

THE VERDANT ELEMENT

Lakeland Agricultural Research Association

Farm Resiliency Starts With You

Resiliency has perhaps become the catch phrase of the day, but catchy or not, it is still important for the agricultural industry. Farms today more than ever have tight margins, have to worry about social perceptions, rising inflation and the ever changing weather; and to do that they need to be resilient. Like an elastic band, you need to stretch and bend and form to whatever situation comes your way while holding your stuff together. Farms build resiliency by improving soil health, increasing rotations or adding diversity, utilizing beneficial management practices and incorporating at least one of the regenerative agricultural principles. It can also be done using new technologies and innovations, as well as learning new things along the way. But at the heart of every farm is still the farmer and without you, what is the farm?

As farmers you take care of the land, the water, your livestock and provide food to your communities and to those around the world. But how do you take care of you?

We all have stress. Some stress is good as it motivates you to get things done; and it can vary in intensity from low to high. We have all different tools and tricks to help us manage our stress. But when we have high stress for long periods of time, it can start to have negative effects on our physical health, as well as our mental wellbeing. Some may use mental wellness and mental illness interchangeably. However in reality you can have one without the other, or have both. Continued Page 8

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How to Build Your Resilience - By Jim Timlick

When it comes to your mental health, resilience is an important skill to develop. Here's why and how.

Farming can exact a heavy emotional toll on even the hardiest of souls.

Between dealing with volatile markets, extreme weather and long hours of work, often in isolated conditions, it's no surprise Canadian farmers suffer higher rates of anxiety and depression than the general public.

A University of Guelph study surveyed 1,132 Canadian farmers between September 2015 and February 2016 to measure signs of stress, depression and anxiety. The results indicated 33 per cent of respondents had probable cases of anxiety, 15 per cent had probable cases of depression and nine per cent had Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) scores indicating psychological distress. Also, results showed the average resilience scores of respondents were lower than the general population.

A more recent U of G survey conducted in 2021 found farmers' mental health in Canada is worse than it was five years ago and worse than the general population in almost every way. Stress, anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, cynicism, suicide ideation and lowered resilience were all higher among farmers than the national average the survey's research team found.

Other key findings include one in four Canadian farmers felt their life was not worth living, wished they were dead or thought of taking their own life during the previous 12 months, around 76 per cent of farmers surveyed were classified as experiencing moderate or high perceived stress and 83 per cent of farmers had lower resilience scores than the U.S. general population.

While those numbers are concerning, the situation is by no means hopeless, according to the CEO and co-founder of the National Farmer Mental Health Alliance (NFMHA), an organization that provides ag-informed training to psychotherapists and offers direct counselling services to farmers.

Build resiliency skills

Lauren Van Ewyk says the good news is farmers can develop resiliency skills to effectively deal with the negative effects of depression and stress to their mental health and well-being.

"The term resilience is derived from the idea that we bounce back, that we take on our original shape," she says.

"To me, resilience isn't so much going back to your original shape, it's recognizing these elements of stress and how these difficult periods in our life teach us about ourselves and teach us new things, and we learn about perseverance. We want to recognize how this event or long period of stress has impacted us and changed us and what strengths do we build in the middle of it. Resilience teaches us to say, 'I can actually feel this emotion, I feel safe enough to feel it and it doesn't destroy me, it builds me.'"

Van Ewyk says the importance of developing resiliency skills is they allow individuals to deal head-on with any emotions they may be feeling rather than sweeping them under the rug and ignoring them.



How to Build Your Resilience - continued

One of the most important resiliency skills farmers can develop is self-compassion, she says. At its core, self-compassion is about extending compassion to yourself in instances when you may be experiencing perceived inadequacy, failure or general suffering.

“As farmers, we do this terribly,” says Van Ewyk, who runs a sheep farm with her husband in southwestern Ontario. “We think of self-compassion as self-indulgence or self-pity, but that’s not what self-compassion is. It’s about recognizing that I’m a wise person, and if I’m a wise person I’m still willing to learn.

“We have to break up with this perfectionist tendency. As farmers, we do this a lot. Did I plant my beans deep enough? Did I fertilize at the right time? Did I use enough fertilizer? We set ourselves up with this idea that our crop has to be perfect, but it doesn’t. We don’t need to be perfect.”

Another resiliency skill farmers should work on building is mindfulness, Van Ewyk says. Mindfulness is the ability to be present in the moment and be aware of what we’re doing rather than being overly reactive or overwhelmed by what’s going on around us. Van Ewyk says it’s “paying attention on purpose” by tapping into the five basic senses.

“Overall, it just talks about how we become addicted to the hurriedness and the adrenaline rush we get when we hurry,” she explains.

“We actually have to break up with that desire and come to this place where we recognize that taking a few minutes to enjoy our surroundings is really critical to resilience. If you’re a cattle farmer, the next time you go to your barn, take a couple of minutes to take a few breaths and enjoy being with those animals. If you’re a crop farmer, take a minute and look at that crop. Notice the colour and the shape and the texture of that crop.”

