

## **Pursuing Wellness in Time of Stress on the Farm**

The River Valley Extension District Board and a team of RVED agents has made a significant commitment to supporting our agricultural community as they face the challenges of the farm economy. We have certainly stepped out of our comfort zone, and we are asking our producers and their families to do the same as we pursue wellness in the face of adversity.

One of the resources I would like to reference is the Kansas State University and North Dakota State University collaborative piece entitled *My Coping Strategies Plan*, which is a part of the *Managing Stress and Pursuing Wellness in Times of Tight Margins* series. Although this resource is directed toward the agricultural community, in terms of title, I am finding it can also be helpful to anyone no matter what their occupation or level of stress might be.

The resource breaks the strategies into six categories where we should be pursuing wellness: physical, mental, emotional/spiritual, personal/relational, work/professional, and financial/practical.

We know that farmers, just like everyone, have extremely busy schedules these days and if “fixes” to problems or issues seem too overwhelming with time or cash resources then we just do not sustain them for very long, if we start them at all. The thing I really like about this resource is, it does not ask you to “eat the elephant” in one bite. Rather, it gives a number of simple options under each of the six categories and asks the user to select two strategies from each category to add to their toolbox.

Twelve tools for your wellness toolbox might look something like this:

- Physical: Exercise 20 minutes or more daily; Get a medical checkup with your local healthcare provider;
- Mental: Spend 10 minutes per day to prioritize what you need to do and plan your activities; Take regular five to ten-minute breaks throughout the day to relax and recharge;
- Emotional: Write down three things that you are grateful for daily; Share your concerns with a counselor, minister, or trusted friend;
- Personal: Reserve 15 minutes each day for uninterrupted conversation with spouse/family; Get involved or stay connected with a friend or group of friends;
- Professional: Discuss the need of the farm, but do not let them occupy all other aspects of your life; Seek constructive feedback on your operation to improve efficiency or to grow;
- Practical: Create a family budget and seek to live within the means of the current situation; Select three healthy habits (8 hours of sleep, eat healthy, read something new) to do daily!

Our team has had a great deal of discussion around finding a coping strategy that works for you as an individual. One of our agents likes to fish as a way to relax and unwind from the stresses of the day-to-day. For me, on the other hand, fishing just adds to my stress and is a reminder of just one more thing I do not do well. That is the last thing I need when I am already feeling stressed. My point is, there is no one “fix,” but rather we must each evaluate our strengths, weaknesses, challenges we currently face, and the opportunities that are before us. We can then develop our Wellness Toolbox to create a sustainable lifestyle that supports our long-term well-being.

The *My Coping Strategies Plan* is available through any K-State Research and Extension Office.