

# NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Southern Ag Exchange Network Announces Farmer Support Hotline**

**[Knoxville, TN]** – Farmers, ranchers, and agricultural workers across the southern region of the U.S. have one number to call to find the help they need, whether it's finding resources in their area, being connected to someone for legal or financial information, or talking through a crisis. The Southern Ag Exchange (SAGe) Network Hotline (833-381-SAGE, or 833-381-7243) is staffed 24/7 by experienced operators with a knowledge of farm stressors.

In addition to offering a traditional voice phone line, users can text or utilize an online chat function to get support in the way that is most comfortable. Interpretation for other languages, including Spanish, is available as well.

"The SAGe Hotline has been created with thoughtful intention—intention to connect strong partners, provide helpful resources, and support farmers," says Dr. Heather Sedges, SAGe's Principal Investigator.

### **Drawing on Partnerships**

The USDA funds SAGe through the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN), and one of the USDA's requirements for regional FRSAN efforts is the provision of a farm stress hotline. There are three contracted entities who are working with SAGe to address this requirement:

- SAGe is partnering with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach's **Concern Line**, which has operated as a stress hotline for farmers for more than 30 years. ISU will run the SAGe Hotline and has collaborated on SAGe's strategy for creating an effective hotline. The Concern Line was established during the 1980s farm crisis to connect farmers to resources, and their work is warm and relevant. It was important to SAGe to have a SAGe-specific hotline operator who lives in the region and has an agricultural background. Rachael Jones, who was born and raised in a small rural farming community and currently resides in Jonesboro, Arkansas, is an ideal fit.
- Callers may be referred to **Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI)**, whose farm advocacy services primarily focus on struggling farms, financial management and assistance, and technical support. They bring an additional level of support for farmers, ranchers, and agricultural workers who may benefit from more extensive, non-crisis services.
- **Farm Aid**, which receives calls from all over the country, will collect data on incoming hotline calls from the southern region of the U.S. and provide anonymized data to SAGe for evaluation purposes.



*The Southern Ag Exchange Network (SAGe) is the Southern region of the USDA's Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network, one of four regional groups charged with addressing heightened stress among American's farming and ranching communities.*

Tammy Jacobs, Hotlines Manager for Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, says, “We are excited to partner with SAgE in order to help farmers and their families as they deal with and work through the stresses of farming. With the rates of suicide, especially in the farming community, rising, we want to be a part of the community to help those who are experiencing stress to have an opportunity to work through the stressors and have a positive impact on the farming community.”

## Types of Hotlines

In the world of crisis intervention, there are typically three types of hotlines: a suicide hotline, which helps people who are in immediate crisis and at risk of harming themselves; a stress or crisis hotline, which may provide some crisis de-escalation and mental health-informed support as well as information and referral to other resources; and what is known as a “warm line,” which offers mental health support from operators who are peers with direct knowledge of the target demographic.

The SAgE Hotline, operated by ISU’s Concern Line, is a mix of crisis hotline and warm line models. Concern Line and SAgE Hotline specialists are trained at high levels of crisis intervention in the event that a caller is experiencing an immediate crisis, but the hotline’s primary focus is on preventing crisis and addressing the root causes of stress through support and referrals.

“The SAgE Hotline model allows farmers and their loved ones to reach out any time—in a crisis, or when information and connections will help prevent a crisis. Eliminating barriers is critical to our design and means we have the resources to help in one place, with one call,” says Hannah Brinson, SAgE’s Strategic Projects Specialist, who oversees the SAgE Hotline.

## Resources and Evaluation

With the aim of offering stress assistance before a crisis is reached, SAgE’s extensive and ever-growing list of resources across the Southern region is available to SAgE Hotline partners. Operators are available 24/7 so that help is available to farmers when they need it.

SAgE has a comprehensive evaluation plan for the hotline, drawing on evaluation expertise from across the network and multiple disciplines. This evaluation will provide critical data about who is being served, the quality of referrals, and outcome measures, without being intrusive or burdensome to callers.

For more information, visit [southernagexchange.org/farmer-support](https://southernagexchange.org/farmer-support).

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