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Stressful Times

Commodity prices have you down? Trying to cut costs without reducing profitability? Putting in long days and late nights? If this describes your situation, you are not alone.

In fact, the Nebraska 2016 Farm Financial Health Survey conducted by the University Of Nebraska - Lincoln's Agricultural Economics Department showed that over 77% of producers surveyed are concerned that they may not be able to obtain needed operating capital this year, about 45% of participants felt that their overall financial condition would decline in 2017, and 54% felt financially stressed.

Stress is anxiety, strain, or tension caused by a new burden or outside force, resulting in an internal struggle that often causes apprehension, misgiving, or uneasiness (Webster's dictionary). While stress is a normal part of life, too much stress can trigger physical illness. Nebraska Medicine reports that if stress is constant, the high levels of cortisol released from long-term stress can increase blood cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood pressure that are common risk factors for heart disease. Those who suffer from chronic stress can also develop depression. If left untreated, depression can lead to suicide.

A startling statistic obtained by a Center for Disease Control study found that the agriculture occupation has the highest rate of suicide (84.5 per 100,000 people) of any other occupation. The National Farm Medicine Center in Wisconsin tracked farm suicides during the 1980s in the Upper Midwest and found that suicide rates were 58 for every 100,000 farmers and ranchers. That means that suicide rates today are more than 50 percent higher than they were in the 1980s, at the peak of the farm crisis.

Factors that might contribute to suicide among farmers include potential financial losses, unwillingness to seek mental health services (which might be limited in rural areas), and stresses of holding onto multi-generational farms, just to name a few. If you notice someone you love suddenly changing his or her behavior, something could be going on. For example, depressed people may become more emotional and irritable quickly, or stop doing activities they enjoy.

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 – legalaidofnebraska.org
- 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 nrrs.ne.gov.