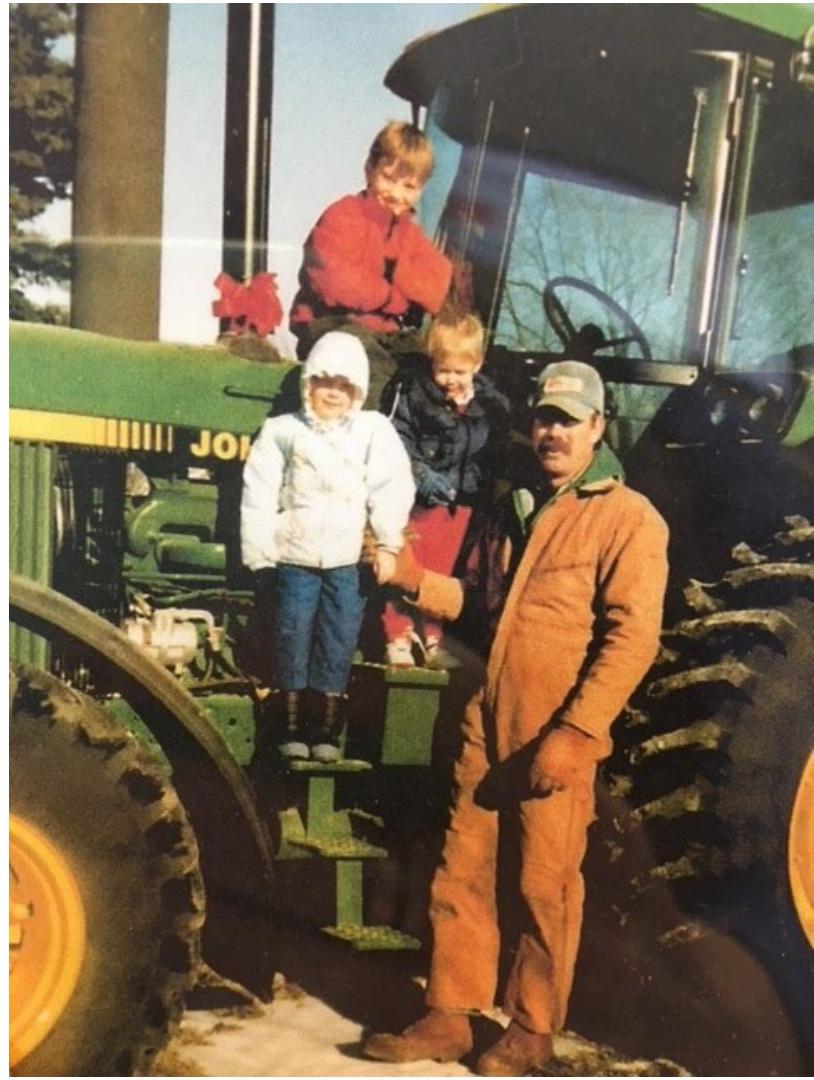
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**Thoughts and opinions expressed today are mine alone and do not reflect those of the University of Illinois, Illinois Extension, or supported funding agencies.**

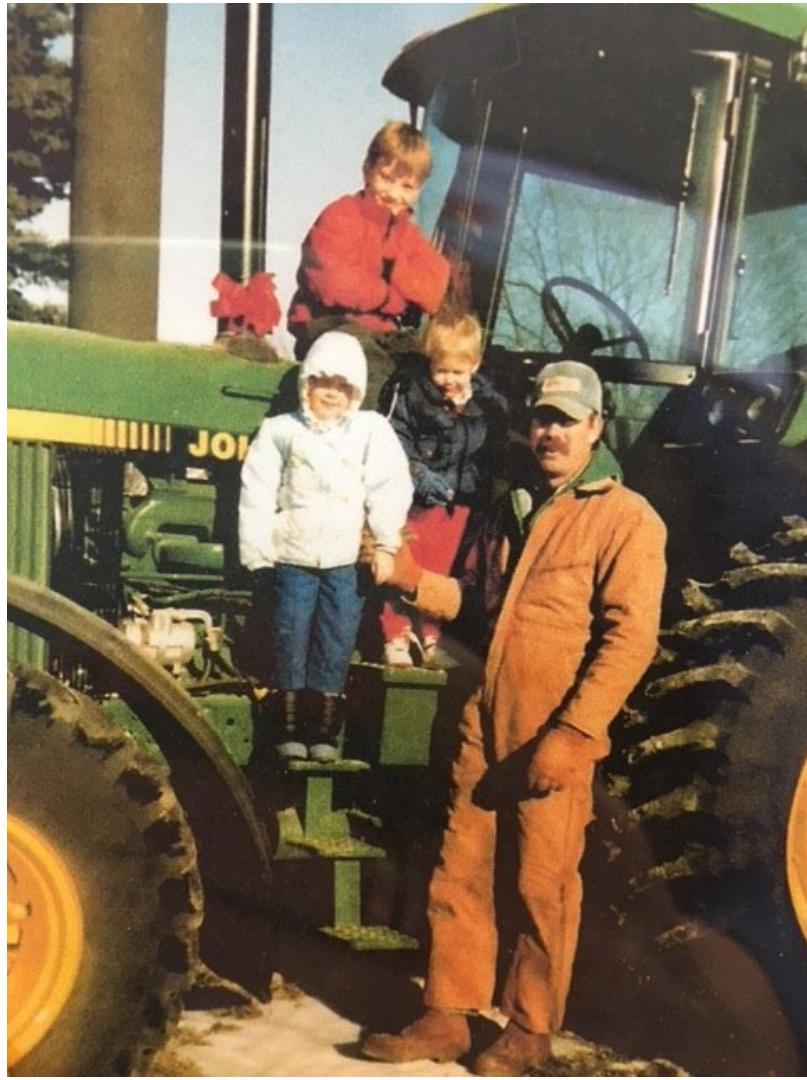
**Do not substitute this information for medical guidance from a licensed provider.**



