



Views from VanDeWalle

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Ag Offers Rewards, but can be Stressful Too

Recently I presented a webinar with my colleague, Glennis McClure that reminds us of daily stress in our lives, especially for farmers and ranchers. Agriculture is a stressful occupation and while it provides numerous rewards, it does not come without challenges. Too much stress can contribute to health issues and make us more accident prone.

The National Center for Farmer Health points out that stress is the human response to any change that is perceived as a challenge or a threat. Changes that cause worry, frustration or upheaval and seem beyond our control can cause stress. An example that hits close to home for Nebraska farmers and ranchers is the recent weather-related disasters. Attitudes, perceptions and meanings that people assign to events determine a large part of one's stress levels.

There are many symptoms of stress that impact our body, mind and actions. For example, physical symptoms might include nausea, shortness of breath, shaky legs, headaches, and fatigue just to name a few. When under stress, some people may experience moodiness, frustration, anger, loneliness, anxiety or depression and even suicidal thoughts. Sleeping too much or too little, increased use of alcohol or drugs, withdrawal from others and exhibiting nervous behaviors are all examples of how our actions might change when stressed.

The good news is there are many ways to reduce stress. A summary of ways to decrease stress as compiled by Susan Harris-Broomfield, Nebraska extension educator includes:

- Exercising ½ hour a day every day or every other day
- Getting enough sleep to meet the demands of your body
- Accepting that stress is a part of life and not dwelling on it
- Learning to relax which could include taking deep breaths
- Balance work and family time
- Connect with sources of support
- Eat a well-balanced diet
- Talk with a friend or counselor
- Don't be afraid to ask for help.

If you recognize someone in distress, express your concern to them and ask about their situation. Do this in a non-judgmental way and actively listen to them. People in distress might turn to suicide and a majority of people who attempt suicide have given a clue or warning to someone. Don't ignore indirect references to death or suicide. In fact it is a myth that talking about suicide with someone may give them the idea to carry it out. Asking someone about potential suicidal thoughts they may have or discussing it openly is one of the most helpful things you can do for someone who is suicidal. If someone indicates they are thinking of suicide, do not leave them alone. Call for help and/or take them to a hospital or health care provider. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline can be reached at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). This hotline can be accessed day or night.

In keeping with the #NebraskaStrong idea, remember to be strong and seek out help as needed and assist others who may need help. In Nebraska, our Rural Response Hotline can be



accessed at 1-800-464-0258. When a farmer, rancher, or rural resident calls the hotline and requests help with stress related issues, they are connected to an experienced staff person who is trained to help callers through the Counseling, Outreach and Mental Health Therapy program. Staff members are trained to work with individuals over the phone or in their home, providing confidential information and assistance.

A recording of the webinar, in addition to resources utilized for this program can be found at <https://go.unl.edu/wellnessintoughtimes>. More resources, especially disaster-related resources can be accessed on the flood.unl.edu website. For more information, contact me at brandy.vandewalle@unl.edu or (402)759-3712.