

A grayscale photograph of a man wearing a baseball cap, looking out over a vast field of crops. The image is used as a background for the document cover.

ON THE FARM  
**DISCUSSION  
GUIDE**

Mississippi State University Extension

**ONTHEFARM.LIFE**



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™  
EXTENSION



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# THE FILM

## ON THE FARM

As symbols of independence and the rewards of hard work, few things are more quintessentially American than the family farm. But small farms in the U.S. have been struggling to survive. And it isn't just the farms that are at risk – it's farmers.

Farmers have experienced high suicide rates, addiction, depression, and stress-related illness, all made worse because the problems often remain hidden. Like many Americans, farmers are reluctant to acknowledge mental health issues, and they are unlikely to use resources that aren't easily accessible to people living in rural areas.

Screenings of *On the Farm* can help change that. The film provides four compelling portraits of farmers who, in different ways, illustrate the stresses that weigh on America's small family farmers. Each story is approximately 12 minutes long and features a farmer sharing his challenges with remarkable candor – and also with hope. These men, from different types of farms, at different ages, and with different challenges, serve as models. Hearing their stories can let other farmers know that they are not alone, that help is available, that talking helps, and that things can get better.

*On The Farm* was produced by the Mississippi State University Extension in collaboration with the Mississippi State Television Center to shed light on the joys and challenges of farm life.

### FEATURED FARMERS

#### Edward Jenkins

works with his brother to farm 2000 acres in Grace, Mississippi, primarily raising soybeans & corn. He hopes to hand the farm down to his son and nephew. This film also features Dr. Devon Meadowcroft, an Agricultural Economist.

#### Will Gilmer's

Sulligent, Alabama 600-acre farm has been in his family for more than a hundred years. The last 70 years it's been a dairy farm (400 head of cattle), but dairy farming isn't financially sustainable, so he is transitioning to raising beef cattle. This film also features an Agricultural Economist, Dr. Jeff Johnson.

#### Steven Sanford

family farm in Collins, Mississippi is 2500 acres planted with soybeans, peanuts, corn, and sorghum, and supporting 3000 head of cattle. A crash on a rural road while hauling equipment sidelined him with serious injuries, forcing family, friends, and neighbors to pick up the slack as he recovers. This film also features a Family Life Specialist, Dr. Alisha Hardman.

#### Nathan Casburn

and his father farm 1500 acres in the Mississippi delta (Sumner). They grow mostly soybeans on the land that's been in the family since the early 1900s. For Nathan, the farm has been a place of healing and recovery from a serious opioid addiction that began with pain medication prescribed after a high school car accident. This film also features Dr. Michael Nadorff, a Clinical Psychologist.

#### Andy Gipson

Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce, State of Mississippi, is featured at the end of the film. In addition, Dr. Ted Matthews, a Farm Stress Specialist, is featured in the film.

# BACKGROUND INFORMATION

## From The Film

- More than 30% of the nation's dairy farms have closed since 2010.
- In 2003, Mississippi had 270 dairy farms. Now it has 60. Alabama went from 110 to 25.
- Farming is the 10th most dangerous job in America.
- Transportation incidents are the leading cause of farm fatalities.
- Three of every four farmers and farm workers have been directly or indirectly affected by the opioid crisis.
- 75% of people living in rural America say that opioids are easily attainable, but only one third say treatment is available.



# ORGANIZING AN EVENT

The discussion facilitator may or may not be the same person who organizes the event. If you're planning a screening, here are some things to consider.

In the U.S., safe spaces to talk about difficult issues are rare. By convening a screening of *On the Farm* – and welcoming people to learn and share with open hearts – you are giving your community a precious gift.

## BEFORE THE EVENT

### o CLEARLY DEFINE YOUR OBJECTIVES

As you reflect on what you hope to accomplish, think about

- how the screening can benefit the community you serve
- what outcomes are realistic (e.g., is the end game to get people talking, or do you expect individuals or the group to agree on taking some sort of action?)

### o IDENTIFY THE TARGET AUDIENCE(S)

- Who needs to attend the screening in order to meet your objectives?
- Is the event for members of a particular group (e.g., the staff of a particular social service agency, a single church, or a college class), or the general public? Is your event invitation-only, or open to anyone?

### o FIND PARTNERS

If your event is public, every partner you add will strengthen your outreach capabilities and create a more powerful community screening. Each partner can also strengthen your own organization as you build relationships.

### o DEFINE YOUR CAPACITY

If you plan to work with others, be clear about what you can – and can't – bring to the table. Are you offering a venue? Funding? Event organizing services? Publicity? Be clear about your capacity so you can seek partners who complement your strengths, and so partners can have clear expectations of you.

### o SET THE AGENDA

#### SAMPLE AGENDA

For a 2 hour event:

1. Welcome/Introductions (5 min.)
2. Film Screening (45 min.)
3. Discussion Ground Rules & Initial Reactions (10 min.)
4. Stretch Break / Refreshments (10 min.)
5. Invited Speaker shares their story (10 min.)
6. Discussion (20 min.)
7. Planning Action Steps (15 min.)
8. Thank yous (5 min.)

