

Views from VanDeWalle

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Sleepless in Nebraska

With planting and other field work underway, farmers put in lots of long hours. This week I've decided to share some information that not only applies to farmers, but anyone who might be working long hours or simply isn't getting enough sleep. My colleague, Susan Harris-Broomfield has written the following article with some interesting facts and tips on getting more sleep.

How much sleep did you get last night? If you live in Nebraska, there is about a 30% chance that it was less than seven hours and not enough for a body to recharge all its parts. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has made it official: Sleep Deprivation is a public health problem. Fifty years ago, Americans slept an hour to an hour and a half more than they do today. Some might be proud of accomplishing more in a day and sleeping less, but they should consider how the body deprives itself of crucial processes when that happens. While proper nutrition and activity rank right up there, sleep performs magic that no other body function does:

- Sleep flushes diseased and damaged bits of toxins and waste from our brains. It also performs a process called consolidation, which cements information learned throughout the day into the brain and retains it.
- Sleep plays a role in metabolism and helps control hunger hormones.
- Sleeping triggers tissue growth that heals injuries and creates virus-fighting cells to boost immunity to illness.
- Creativity, energy levels, and positive moods increase with sleep, while it also fights stress.
- Muscles and organs rebuild critical cells during sleep.

Sleep is the single most effective way to reset body functions for good health. Going without it means risking a whole slew of body breakdowns, including high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, and even obesity.

One of the main symptoms of all sleep problems is daytime sleepiness. Sometimes sleep deprivation will show itself in other ways, such as irritability, confusion, memory loss, concentration problems, or depression. This can be deadly for farmers and ranchers using heavy equipment, handling chemicals, or working with livestock. A study from colleagues at UNMC (Siu et al., 2015) involved farmers performing four balance tests using a pressure mat for several weeks. As sleep time decreased, they became less stable – 7.4 times worse when they slept less than their average weekly hours the night before the test, and that was still with at least five hours of sleep! In another study, adolescent youth on farms were significantly more likely to get injured if they slept less than 9.25 hours per night (Stallones et al., 2006).

It is crucial for farmers and ranchers to respect the need for adequate sleep and make it a priority in daily routines. A few ways to achieve better quality sleep include the following:

- Go to bed, and more importantly, get up at the same time every day. Use the alarm clock the right way: NO snooze button. Get up and get out on time.
- Sleep in a room temperature of 60 to 68 degrees.
- Turn off all devices so there is no lighting up, dinging, vibrating, or ringing. Phone alarms still work in silenced or airplane modes.



- Allow eyes to take in plenty of bright light first thing in the morning and avoid it in the evening. Lower lights in the house after the sun goes down.
- Consider a sleep study either in-home or at a clinic or hospital near you. Ask your physician. For program information about sleep deprivation, and how to conquer it, contact Nebraska Extension's Rural Health, Wellness, and Safety Educator Susan Harris-Broomfield: susan.harris@unl.edu or (308) 832-0645.