I

**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

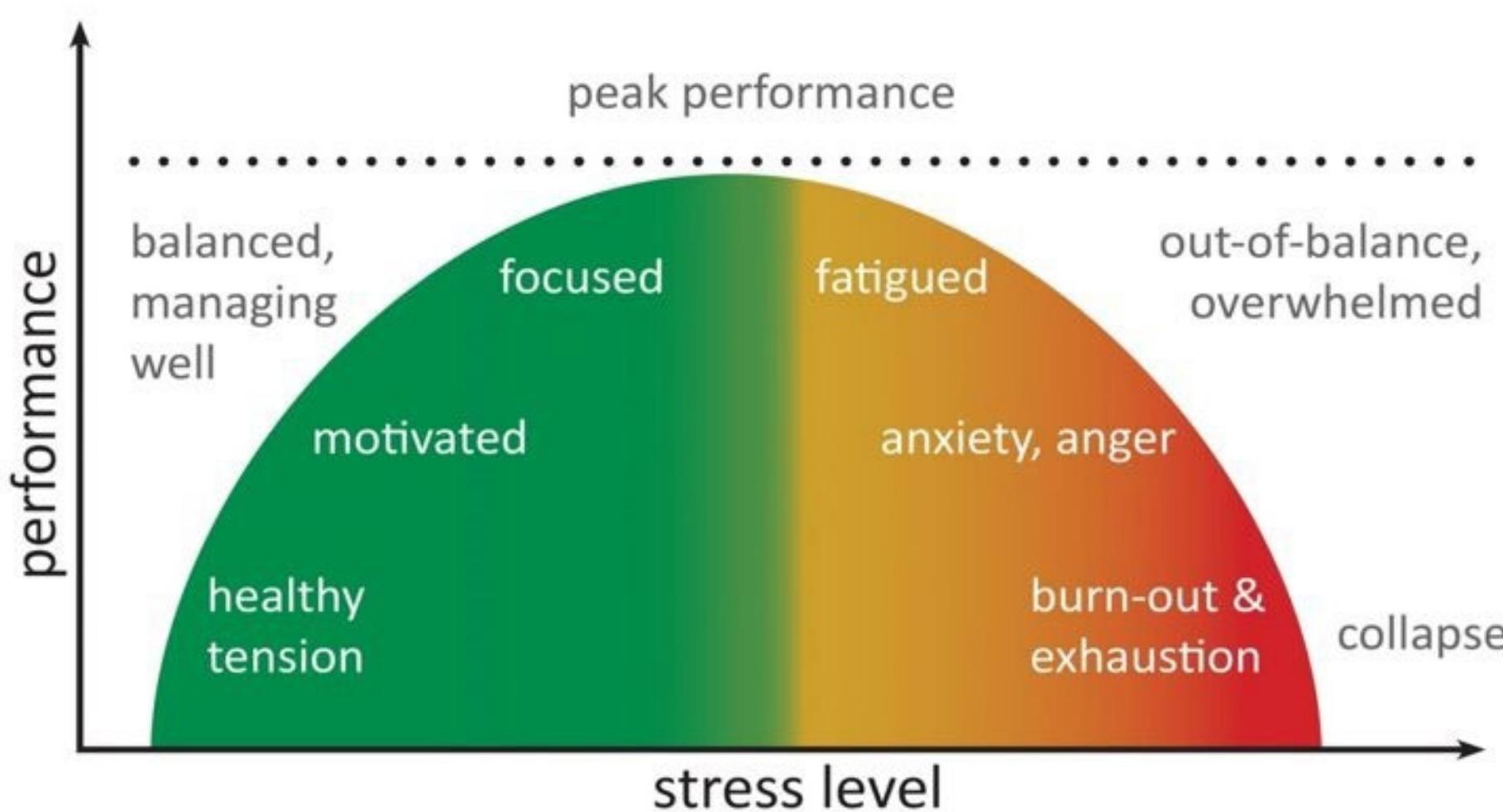
**I** ILLINOIS

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

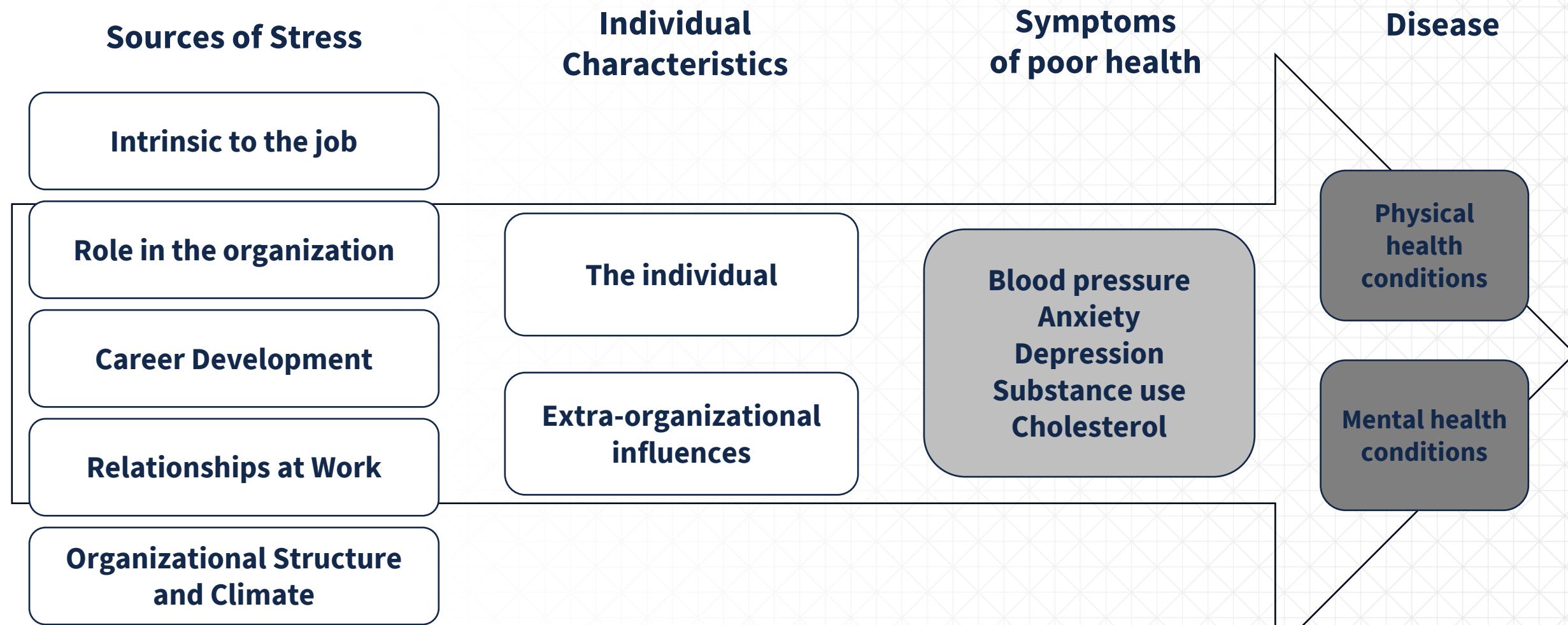
**Assign one person to blow up a balloon and write the stressor on this balloon.**