### Determine the length of your event and how it will be structured.

- Will this be a one-time gathering, or part of a series of meetings?
- You'll want to leave at least 45 minutes for discussion and planning action steps. Add that to the portion of film you intend to show (12 minutes per story, 45 minutes for the full film) and 10 minutes for "housekeeping" (introductions, acknowledgments, explanations of process, etc.).
- Do you want to invite speakers or community members who have a related story to share (and how much time will you give them to speak following the film)?

# ORGANIZING AN EVENT

## o SECURE A LOCATION

When choosing a venue, consider:

**Accessibility:** For public events, make sure the venue is accessible to people with disabilities and that the location is easy to get to and comfortable for your intended audience.

**Size:** The screening room should fit everyone comfortably without being so large that it inhibits interaction (particularly if building a supportive community is one of your goals).

**AV:** Be sure the venue has adequate projection and sound. If you intend to stream the film, be sure there is strong Internet service.

**Auxiliary spaces:** If you plan to break your audience into smaller groups for the discussion, be sure the facility can accommodate this. If you plan to provide childcare, be sure the site includes safe space for children where they can make noise without disturbing the screening or discussion.

## o SELECT A DATE AND TIME

**Check venues:** Be sure that your venue is available on the day and time you have chosen and that you take whatever steps are necessary to reserve it.

**Avoid conflicts:** Check congregation, organization, community and school holiday calendars to ensure that your selected date doesn't conflict with another event likely to draw the same audience.

**Ask your partners:** Consider the days and times that partners have successfully drawn an audience in the past.

## o FIND A FACILITATOR

Try to identify someone who can make people feel welcome and energized, and who will keep the discussion moving rather than lecture or publicize their own work. Give the facilitator a copy of this guide and ask that they review it prior to the event.

## o ASSIGN ADDITIONAL TASKS

Make sure you know who will be responsible for things like:

- reproducing handouts
- bringing refreshments
- creating & posting signs (for public events, so people can easily find the screening room); bringing name tags, markers, sign-in sheets, etc.
- operating the AV equipment and bringing a copy of the film

## o GET THE WORD OUT

Send invitations and/or text, call, and email friends, family, congregants, organization members, and/or everyone you can think of that is part of your target audience.

Share event information widely, including providing reproducible copies of publicity resources to organizations that have newsletters or social media followers (e.g., churches, civic groups, youth groups, etc.). Ask all partners to spread the word to their members.

# EVENT GOALS

No single event or initiative can prevent every suicide or ensure that there will never be another addict. But community screenings of *On the Farm* can create a climate where problems are more likely to be addressed because stories told on film are uniquely well suited to simultaneously convey information, evoke emotion, and provide sparks for substantive conversations. Screenings followed by discussions can:

- Provide hope to those who are struggling as they hear the stories of peers who have struggled and survived
- Create a general awareness for farmers' situations
- Create empathy for farmers who are struggling
- Give farmers a chance to feel supported as others in their community learn of struggles that may have been previously invisible
- Provide an “excuse” to engage in conversations that people want to have but that can be hard to start
- Provide communities with an opportunity to gather and consider actions they can take to support farmers

Specific project goals include that :

## FARMERS WILL

- Walk away knowing at least one specific resource they can go to for help
- Have an opportunity to talk about their challenges
- Know that they are not alone in their struggles; others have had similar experiences and there are people who understand and support them
- Gain a deeper understanding of some of the emotions they may be experiencing

## COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND STUDENTS WILL

- Increase their awareness and understanding of farm stress, including understanding that even people who are strong and stoic can be experiencing mental health challenges
- Understand the importance of being on the lookout for opportunities to be a support for farmers, even absent an obvious crisis
- Discover ways they can be supportive, including learning about available resources for people they know who may be struggling

## PROFESSIONAL SERVICE PROVIDERS WILL

- Increase their awareness and understanding of farm stress, so that they are better prepared to spot someone in need and/or provide care for farmers who come to them for help

Keep these goals in mind as you plan events and facilitate discussions.



# MARKETING THE EVENT

Once you have completed the steps of organizing an event, it is finally time to spread the word. You have secured a location, selected a date and time, found a facilitator, and assigned additional tasks, and now you are finally ready to market your event. If you would like to increase participation and impact of your community screening, here are a few marketing tips to help you meet that goal.

- **Create a Social Media Campaign**

We live in an age of social media, so use that to your advantage. Using the graphics provided in the toolkit, share the message of farm stress and *On the Farm* with your community through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or other social media platforms. An effective social media campaign will engage your target audience and get them excited to attend the screening event.

- **Engage Community Resources**

Print and local news media are not dead. Take advantage of local newspapers, radio and TV stations, or maybe even local influencers to market your event. Use the provided press release to share with these media outlets. Engaging with your community resources will allow for a wider distribution of the message of *On the Farm* and your event.

- **The 'Old Fashion Way'**

If you really want to make a good impression on potential audience members of your event, try the old fashion way. Take the time to create invitations or use the marketing material provided such as brochures and push cards to share information about your screening with potential viewers. This may take more time but should be worth it in the end.

- **Get the Word Out**

Word of mouth gets you farther than you may think. Share the message of *On the Farm* and the information about your event with your friends and family and make sure they do the same. Enlist volunteers to spread the word of your event to their circles. This may not be the only marketing technique you will want to use, but it can foster excitement in rural communities where word travels fast.

