



## Views from VanDeWalle

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### **Mental Health is Just as Important as Financial Health**

Picture this. Someone is showing physical signs of stress – maybe it's a heart attack or even a broken leg. Who might arrive to the scene first? It probably will be an EMT or other first responder. Their role is to keep the person alive or comfortable until that person reaches the hospital where doctors and other medical professionals will treat that patient. What happens if a person is showing signs of mental distress or even suicidal signs? There are classes available called, “Mental Health First Aid” which provides people the opportunity to properly help others receive professional help he/she might need. Things as simple as listening to the person non-judgmentally and encouraging them to seek professional help might just save that person’s life. Calling the suicide hotline with the person can also help that person realize that they can get through the crisis in their life.

Farmers and ranchers have many stressors in their life. Weather challenges and disasters like many Nebraskans have recently experienced have led to uncertainty in their crop and livestock operations. Machinery breakdowns, debt loads, volatile markets, long days with sleep deprivation, government regulations, and the stress of holding onto a multi-generational farm/ranch all play a part of the stress and mental health of a farmer or rancher. Farmers and ranchers know the importance of planning and talking about their financial health to bankers, financial planners, spouses, etc. but might not realize how important it is to spend time on their mental health.

A North Dakota State University Extension publication reminds farmers that “just as farms need to be operated in a sustainable way that preserves resources for the long term, an individual’s life needs to be managed in a sustainable way for long-term well-being. Feeling overly tired, overwhelmed by stresses or under constant pressure is not a recipe for a sustainable lifestyle.” There are physical, mental, emotional/spiritual, personal/relational, work/professional and financial/practical strategies for coping with stress. For example, get at least 7-8 hours of restful sleep is one physical way to take care of yourself. Take 10 minutes and reflect on blessings in your life in as a mental strategy to dealing with stress. Emotional or spiritual coping strategies are to pray, do random acts of kindness and something as simple as eating a meal with a friend or loved one. A personal or relational coping strategy is to plan a small getaway with a family member or spend time playing games with family or friends. For a work strategy, talk to other farmers about their strategies or plan your next day at the end of a work day and set priorities ahead of time. Finally, financial/practical coping strategies are to schedule time to organize your records or finances monthly and create a family budget and live within your means.

At the Mental Health First Aid workshop, an action plan to help others with potential mental health problems is referred to as “ALGEE.” The action plan is as follows:

- Assess for risk of suicide or harm.
- Listen non-judgmentally.
- Give re-assurance and information.
- Encourage appropriate professional help.
- Encourage self-help and other support strategies.



If you or someone you know needs help, there are several resources. The Nebraska Family Helpline can be reached at 1-888-866-8660, the Nebraska Rural Response Hotline at 1-800-464-0258 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

## **Disaster Resources**

Nebraska Extension is pushing out information to help. Please use or share the website <https://flood.unl.edu> It's a key resource full of science-based information

Knowing the legal rights, benefits and resources available to low-income survivors of a disaster is crucial to recovery. Legal Aid of Nebraska can help. Apply online at [disaster.legalaidofnebraska.org/apply](https://disaster.legalaidofnebraska.org/apply), or call the Disaster Relief Hotline at 1-844-268-5627.