# 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



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





**CHECKED ON MY  
CROPS TODAY**

**SO FAR SO GOOD!**



## 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...

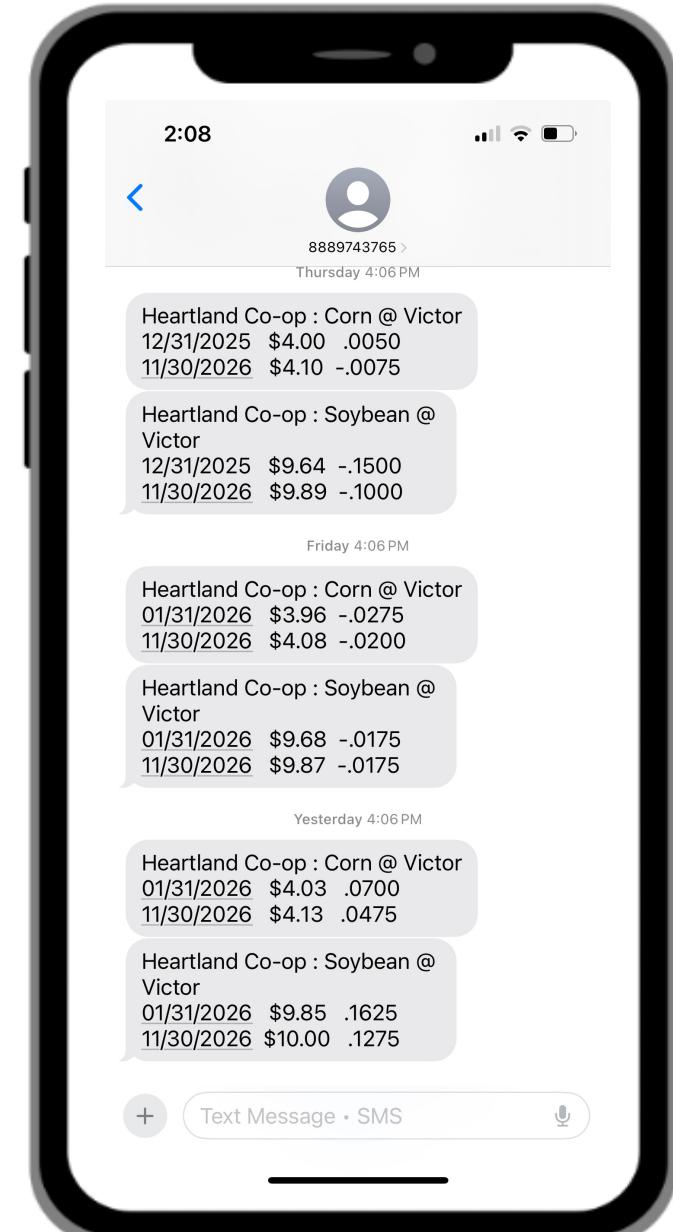
[Read more](#)

Ag News

## Climbing Farm Debt

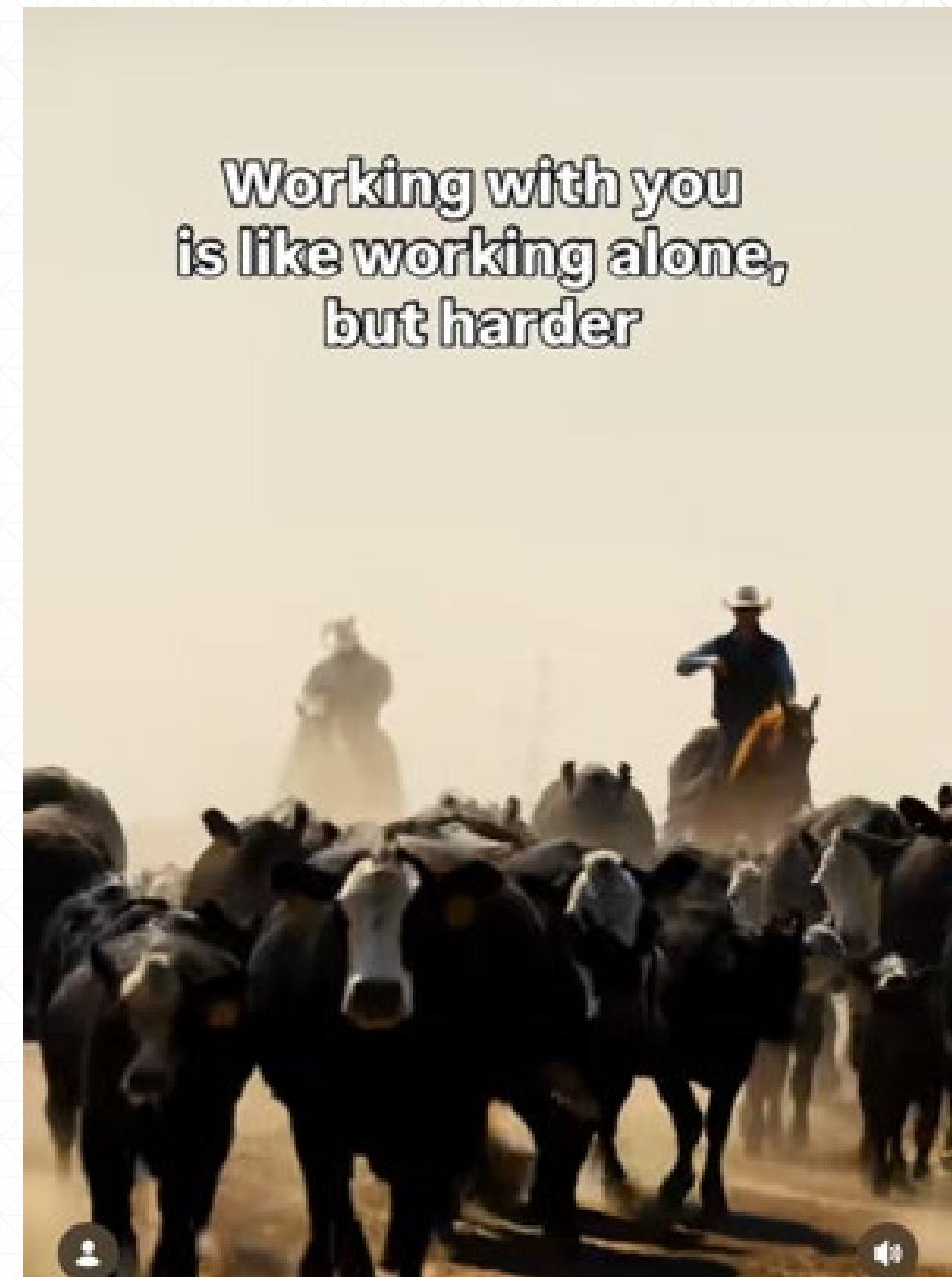
News Release Posted: January 6, 2026

Share:  



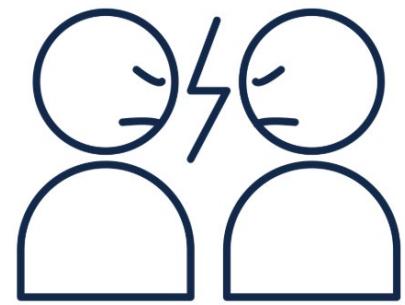


“You can’t hurt my feelings.  
I ranch with my family.”