Process emotions

Another key to developing resiliency is to build coping skills, according to Van Ewyk. As part of this, she says it’s important for farmers to process any emotions they may be feeling rather than simply trying to tamp them down.

“The fact is we have four basic emotions: mad, sad, glad and scared. Pay attention to them. At any given moment on any given day ask yourself, ‘What am I feeling right now.’ If you have kids or a family, challenge them to do likewise,” she says.

“Have that conversation and what it is that you’re feeling. Once you recognize that feeling, it changes your brain and what happens in your brain, and we settle down. We go from this place of ‘Oh my goodness, there’s a bear in the room,’ to where there’s no threat and we’re just feeling scared or sad, and your brain goes, ‘OK, my mistake.’ It settles everything down and you can cope and build resilience.”

One example of a useful coping technique is deep breathing. Van Ewyk teaches many of her farmer clients to practice something called box breathing or square breathing each day when they wake up and again before they go to sleep. This deep breathing technique requires you to breathe in for four seconds, hold that breath for four seconds, then slowly exhale for four seconds and repeat the process until you feel re-centred.

“If you practice deep breathing, your brain will automatically take over and (help you breathe) when you need it,” she explains.

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Environmental Farm Plans

The environment is becoming a more prominent issue. It is a large factor in marketing agriculture and food products in today's global markets. Consumers are demanding more transparency and are demanding high quality and safe products. Reputation of food safety is critical to retain and gain access to domestic and international markets.

Environmental Farm Plans (EFP) provide a tool for producers to self analyze their operation and identify environmental risks, current standards, areas for improvement and also highlight what they are doing well.

Having a completed EFP allows producers to access different funding opportunities, such as the Canadian Agricultural Partnerships Programs or OFCAF. It is also useful in product branding that demonstrates specific environmental standards.

The EFP is a living document and should be reviewed and updated periodically.

If you wish to complete an EFP or have any questions regarding EFP please contact Kellie at the LARA office at 780-826-7260

That's a Wrap of 2022!

This past year seemed to fly by. This year LARA hosted 34 events which varied with webinars, field days and workshops. We wish you a very Merry Christmas and a wonderful Happy New Year. We hope to connect in 2023. If you have suggestions for trials or workshops that you would like to see please contact any of us at the LARA office at any time.





5 New Year's Resolutions For Better Mental Health on the Farm - By Lesley Kelly

Do you have a New Year's resolution for the farm? Some of the resolutions could include managing costs better, focusing on a succession plan, and improving production practices. Another resolution to consider is focusing on your mental health, because taking care of you and your mental health is also taking care of the farm.

After another unprecedented year, many are looking to protect and make their mental health a priority. The past two years have been full of adjustments. And while we're looking forward to a brighter 2022, continuing COVID-19-related worries can make traditional New Year's resolutions stressful to stick to. Instead, make 2022 the year of mental health for you and your farm. This gentler approach can give you the space and time to think about what you want to change to feel better and what you realistically can do to achieve that change. By taking smaller, more achievable steps towards your goals, there is a greater chance that you will keep them.

This applies to all kinds of resolutions, including mental health. You can help manage your mental health symptoms by taking small steps every day. Of course, there's no one-size-fits-all approach to mental health. But these simple, low-stress resolutions can help boost your mental wellness for a happier New Year.

Make time for self-care: Self-care is something that can be done in as little as 10 minutes a day with no cost at all. And it can help reduce stress and positively impact your mental health and well-being. Brainstorm a list of self-care activities that make you happy and schedule them as part of your daily routine. This could be structured therapy sessions or daily exercise, a stretch in the tractor or simply an outdoor walk or time with friends and loved ones.

Identifying and fostering healthy relationships: Unhealthy relationships can quickly become a stressor or mental illness trigger. For this reason, it's important to pursue relationships with those who encourage healthy habits and provide emotional support. Depending on your circumstances, consider:

- Reaching out to old friends you have lost contact with
- Making regular plans with family members
- Joining a social organization that reflects your interests or values
- Volunteering with a non-profit organization you support
- Creating or joining a peer group - You might find meaningful relationships and emotional support from other farmers, neighbors and those in and around your community or area.





5 New Year's Resolutions For Better Mental Health on the Farm

Improve your sleep: With the changes of seasons in farming comes changes to our sleeping patterns as well. But there is so much value in having a bedtime routine and getting good sleep. According to Mental Health Canada, a chronic lack of sleep can lead to mental health issues like depression. If you're experiencing bouts of depression or mood swings, maintaining a regular sleeping schedule that gives you 7-8 hours of sleep each night could dramatically improve your wellbeing.

Reduce time spent on social media: Studies have shown that an excessive use of social media can lead to less moment-to-moment happiness and less life satisfaction. While these platforms help keep us connected to family and friends, like all things, social media is only good in moderation. This year, try limiting your daily use or taking regular breaks from your apps so you can focus more on your wellbeing.