Please see the marketing resources included in the appendix of this document. Brochures, push cards, social media graphics, and a movie poster featuring quotes for public health professionals and agricultural producers that have experienced *On the Farm* have been provided. If you have difficulty downloading the graphics for use, please reach out to the *On the Farm* team through the website, [www.onthefarm.life](http://www.onthefarm.life).

# FACILITATION TIPS

## BEFORE THE EVENT

If it was easy to talk publicly about mental health issues, you probably wouldn't need this event. But because it isn't, people are suffering who could be helped. As a facilitator, you can make a difference in people's lives by creating an atmosphere that encourages openness. This section provides tips on how to make that happen.

As a facilitator, your role is to shepherd a process that enables people to

- feel comfortable
- share honestly and respectfully
- learn from one another
- stay on track
- use the available time in a purposeful manner
- work through any challenges that may arise.

Facilitators should avoid

- telling people what they will experience, think, or feel. This almost always provokes resistance.
- providing answers to participants or interpreting the film for them.
- using jargon or language that might be heard as condescending or judgmental.
- making yourself the center of attention by responding to each comment or thanking people after they speak.
- asking your own questions (except for clarification) or making interpretive comments.
- speaking more than a little about your personal or professional background or content expertise.
- taking exclusive responsibility for the success of the conversation. If there's a concern about how the dialogue is unfolding, raise it matter-of-factly. If the concern is shared by the group, guide everyone to work together to figure out how to address it. If the group doesn't share your concern, move on.
- losing your cool. If you are having a hard time managing feelings, find the right spot in the agenda to take a break, go off by yourself to collect yourself, call on your resilience, remember your strengths, and remember your role.

## What Makes a Good Facilitator?

The best facilitators are collaborative, fair, respectful, relatable, curious, calm, encouraging, trustworthy, and transparent about process. They are

- willing to make space for a diverse group and to listen carefully to all involved.
- able to lead with a question rather than an assertion of fact.
- able to keep from entering into the conversation themselves.
- able to keep a confidence if anyone in the group asks for confidentiality as a pre-condition to honest sharing.
- able to recognize the difference between a difficult or intense conversation and a discussion that is so uncomfortable it is no longer productive, and able to accept the tension inherent in the former while also being confident enough to intervene in the latter
- strong enough to redirect the group if it needs to be guided back to ground rules and purposes, and graceful enough to do so with care.



# FACILITATION TIPS

Even the most experienced facilitators benefit by preparing themselves in advance. So...

## Before the Event

Preview the film.

View *On the Farm* and reflect on your own experiences and emotions around the issues it raises. That way you aren't trying to process your own raw reactions while you are also trying to engage others in a dialogue.

Choose discussion prompts.

Find out who the audience is, review the discussion questions in this guide, and choose a handful that you think will be most useful. In particular, choose your opening and closing questions.

Anticipate potential glitches.

Plan your strategies for dealing with things that might derail the dialogue (e.g., offensive language, raised voices, a person who wants to dominate the time, people who interrupt while others are speaking, etc.). See the "Responding to Challenges" section for suggestions.

Educate yourself on the issues.

Though the facilitator should not take on the role of expert, it can be helpful to know important facts and be aware of common misconceptions. The sites listed in the Resources section of this Guide are a good place to start to familiarize yourself with the issues.

# FACILITATION TIPS

## During the Discussion

- Use your spoken language, body language, and tone to create a welcoming atmosphere where people feel comfortable expressing all sorts of views. Convey the feeling that “we’re all in this together.” Steer participants away from rhetoric that seeks to identify enemies rather than work towards solutions.
- Explain your role. Be clear, concise, and transparent.
- Together with the group, briefly establish basic ground rules for the discussion. These are intended to create safe space and keep the discussion on track. Rules would typically include things like speaking only for oneself and not generalize or presume to know how others feel (sentences that start with “I”, not “we” or “everyone” or “people”), no yelling, no use of personal put-downs, start by sharing your name the first time you speak, etc.

As you establish guidelines, take care not to be seen as demanding “political correctness” or asking people to code switch from the routine way they speak. Help the group distinguish between language they may not like but can tolerate and “fighting words,” which should be off limits. Define “fighting words” as language that makes someone so angry or upset that they can no longer hear what the speaker is saying. It’s off limits not because it is offensive, but because it actually blocks the communication we’re striving for. Racial, sexual, and gender slurs often fall into the category of “fighting words.”

Depending on your situation, rules might also include agreement that what is said remains confidential. Encourage people to speak with others who were not present about topics that came up, but without attaching names to who said what and without repeating any story that was shared in confidence.

Invite people to add any other rules they think are essential and ask for some sign of agreement before moving on.

- Start things off by posing a question, but then be guided by the interests and needs of the group. As long as the conversation is more or less on topic, don’t feel like you need to impose a structure or ask a list of pre-determined questions.
- Be sure to leave time for planning action steps.

## Responding to Challenges

It’s common for people to respond with strong emotions when they are asked to speak about things they hold dear, like family, or experiences with addiction or death (especially the suicide of a loved one). As a facilitator, there are a range of strategies you can use to de-escalate if that emotional response overheats. Those strategies fall into two categories: prevention and response. Prevention strategies make it less likely that tensions will escalate in the first place. Responses are strategies to address tensions as they arise.