Working with you  
is like working alone,  
but harder



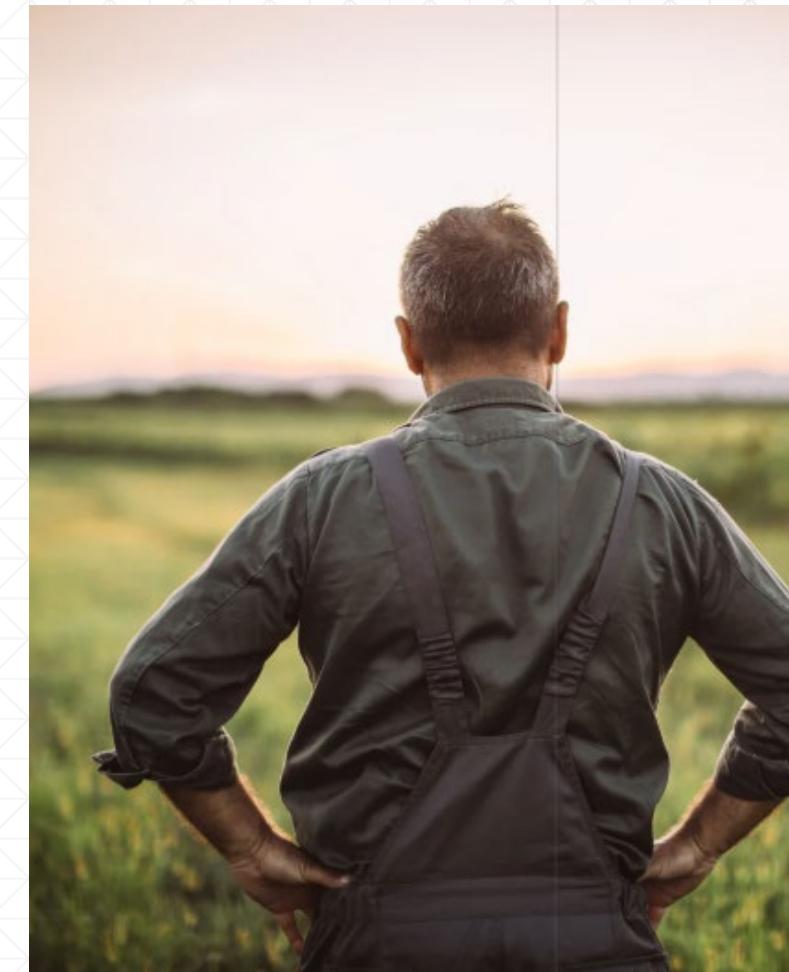


**Agricultural producers experience more symptoms of anxiety and depression than the general population.**

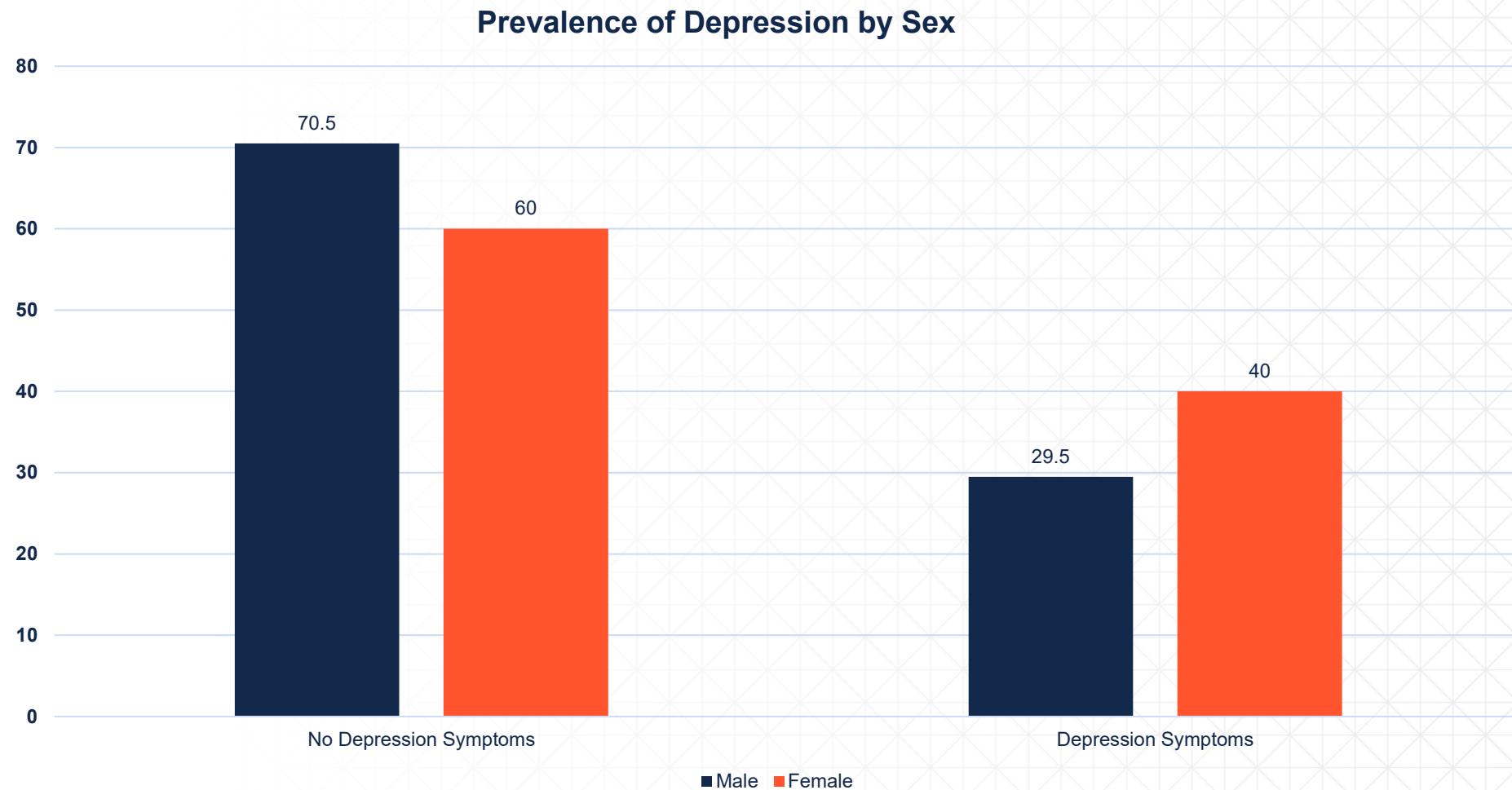
- A. True
- B. False

# 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 $\leq$ 4 Mean (SD)	PHQ-9 $\geq$ 5 Mean (SD)	P-value	GAD-7 $\leq$ 4 Mean (SD)	GAD-7 $\geq$ 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

<b>In the past two weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following:</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Several days</b>	<b>More than half the days</b>	<b>Nearly every day</b>
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

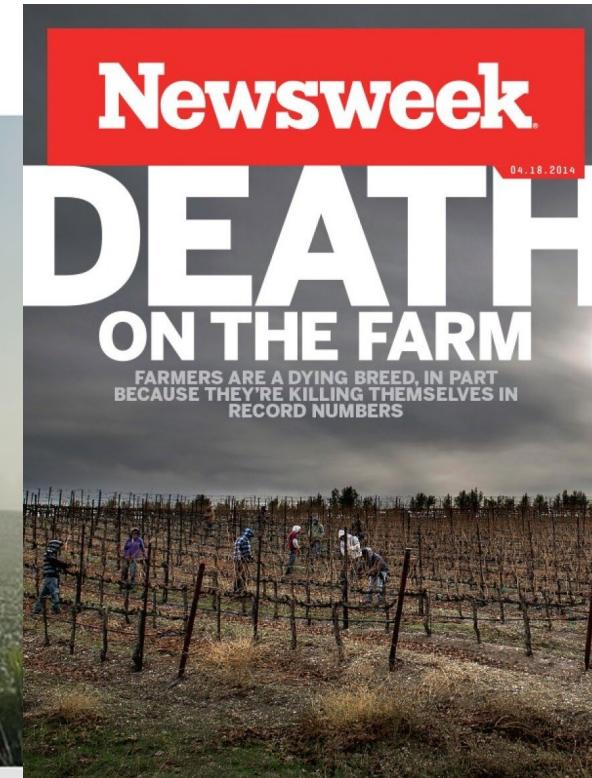
**Farmer optimism in freefall: Financial stress showing in Ag Economy Barometer survey**

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 more to the story, though. The mental health of farmers is also in decline, with suicide rates rising sharply in recent years.

