

Farm and Ranch Mental Health: Stressors, Barriers, and Strategies

This brief provides information on stressors for farmers and ranchers, barriers limiting access to resources and mental health care for this group, and strategies for limiting farm and ranch stress as well as removing barriers to mental health care.

THE FACTS

- Chronic stress can lead to feelings of anxiety and depression, changes in diet, sleeplessness, poor physical health, and substance abuse.
- A 2020 study found that suicides among male farmers, ranchers, and agriculture workers was 1.6 times higher than the general population of males.
- Agriculture as an occupation has the 4th highest suicide rate among males.
- Trend data from 2003 to 2017 show an increase in farmer suicide, especially among older, white male farmers.
- There are no clear data on female farmers and suicide, although stressors specific to female farmers and ranchers are known.

THE STRESSORS

- Financial concerns
- The demands of farming – long workdays, no time off, injury risk, and market uncertainty
- Weather, climate, and environmental challenges
- Legal and regulatory burdens
- Social isolation, familial conflicts, and other psychological stressors

THE BARRIERS

- Distrust of medical/mental health professionals as well as public institutions and agencies
- Lack of access and lack of time off to seek care
- Prohibitive costs of mental health services
- Discrimination when seeking care
- Mental health stigma

THE STRATEGIES

- Farmer-led resource delivery
- Cooperatives and integration of farm stress resources in Cooperative Extension
- Curriculum and training for mental health and farm service providers
- Technology-supported platforms such as telehealth
- Greater transparency in federal programs, assuring accessibility for socially disadvantaged farmers

Conclusion

Farm stress is a complex issue, but when farmers and ranchers are able to use the resources available to them, the effects of stress can be eased.