# FACILITATION TIPS

## Prevention

- Structure the discussion to provide everyone who wants to speak a chance to be heard. Depending on the size of your group, strategies might include using go-rounds (where each person takes a turn speaking), limiting opportunities to speak for a second or third time until everyone has had a first chance, and/or dividing the audience into small groups or pairs. You may also want to appoint a time keeper and place time limits on speakers.
- If your event has a particular purpose (e.g., encouraging participation in a local initiative), be sure that everyone understands the goal up front. If the discussion strays too far off topic, get things back on track by validating the importance of other concerns and then gently reminding speakers that the purpose of today's event is [fill in the blank]. Or politely ask the speaker to explain how what they are saying relates to the purpose. They may see a link that you don't and that can provide the group with valuable insight.
- Be consistent about intervening when people stray from the group's Conversation Agreement or ground rules. If you let things go with one person, it will be much harder to be seen as fair if you redirect another later. If you need to intervene, gently interrupt with a reminder of the ground rules. If the speaker needs help, offer an alternative way of phrasing or engaging that's in keeping with the rules.
- At the beginning of the discussion, remind people that they will be engaging in a dialogue, not a debate. A debate is about staking out a position and trying to convince everyone else that you are right and they are wrong. A dialogue is about exchanging ideas in order to learn from one another. That means actively listening as well as talking. In summary, the discussion is about learning, not winning. Winning happens when everyone in the room walks away with new insight and a deeper understanding of the issues.
- Remind people that when coping with mental health issues, one strategy does not fit all. What works for you might not be the best strategy for someone else. So participants don't need to insist that "We all should..." in order to feel supported in the option(s) they choose.
- Appoint a "vibes watcher" (preferably an elder, clergy, or a respected community member) and make sure that everyone in the room can see that person. At the beginning of the discussion, explain that the job of the "vibes watcher" is to listen for raised voices or keep an eye out for people who are especially upset, and to put a brake on the discussion if it heads into a dangerous direction. If they spot a problem, they will (silently) stand up. That action means that everything else in the room immediately comes to a stop. Once there is silence, invite everyone to take a deep breath. If needed, ask the vibes watcher to explain why they stood and engage the group in a process to address the immediate problem. Or use the pause to re-start the dialogue.
- Plan ahead to convene more than one meeting to address the topic. The prospect of having more time can alleviate a sense of urgency, so no one feels the need to say everything they are thinking before the end of the screening event.

# FACILITATION TIPS

## Response

Take the floor.

Should people begin to argue or shout, the very first step is to call a time out. Once you have regained control of the room, choose an action, or combination of actions, that interrupt the energy without shutting down the conversation. For example:

- Acknowledge the depth of feeling and importance of the issue and pause the discussion to give everyone a chance to write down a one or two sentence response. Quick poll the group – do a go-round giving everyone a chance to say something brief (or pass) before anyone else can speak
- Summarize the points of view of the major opponents. If they feel heard, they will feel less need to shout. Start with a phrase like, “Let me see if I understand...” If people are calm enough, you might ask those most engaged in the argument to summarize what they think the other person is saying.
- Transform the core issue under debate into a question and break into dyads or small groups to discuss that question. After several minutes, bring the group back together and ask for volunteers to share what came up for them in the breakout discussion.
- Remind the group that the purpose of dialogue is to increase understanding, not to win an argument. Or, remind the group that everyone in the room has good intentions and is trying to do their best. If the group has already identified common ground (e.g., we all want to protect our families; we all think life is precious; etc.), remind people of the views they share. Then ask if people feel ready to resume the discussion or if they want to take a short break.

Take a break. In instances where there has been a major blow up, change the energy in the room by interrupting it and giving people a few minutes to cool down and regain their composure. Depending on what has actually occurred, you may want to take additional steps:


- If someone appears to have hurt or offended another, pull those involved aside during the break. Work with them on examining the intention of what they said and check in with the offended party about whether that matched the effect that the speaking had on her/him. If there is a gap, work with both until the person/people offending can deliver their statement in an acceptable way.
- During the break, check in with people who are visibly upset. If someone is having a hard time controlling anger or grief or other strong feelings, speak to the person off to the side. Ask about the feeling, what sparked it, and what’s helped them to move through it in the past. Explain that you want to ensure that their perspective is heard by others and that you want to work with them to shift their speaking to make that possible. Ask them how you can best support them when the group comes back together.

When you reconvene, re-start the discussion by acknowledging what happened, noting that it is evidence of just how very important and meaningful this conversation is. Let people know that intensity is normal when we dialogue about things we care about. Express appreciation for people’s willingness to stay invested in the process. Depending on the situation, you may also want to take some time for

- speakers who have offended or disrupted to apologize to the group
- allowing others in the group to share their experience of what happened

# DISCUSSION PROMPTS

## Note to Facilitators

The questions are written in a variety of styles to meet the needs of different audiences. Some are best for general audiences, students, or communities who want to support farmers, others for health care providers, mental health professionals and agricultural experts. These latter questions are designated with this icon:  In some instances you'll want to change to the language in the question from "them" or "farmers" to "you." Or you'll want to follow up a question about the farmer in the film with a question like, "How does their experience compare to yours?"