Learn more about mental health: One of the most important resolutions for your mental health is to understand it and to know when to seek help. There are online resources and workshops available that provide information about mental health, as well as speaking to a medical and/or mental health professional.

Also, please be kind to yourself. Change can be hard and often takes time. Allow yourself to have feelings and forgive yourself for mistakes. You are here and doing your best, and that's what counts. So make 2022 the year that will have a long-lasting impact on your mental health and happiness.

For more resources visit domore.ag/crisis-contacts.

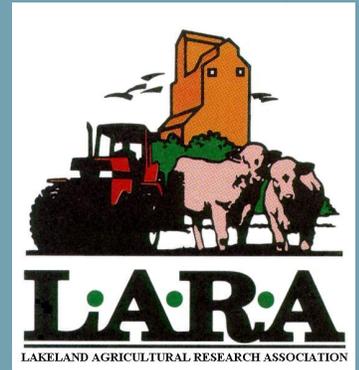
About The Do More Agriculture Foundation: The Do More Agriculture Foundation is the national voice and champion for mental health in Canadian agriculture and is changing the culture of agriculture to one where all producers are encouraged, supported, and empowered to take care of their mental wellbeing. Producers are among the most vulnerable when it comes to mental health issues. By collaborating with the entire industry and those working to address the state of mental health in Agriculture, we can and will make a substantial impact.

Lakeland Agricultural Research Association

Kellie Nichiporik
Environmental Program
Manager
E-mail: sustainag@laraonline.ca
Phone: 780-826-7260
Cell: 780-812-1036
Box 7068
Bonnyville, AB
T9N 2H4

Follow Us on Twitter! @LakelandARA
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 Follow Us on Facebook at LakelandARA

Sustainable farming encompasses a wide range of practices and principles; combining environmental stewardship with profitability and ensuring that the family farm will be there for generations to come.

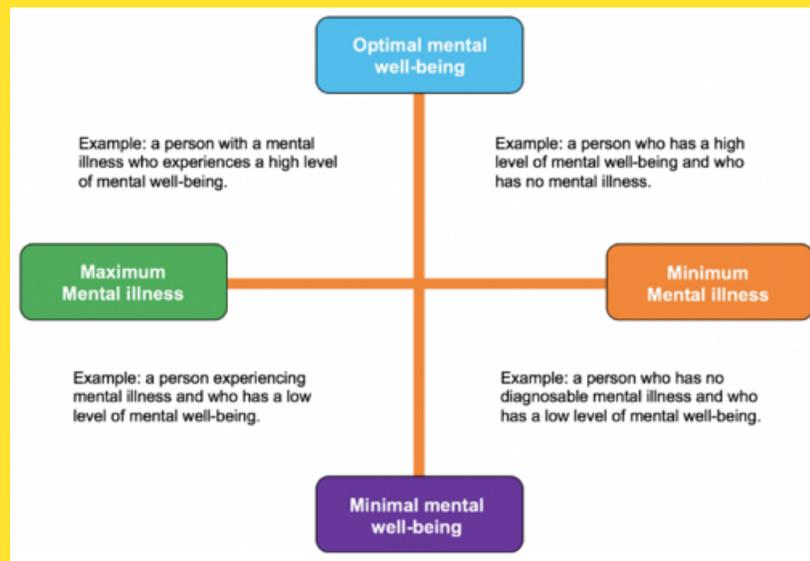


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You can have a mental illness such as PTSD, anxiety, depression.... but have things under control and a high level of mental wellness. You can also have someone with no mental illness but struggling to cope with everyday tasks and a low level of mental wellness.

Both models are a sliding scale and your level of mental wellness is continually fluctuating. If you or someone you know is struggling please reach out as there are many supports available. The Alberta mental health hotline is 1-877-303-2642 If you are in crisis, please visit your local emergency department or call 911.



Mental Health Continuum Model



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal mood fluctuations • Calm & takes things in stride • Good sense of humour • Performing well • In control mentally • Normal sleep patterns • Few sleep difficulties • Physically well • Good energy level • Physically and socially active • No or limited alcohol use/ gambling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritable / impatient • Nervous • Sadness / overwhelmed • Displaced sarcasm • Procrastination • Forgetfulness • Trouble sleeping • Intrusive thoughts • Nightmares • Muscle tension / headaches • Low energy • Decreased activity/socializing • Regular but controlled alcohol use / gambling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger • Anxiety • Pervasively sad / hopeless • Negative attitude • Poor performance / workaholic • Poor concentration / decisions • Restless disturbed sleep • Recurrent images / nightmares • Increased aches and pains • Increased fatigue • Avoidance • Withdrawal • Increased alcohol use / gambling is hard to control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angry outbursts / aggression • Excessive anxiety / panic attacks • Depressed / suicidal thoughts • Over insubordination • Can't perform duties, control behaviour or concentrate • Can't fall asleep or stay asleep • Sleeping too much or too little • Physical illnesses • Constant fatigue • Not going out or answering phone • Alcohol or gambling addiction • Other addictions
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