

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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We're All in This Together

We all have stress in our lives. From family stress, to work stress, to stress at home. Every person's stress morphs and looks different. For agriculture producers a lot of time stress at home, work and within the family, is all knotted very tightly together.

This time of year, it's easy to see how folks can get down. The weather is cold and miserable, the pens can be muddy and sloppy. You're working your hardest to keep animals healthy through Mother Nature's unpredictable winter weather. There aren't enough hours of sunlight in the day to accomplish everything that needs to get done. Whether you work on the farm or off the farm, many times you're continuing to finish chores long after the sun has gone down. Anyone can see how all of these factors may wear on a person's spirit.

When looking at hazardous occupations in the world, agriculture is consistently in the top ten. There are many factors that go into this: the large equipment, working long days and longer evenings, and the repetitive heavy labor that just wears down the body over time. Additionally, there is an alarming statistic that is on the rise thus making agriculture even more dangerous. According to the Center for Disease Control, professions that are ag related sadly have the highest rate of suicides in the US. In July of 2016, 84.5 out of 100,000 in Ag took their lives compared to a national average of 13.4 per 100,000. The disparity is disturbing and unfortunately the number is on the rise with the uncertainty in agriculture at this time.

Agricultural occupations are unique in the job market and many of the factors that make it unique also make them much more stressful. The higher stressors include: engaging in dangerous activities much of the time, the lack of control on conditions such as input pricing, commodity pricing, and weather. These all play into whether a producer can pay his bills. Sustained higher levels of stress can cause depression, fatigue, anxiety, and other triggers that cause a greater propensity of attempting suicide. The negative stigma of mental health issues can also make it difficult for producers to feel that they can reach out for help. There is help available specifically to the agriculture community, assistance from individuals who understand a producer's lifestyle and are ready to help.

The Kansas Agriculture Mediations Services at (800) 321-3276 can help producers with several programs in place. They will gather information from you and can connect you with financial advisors, legal advice, lawyers, and can also connect people with mental health facilities close to your location. One phone call can get you in touch with many people that can help your unique situation. Also, the National Suicide hotline is (800) 273-8255 and provides 24/7 free and confidential support. Some people do not want to talk on the phone. You can also text 741741, or chat online at imalive.org.

Most of all, watch out for your family and friends. If you feel that something is wrong, ask. Agriculture producers are incredibly resilient by nature. Don't be afraid to talk to others, many producers are going through similar situations as you! Attending programs or seminars about agriculture is a perfect time to interact with like-minded people, who all understand the stress you're going through. It is also good to implement strategies that can help daily. Some practices you can implement are: Taking a walk, positive talk with friends, appropriate amounts of sleep, community events with family and friends, sports or outdoor activities, among others. Positive thoughts and practices can go a long way to improving an outlook on life. And most of all, if you need help, seek it. As an Agriculture community, we're all in this together.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Lindsay Shorter, at lindsayshorter@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.