Don't feel compelled to use all the questions or ask them in any particular order. Choose those that best meet the needs of your group and the purpose of your gathering. Typically, just one or two prompts are plenty to get a discussion going. Then be guided by the interests of the participants.



## QUESTIONS TO GET THINGS STARTED

If you were going to tell a friend what this film was about, what would you say?

What did you learn about farming or farmers or farm stress that you didn't know before you watched the film?


A few weeks from now, is there a particular person or moment from the film that you think you'll remember? What was it that especially stands out to you?

 Did you hear anything that sounded familiar? What do you have in common with the person/people in the film?

# GENERAL QUESTIONS


These questions are appropriate for any of the individual segments or all of the segments viewed together. If your group has only viewed one segment, you may need to adapt the wording slightly.

## Understanding Farm Stress

 What's your story? Is it anything like the people featured in the film? What did you think about the way they handled their challenges?


Agricultural Economist Devon Meadowcroft, shares that “farmers are under stress just because of uncertainties.” What is the relationship between chronic uncertainty and mental health? What's your answer if you replace “chronic uncertainty” with:


- success or failure being determined by things completely out of your control (like weather, price fluctuations, or supply chain glitches delaying essential parts or equipment)
- farming being a 24/7 job with no time for breaks

 The farmers in the film see farming as more than a job. It's a major part of their identity and for some, responsibility to carry on a multi-generation legacy. How does that complicate the impact on them when things on the farm don't go well, even if failures result from things completely beyond their control?

If a farmer's stress is like a pebble tossed into a pond, who else is affected by the ripples of that stress?

Steven Sanford echoes several of the farmers when he says, “people think all we do is go out there and drive a tractor.” Where do you suppose that stereotype comes from? How does it harm family farmers or reduce their chances of getting the help they need?

 Nathan Casburn says that one of the biggest hurdles in his recovery was, “saying I can't do this on my own, I need help with this.” How might this apply to farm stress as well as addiction? Why is asking for help so difficult?

 What was your reaction to the closing words from Commissioner Andy Gipson? Which of these things that he said rings true to your own experience?:

“Everyone knows someone struck by tragedy.”

“It can be hard to talk to someone who doesn't understand.”

“Out in the field it can be easy to feel alone, but I want you to know you're not alone.”

“Farmers are the backbone of this country and we all need to look out for each other. And remember it's never too late to seek help.”



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## Coping

🌱 Edward Jenkins says, “my first twenty years of farming I quit nineteen times.” Have you ever thought about quitting? If you stayed, what kept you going?

🌱 All the farmers in the film are men. How do you think beliefs about what it means to be a man influence their reactions to stress and the coping strategies they choose? How does their interpretation of manhood compare to yours and the ways that you cope?

Psychologist Michael Nadorff reminds us that whether it was bad choices or bad circumstances, “however you got there, doesn’t matter, it’s what you do going forward – ultimately that’s how we leave our mark on the world...Sometimes the greatest stories start from the worst places.” Why might Dr. Nadorff think it’s important to refrain from judging how people got to where they are? What’s one thing you could do to make your mark going forward?

🌱 What are the benefits of hearing other people’s stories and sharing your own?



## TRY THIS:

Watch one of the film’s landscape scenes with the sound off. What adjectives would you use to describe the scene. If you didn’t already know the content of the film, would you guess that it is about stress? How do you interpret the contrast between the beauty and calmness of the landscapes compared to the stress and anxiety of the stories and music?

# QUESTIONS FOR SPECIFIC STORIES


These questions are helpful for groups that are viewing a story or two rather than the entire film. They don't repeat any of the general questions, so you may still want to start with one of those. No matter which stories you choose to show, we recommend that every screening include the scene featuring Commissioner Gipson's words of encouragement.

## Edward Jenkins and the Pressures of Producing a Profit (0:00-11:30)

At one point, Jenkins thought he was having heart attack, but it was just "farm stress." What's "farm stress" and what makes it different from other kinds of stress?

Jenkins notes that even in years when he made a profit, he was still worried? Why didn't economic success relieve his stress?

Jenkins explains that a farmer used to be able to make a couple of mistakes and keep going, but "in the 2000s, make a couple of mistakes and you'll be out of business." Why? What's changed and (according to Jenkins or your own experience) what have been the forces driving that change? Does understanding what changed alleviate the stress of having to be perfect in order to be economically sustainable?

 Agricultural Economist, Devon Meadowcroft, says that to cope with stress, farmers typically rely on family, friends, and faith-based organizations. What are the strengths of such resources? What do they do well? What can't they do? What are the gaps in care if this is all that's available?

Dr. Meadowcroft observes that there is a stigma about seeking professional help. What do you think the sources of that stigma are? Do you agree with her that, "We, as a community, need to do a better job of saying it's okay to seek help." How could your community begin to do that?


Jenkins says, "Everything I do is under a microscope...I'm the youngest farmer around, they're just waiting for me to make mistakes." This motivates him to prove them wrong, but also adds to his stress. Jenkins believes that if he and his brother can prove that "people who look like me" can succeed, then his son and nephew won't have nearly as much stress as they had (because "everybody seen it done" so people won't doubt them so much). What other sorts of help might be given to young farmers so they can avoid mistakes?