**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:

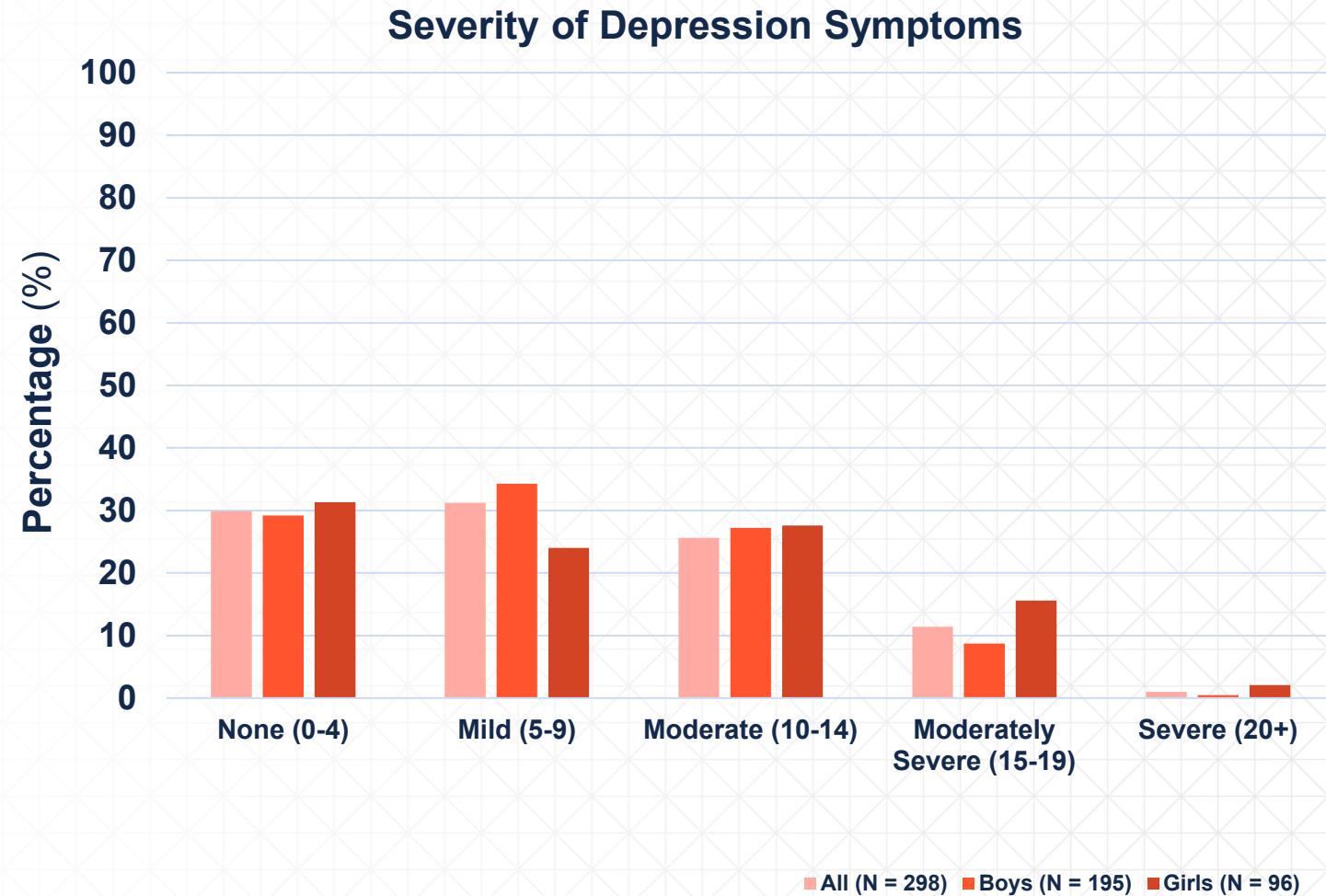
- Age (65+)
- Chronic health condition
- ~~Legal problems~~
- ~~Family problems~~
- ~~Financial problems~~

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

- A. True
- B. False

# Farm youth mental health

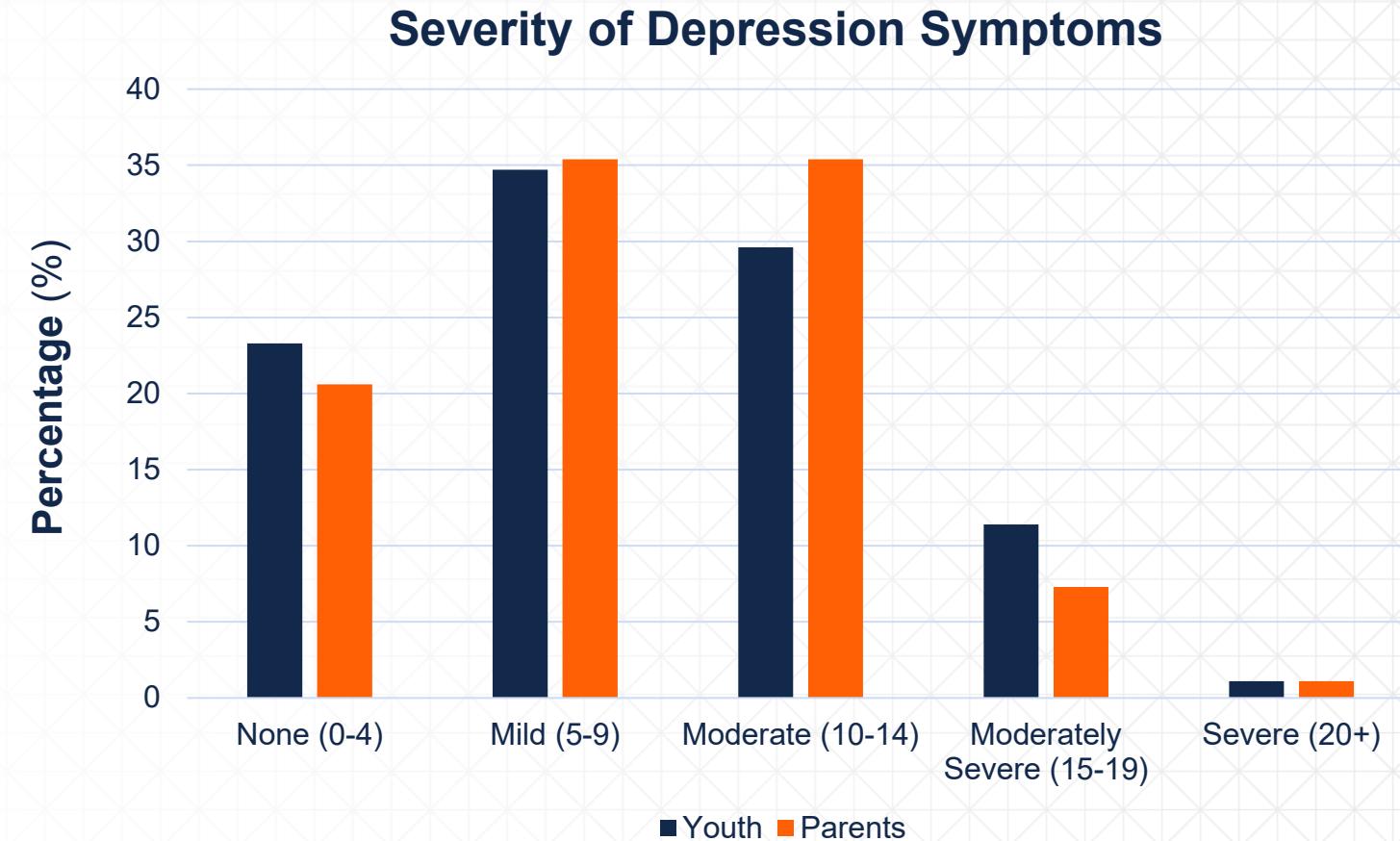
- **60.3%** of farm youth met the criteria for depression, **45.1%** for GAD.
- In the U.S., **20%** of adolescents meet the criteria for depression annually.



