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Rural Stress

This is not my first article about stress, and it won't be the last. According to a survey that a colleague and I conducted late last year, stress was the number one health issue needing attention.

Stress can be positive, giving us a competitive edge. However, when that stress turns into negative distress, it is no longer healthy for our well-being. In our part of Nebraska, many are subject to stresses and distress resulting from agriculture.

Farming is among the most stressful jobs in America, based on factors that affect a farmer's financial, physical, and mental health, according to John Shutske, Professor and Extension Specialist at the University of Wisconsin – Madison with over 30 years of experience with the agricultural community.

A 2016 study showed that people involved in agriculture have the highest overall rate of suicide among all occupational groups, with their suicide rate being almost 60% higher than the next closest industry. Farmers may refer to themselves as “full time gamblers”, a fitting title. Complex factors such as markets and weather are impossible to control directly, and these influence the livelihood of a farmer.

Shutske says stress is a double-edged sword. A little stress can serve as a constructive motivator, pushing us to action. However, too much stress can damage our health, compromise safety, and sabotage personal relationships. It reduces our capacity to consider and evaluate optional solutions to complex problems, and can limit our power to make sound decisions. Stress can also manifest itself as a vicious cycle with escalating consequences that can paralyze business owners or their families.

With symptoms of stress, such as moodiness, anger, loneliness, anxiety, lack of energy, sleep deprivation, low self-esteem, constant worrying, forgetfulness, overeating, or increased use of alcohol or drugs, it might be time to talk to someone about it. If you or someone you know needs help with stress management or would like to talk to someone confidentially, Nebraska has some great resources:

- **Rural Response Hotline offers no-cost vouchers for confidential mental health services for persons affected by the rural crisis, also offering information about farm mediation clinics - 800-464-0258**
- **Farm Mediation is a way to resolve disputes involving farm loans or other issues - 800-446-4071**
- **Nebraska Legal Aid – [Legal Aid of Nebraska](#)**
- **Nebraska Resource and Referral System (NRRS) lists toll-free numbers, websites, and email contacts to help you connect faster to the services you are seeking. Visit [Nebraska Resource and Referral System](#).**