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## Will Gilmer and the Decline of Dairy (11:30-22:40)

What did you learn from Gilmer's experience about why it's so difficult for dairy farms to turn a profit?

Agricultural Economist, Jeff Johnson points out that the nature of dairy farming is that you produce and sell your product every day. There's no way to wait for the milk market to improve. And the price of milk is like a roller coaster; it can double or be cut in half without you doing anything different. So the work is predictable but the revenue is not. How does that contribute to stress?

 Like all dairy farmers, Gilmer works very long days. And while he appreciates that each day brings different challenges, the grueling routines are repetitive and unrelenting. As he puts it, "we don't shut down." In what ways does the physical energy it takes to farm influence the available energy to deal with stress?

Gilmer says, "it's hard to see where we fit in," and it can feel like being on an island with no one around to support you. How does isolation affect mental health? What things could communities do to mitigate rural isolation?

Gilmer comments on the high suicide rate among dairy farmers saying, "a ton of that comes from the feeling, 'I've let my family down.'" Dr. Johnson describes it as "I don't want to be the one that has to get rid of the farm." In what ways could that farming heritage be shifted into a strength rather than a burden? What could be done to change "it comes down to me" to "it comes down to US?" Write an alternate ending to the sentence "I don't want to be the one..."

Gilmer feels an obligation to continue his family's legacy of farming and says, "I live where I want to live and I work where I want to work." So once he decides to transition from dairy to raising beef, he experiences a sense of relief, liberation, and peace. What did you think of his decision?

Dr. Johnson points out that, "when you say 'I want to live and farm,' instead of 'I've got to just be a dairy farmer,' lots of alternatives open up. In your community, what are some viable alternatives that would allow families to stay on their land?"

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## Steven Sanford and Coping with Injury (22:40-33:45)

Prof. Alisha Hardman acknowledges that all families have stress, but says that there are stresses unique to farming. These include some extraordinary stressors that people in other professions and places don't experience. What did you see in Sanford's story that was "normal" farm stress, and what might be considered an extraordinary stressor?

Sanford is upset that his car wreck took place during planting season, saying that it "messes with you mentally" knowing that there is critical work to do and you can't do it. What do you think he means by "messes with you mentally." What might people around him have noticed to indicate that he was struggling with a mental health challenge?


Sanford says it feels good when he can be back and "contributing," even though he's not yet 100% healthy. In your situation, what valuable contributions could you help someone make even if they aren't physically able to do everything that they wish they could?

Prof. Hardman suggests that if family and friends are available to pitch in and pick up the slack, it can help the injured farmer to heal. Sanford appreciated the help he got, but also said he felt guilty because he knew that his situation doubled the workload for everyone else. Can you think of anything that could alleviate Sanford's guilt?



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## Nathan Casburn and the Challenges of Addiction (33:45-45:30)

 What did you learn from Nathan's story about addiction and recovery?

Nathan shares that he didn't plan to be farmer. He didn't think he "fit in." Is this attitude common in your community? What is it about farm culture that some young people might see as exclusionary? Ultimately, how did farm life both contribute to and help Nathan recover from addiction?


Dr. Nadorff explains that, "the more you rely on any substance for your coping, the less you're going to be able to naturally cope." How would you describe your "natural" coping abilities? Are there coping skills that you wish you were better at?


Nathan describes the Delta as a "drinking culture." In his case, that meant drinking in high school. What's it like in your community? How does the culture of your community help or prevent people from developing strong coping skills?

 Nathan says that there's, "never enough hours in the day to do what you want to do," so you "wake up the next day and do what you can." In your experience, what's the impact on mental health of this sense that there is always more to do, that the job is never finished? How does it give farmers a sense of purpose and also drain their energy?


In farming, often your co-workers are also your family. How do you think that affected Nathan's recovery process and making amends?

## Closing Questions

 In his closing statement, Commissioner Andy Gipson says, "If you see a friend in need, don't be afraid to speak up. We're all in this together. You can be the difference in someone's life." What's one thing you think you could do to make a difference?

 I think the information in *On the Farm* is important because \_\_\_\_\_.

If you had the power to make sure that one person watched this film, who would that person be? Why them?

 What's one thing you learned from the film that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?

# ACTION STEPS

We end events by planning for action steps because taking action is an antidote to frustration, cynicism, and hopelessness.

Having to live with circumstances over which people have no control is a common stressor affecting mental health. In order not to repeat the pattern, it's important to give event participants as much control as possible over what happens next.

## To empower participants:

1. Start by brainstorming a list of possible actions.
2. Help the group to narrow the list and choose their focus.
3. Plan next steps.

Initial brainstorming can be done in small groups or with everyone together, and it can focus on either individual or collective actions.

If the group is having trouble getting started, you can offer a couple of possibilities:

- Invite participants to complete the following sentence:  
“I will share what I learned today with \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Coordinate a campaign to engage political and business leaders in an effort to ensure that all rural areas have high quality broadband to support access to “telemedicine” services, including counseling.
- Create an annotated resource list to be distributed via social media, listserv, or email. Start by asking everyone to list resources they currently know about or use. Where appropriate, note people who have used each resource, so if someone has a question about the resource they can contact people who might know the answer. The facilitator or event host can help by keeping the list and collecting names & addresses for distribution.