■ All (N = 298) ■ Boys (N = 195) ■ Girls (N = 96)

# Farm parents and farm youth

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

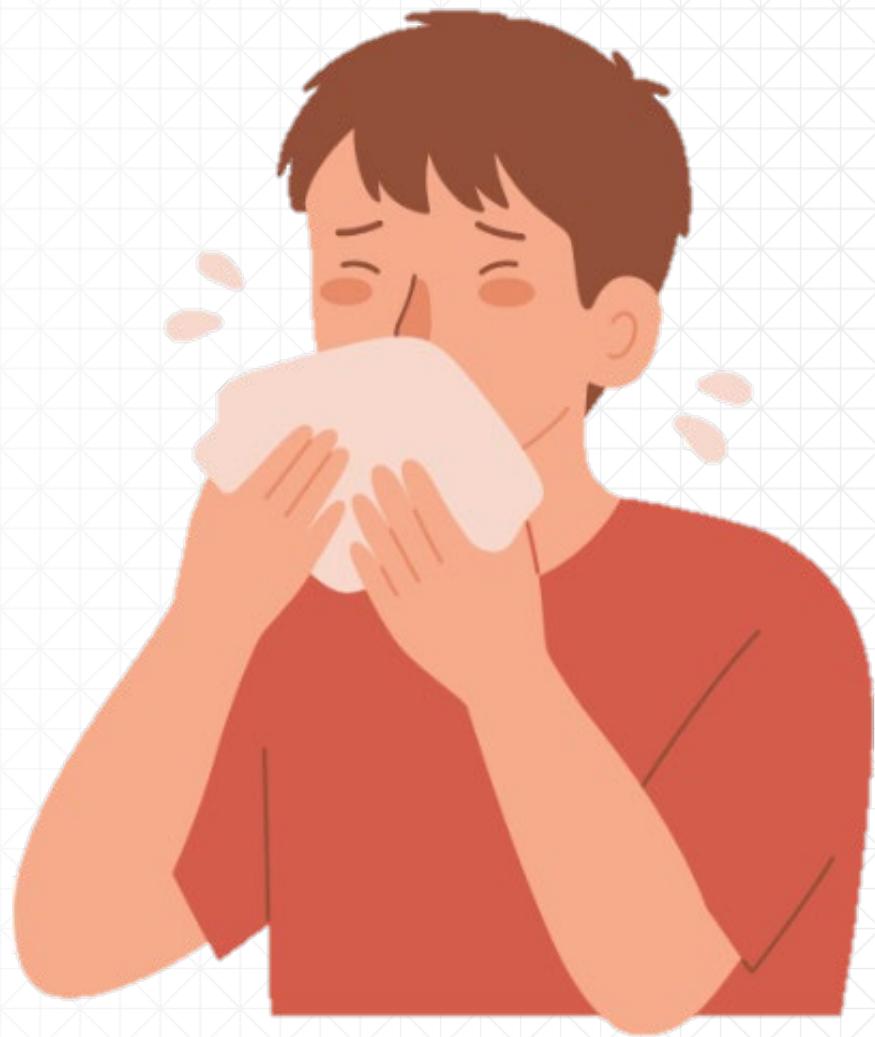


# Signs and Symptoms



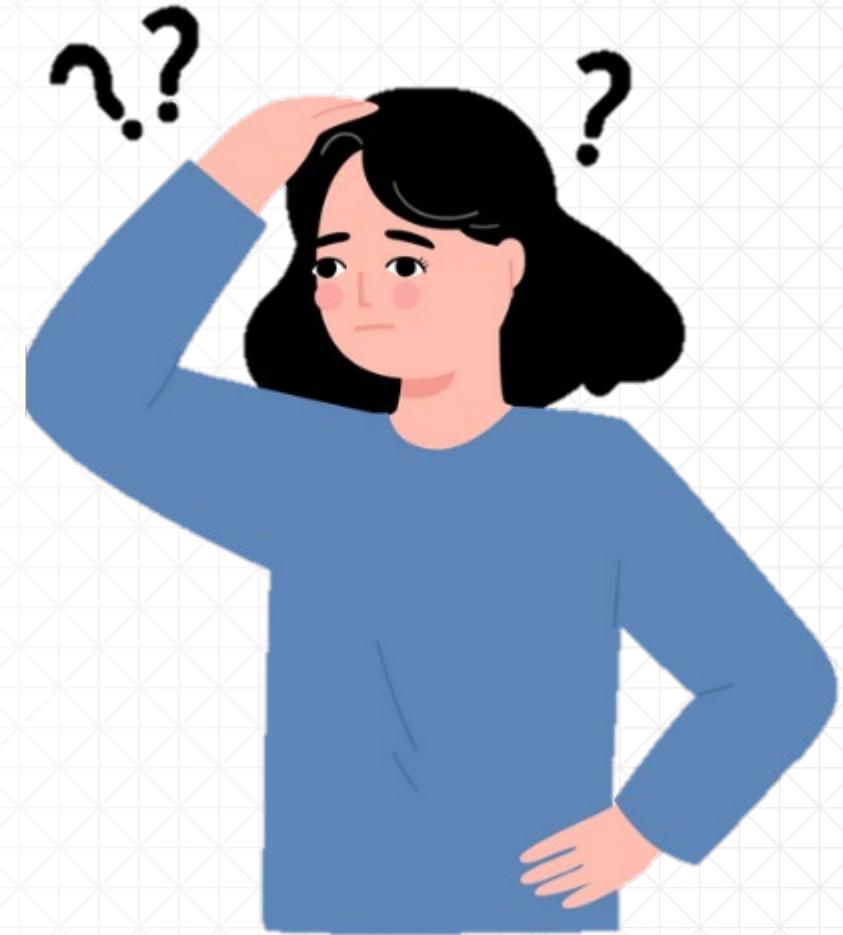
# Physical Symptoms

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



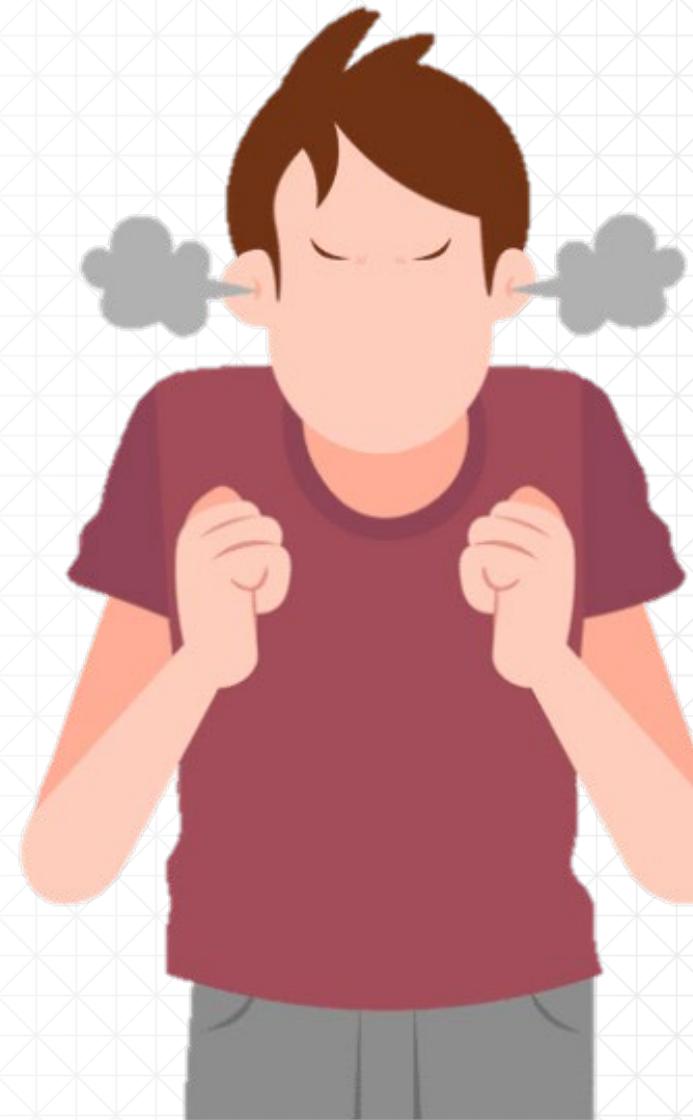
# Behavioral Symptoms

- 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



# 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



Consider reaching out to these **free, confidential** resources:

**Concern Hotline:** Call 1-800-447-1985 (Legal, financial, and stress support available to farmers and