Keep in mind that for some participants, talking – especially speaking in public about sensitive issues – is, by itself, a powerful action step.

# AT THE SCREENING

## SET UP

### o Check Equipment

Arrive early to set up and test your A/V equipment for projecting the film and, if needed, for facilitating speakers or discussion (e.g., microphones). Don't forget batteries, extension cords, adapters, and, of course, the film.

### o Check Supplies

Make sure you have name tags (if participants don't already know one another) & markers, tape, refreshments, sign-in sheets (if applicable), and the film.

### o Room Set Up

If seats are movable, place them in a configuration that will both facilitate conversation and ensure that everyone can see the screen.

### o Signage

If you're convening in a place that might be unfamiliar, post signs in and around the venue so people know they are in the right place and can easily find the room you are using.

o Arrive early, and if you've invited any speakers or specialists, ask them to arrive early. Review with them how their part of the event will proceed. Leave yourself enough time to finish setting up in time to greet participants as they arrive.

## DURING THE SCREENING

### o Introductions

Make the most of your allotted time. Introduce partners, thank sponsors and hosts, and let people know how the event will proceed, but do it in "headline" format. Nothing brings down the energy level of a room more than a series of introductions that are too long. If you wish, leave time after the film for partners to describe their work.

### o Discussion

Remember that your job is to host the conversation, not teach or preach.

### o Next Steps

Be prepared to facilitate follow-up meetings and/or ways for participants to stay in touch. When you thank people for coming, share [insert key resource(s) (e.g. like the hotline number at the end of the film?) and/or ways to reach the project for people who want to stay engaged?].

o Step back and enjoy! You've done something really important.

## AFTER THE SCREENING

### o Thank Yous

Send thank you notes to partners, speakers, the facilitator, and if possible, discussion participants.

o Tell us about your event [Do you need facilitators to report back to you? If so, describe expectations and procedure here. This would include how to collect data with the evaluation survey.]

### o Updates & Follow-Up

Follow-Up on anything you agreed to do during the event. Send updates to participants about issues or initiatives that came up and/or announcements of related upcoming events. Note: This will be easier if you collect email or other contact information at the event.

### o Spread the Word

Without breaching any confidentiality agreements that may have been made at the event, let others in your community know about your efforts to initiate conversations about mental health issues affecting farm families. If you're able, offer your expertise to help others organize their own screenings of *On the Farm*.

# CREDITS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide was written by Faith Rogow, Ph.D., [InsightersEducation.com](https://www.insighterseducation.com) and Brice Fortinberry, B.S. with input from David R. Buys, Ph.D., Mary Nelson Robertson, Ph.D., and Brody Hamm. The guide was designed by Mollie Brothers.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PROJECT, CONTACT DR. DAVID R. BUYS at [david.buys@msstate.edu](mailto:david.buys@msstate.edu) or (662) 325-3060.

## **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

Telephone: 988  
The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones.

## **Crisis Text line**

Text TALK to 741-741  
(Text with a trained counselor from the Crisis Text Line for free, 24/7)

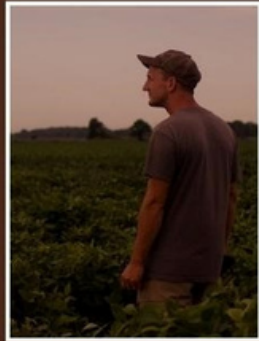


# APPENDIX

# MARKETING MATERIALS



# ON THE FARM



" A lot of people think it is easy, that you just put something in the ground and count your money in the fall." - Nathan Casburn

Visit [www.onthefarm.life](http://www.onthefarm.life) for more information



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VISIT  
WWW.ONTHEFARM.LIFE

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Mississippi State University Presents

# ON THE FARM

FEATURING

EDWARD  
JENKINS

WILL  
GILMER

STEVEN  
SANFORD

NATHAN  
CASBURN



**"WATCH THIS FILM!"**

KAYE BENDER, PHD, RN, FAAN



**"VERY MOVING!"**

ALYSSA KILLEBREW, PHD



**"REAL. RAW. RELEVANT."**

T.J. BRADFORD, PHD



HEAR THE STORIES OF THE JOYS AND CHALLENGES OF FARM LIFE

PRODUCERS: DAVID GARRAWAY, JAMES PARKER

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS: DAVID BUYS, MARY NELSON ROBERTSON

Who: \_\_\_\_\_

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_





# ON THE FARM

## The Story of *On the Farm*

Volatile markets, unpredictable weather patterns, and work injuries all continue to negatively impact farmers-- the "backbone of America."

*On the Farm* shares the story of four brave farmers dealing with the joys and challenges of agricultural life.

If you or someone you know is struggling with a mental health challenge as a result of farm stress, watch and share this film, and access more mental health resources at [www.onthefarm.life](http://www.onthefarm.life).