agricultural workers nationwide 24/7)

**National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** Call or text 988 (Available 24/7)

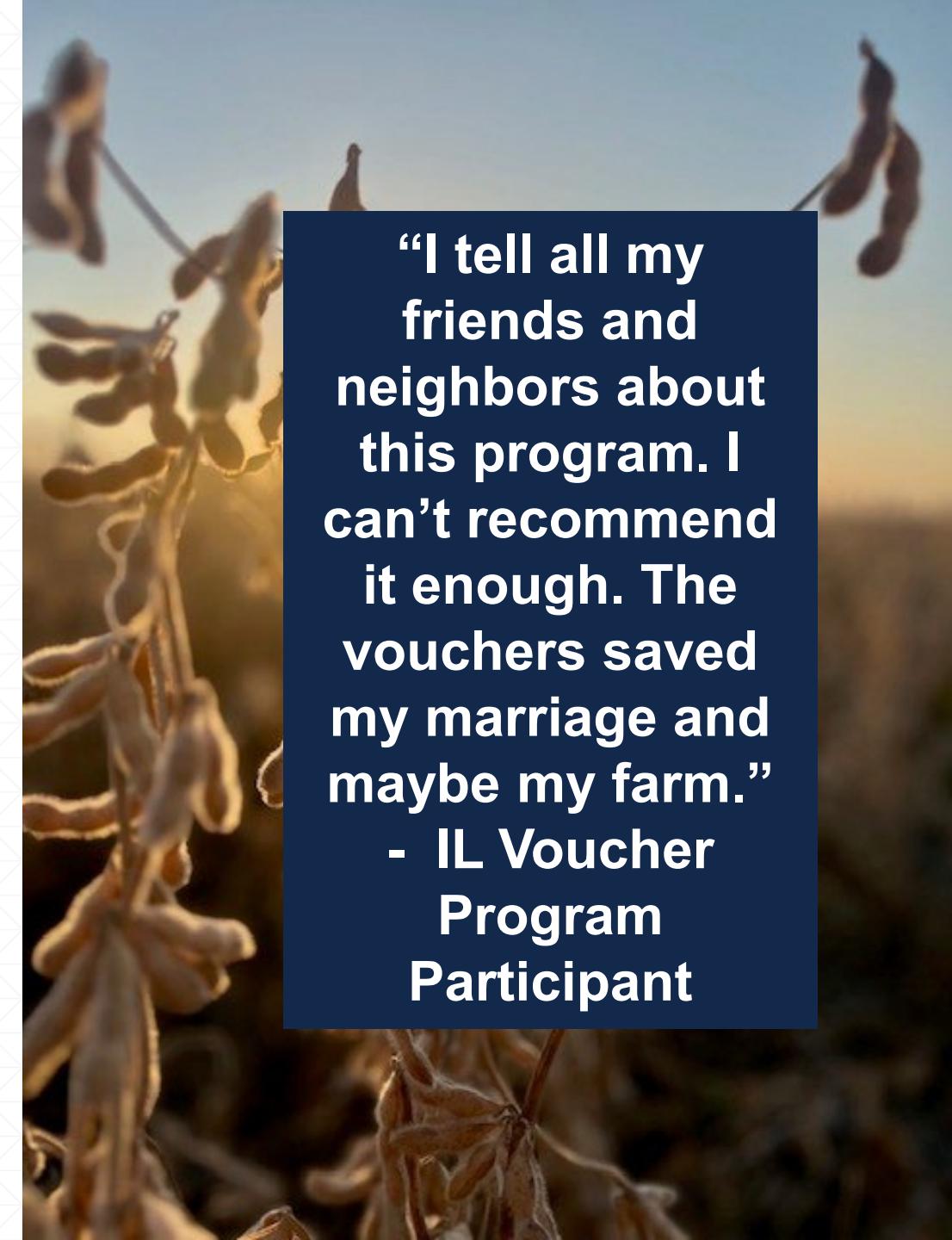
**Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741741 (Available 24/7)

**Farm Aid Hotline:** Call 1-800-327-6243 (Mon-Fri 8am-8pm CST)

Funded by: USDA-NIFA 2020-70028-32728, 2023-70028-41284, 2024-70028-43552

# 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



**“ 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?

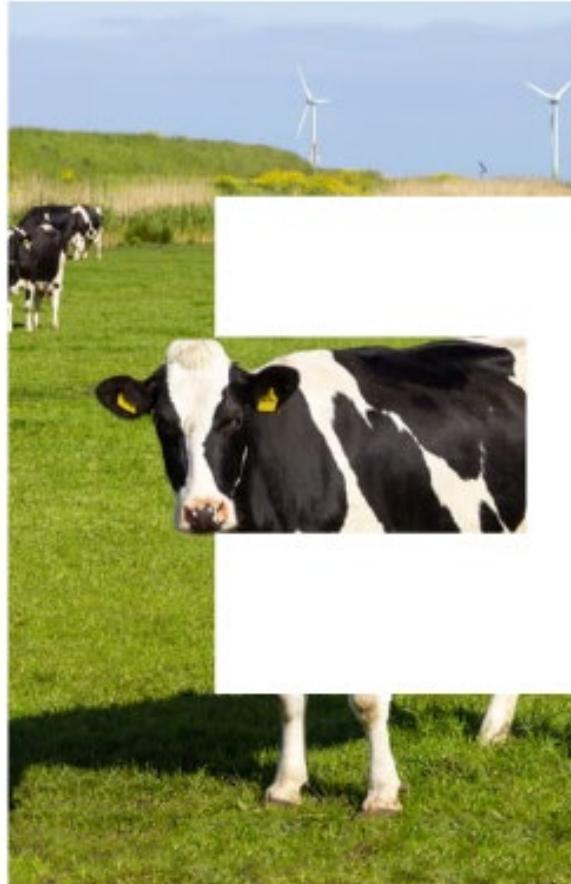


## Reassure

- 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 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:

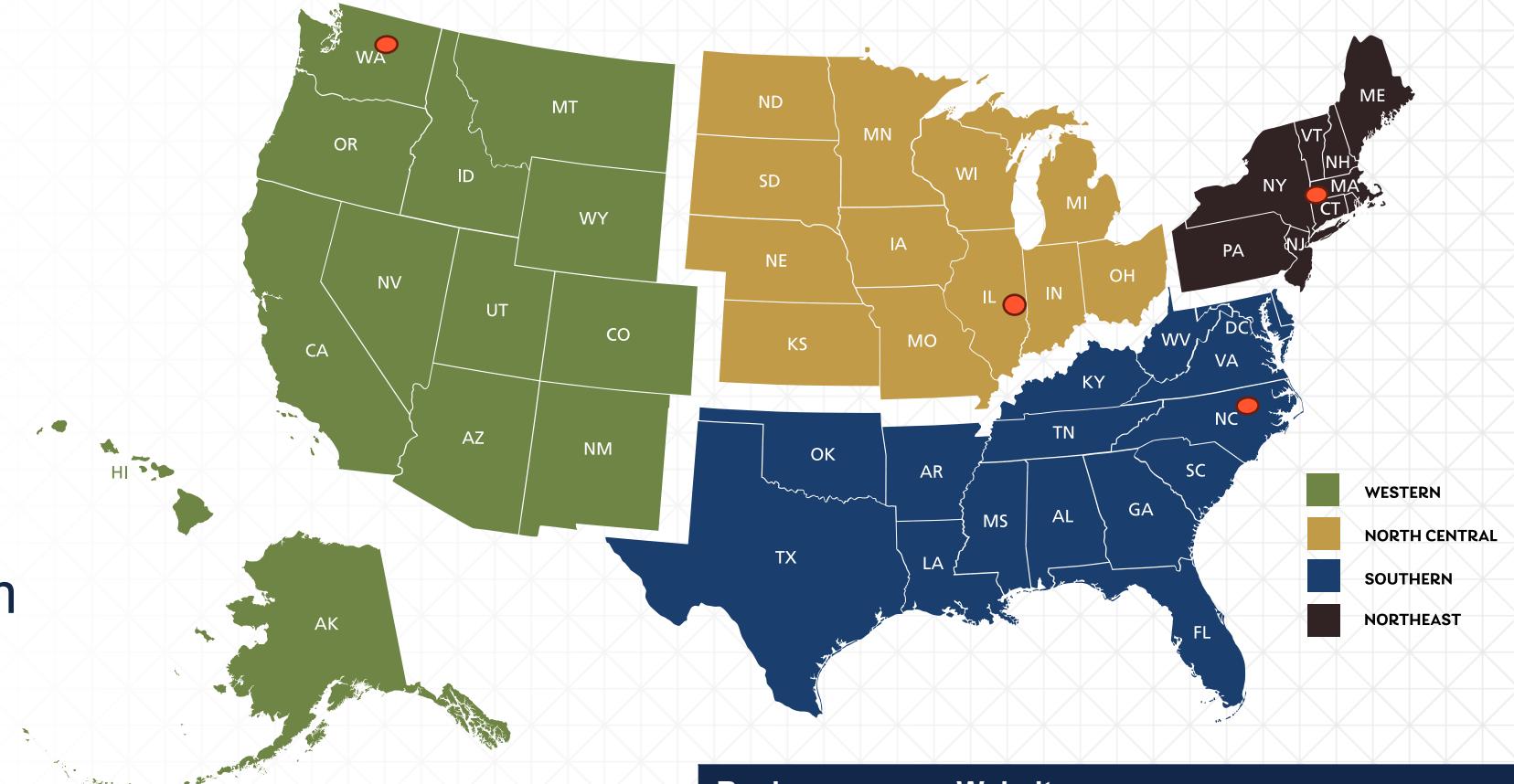
# Table Talk

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

# Regional and National Resources

# Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN)

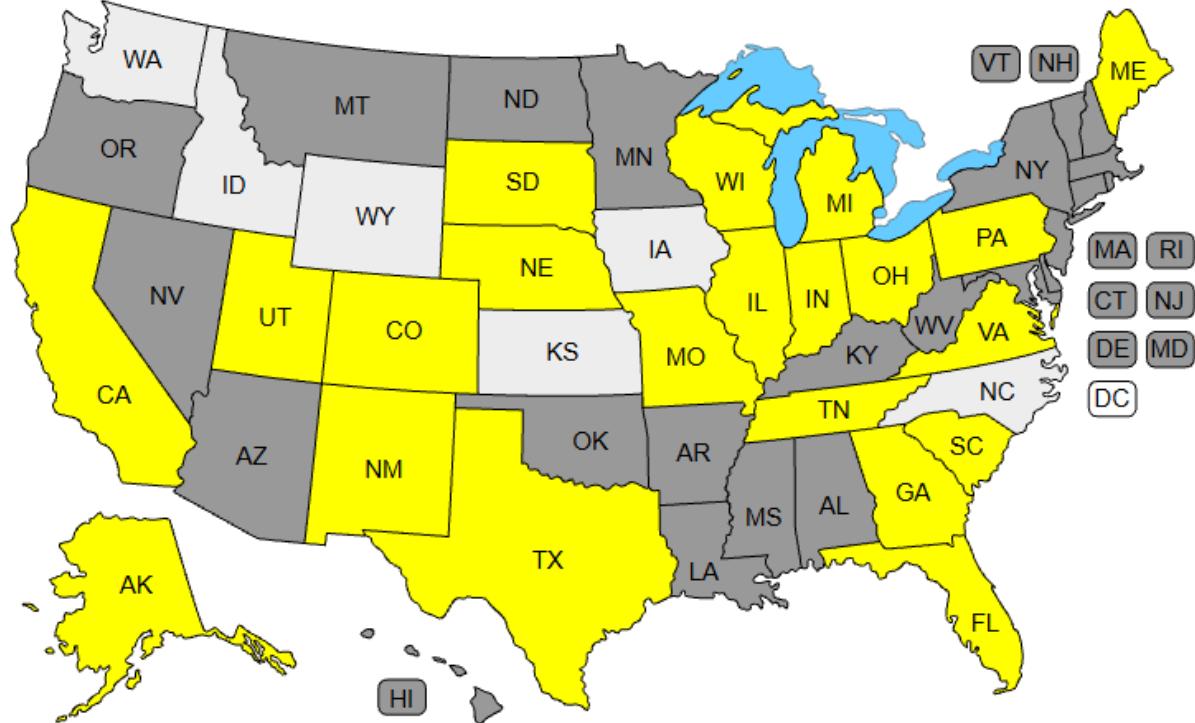
- 2018 Farm Bill authorized funding for 4 regional farm stress assistance networks.
- Increased resources and services for farm stress management and mental health.



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<sup>✓</sup>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?**