**You don't have to go it alone!**

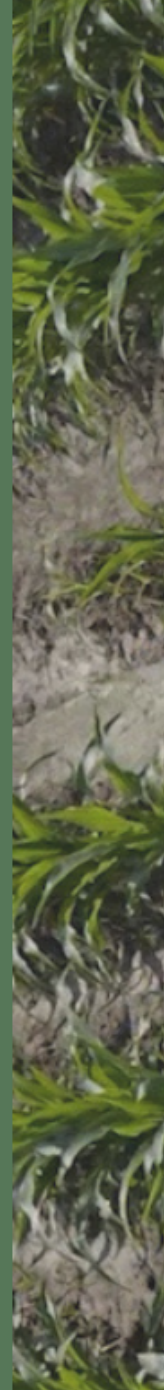
## For More Information:

Who:

Where:

When:

Contact Info:



"Through this film, we hope viewers know that while life is difficult for farmers, there is hope for recovery from the hard times."

- **David Buys, PhD**

**Mississippi State University**



"Farming is a stressful job, and it comes from all different places."

- **Edward Jenkins, Farmer**

**Grace, Mississippi**



## **Why Watch On the Farm?**

- Hear directly from farmers about the highs and lows of farm life.
- Learn from economics, family science, and clinical psychology experts who connect the lived experiences of these farmers to the scientific literature on rural and agricultural lifestyles.
- Understand the daily challenges and the mental toll of farm life.





# WATCH ON THE FARM

Visit [www.onthefarm.life](http://www.onthefarm.life) for  
more information

If you or someone you know is experiencing a  
mental health challenge, contact the  
Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988



MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™  
EXTENSION

# WATCH ON THE FARM

A HEALTHY FARM STARTS WITH A  
HEALTHY FARMER!



Who: \_\_\_\_\_



Where: \_\_\_\_\_



When: \_\_\_\_\_



Contact Info: \_\_\_\_\_



# RESOURCES

## National

Rural Health Information Hub

<https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/farmer-mental-health> - A one stop overview of the issues, including a rich set of links to related sources.

American Farm Bureau

<https://www.fb.org/land/fsom> - Among the many resources that the FB provides, is this tool to search by state and type of resource to find support for farmers struggling with anxiety, depression, or another mental health issue

National Association of County and City Health Officials

<https://www.naccho.org/membership/meet-our-members/saccho> - Find contact information for your local public health department on this interactive map.

American Psychological Association

<https://www.apa.org/events/farmer> - Links to mental health resources for farmers and also for mental health professionals who work with farmers.

## Mississippi

Mississippi State University Extension Promise Initiative

<http://extension.msstate.edu/health/the-promise-initiative/farm-stress> - Helpful background information, event announcements, and contact information for Project staff.

Mississippi Farm Bureau <https://msfb.org/mental-health-resources/> - A helpful list of warning signs that someone needs help with mental health issues and a set of resources to help everyone understand the issues and get the help they need.



# ON THE FARM

## OUTREACH EVALUATION

Thanks for attending a screening of *On the Farm*. It would mean a lot to us if you could complete this short survey about the experience. It shouldn't take more than 5 minutes and it will help us to better serve communities and families like yours. All answers will be completely anonymous.

### ABOUT YOU

1. a. I live in the county of \_\_\_\_\_

b. Age

- younger than 20
- 20-34
- 35-49
- 50-65
- 66-80
- older than 80
- prefer not to say

c. Race/ Ethnicity

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- White or Caucasian
- Some other race or ethnicity (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_  prefer not to say

d. Gender

- female
- male
- non-binary
- prefer not to say

2. Check the one that best describes you:

- I live on a farm
- I live in a farm community, but not on a farm
- I live on campus or near the university or college I attend
- I live in a city
- I live in a small town

2a. If you don't currently live on a farm, did you grow up on a farm?

- Yes
- No

### BACKGROUND

3. a. Where did you see the film *On the Farm* (e.g., in class or at a community screening)?

b. When (approximate date)?

4. What's your best estimate of how often mental health issues are publicly discussed in your community

a. FORMALLY (e.g., at school, government meeting, or special event)

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Yearly
- Never

b. INFORMALLY (e.g., at a diner, family gathering, church social)?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Yearly
- Never

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE FILM

4. Watching the film made me feel (check all that apply)

- better
- worse
- frustrated
- hopeful
- understood
- upset

5. The stories (or story if you only viewed one) accurately reflected my experience and/or my community

- Strongly Agree
- Agree Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- No Opinion/Not Sure

6. The film and discussion gave me a deeper understanding of the situations faced by farmers.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- No Opinion/Not Sure

6a. If you answered "Agree," can you briefly share one thing you learned:

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SCREENING EVENT

7. On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable did you feel at the screening to share your own experiences or opinions?

Not at all comfortable Totally comfortable  
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

8. From the film or discussion, I learned at least one coping strategy I can use or recommend

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

If yes, please specify:

## FOLLOW-UP

9. I know where in my community to go if I or someone I care about needs help with a mental health issue.

- Yes
- No

9a. Did you know about this resource prior to the event?

- Yes
- No

10. How likely are you to talk about *On the Farm* with

Definitely will   Likely   Might   Probably Won't   Not a Chance   N/A

a family member

a friend

a co-worker

an employee

a classmate

someone else you think you might talk with: (please list)

[optional] 11. Anything we didn't ask that we should have, or anything else you want to tell event organizers?

That's all we need. Thanks for your help. We really appreciate it!

If you or a person you care about needs help with a mental health issue, you can always call 877- 210-8513 or visit this website: [msuext.ms/promise](https://msuext.ms/promise)