

News Column for Use Week of 04/20/2020  
John Forshee, District Director/Community Vitality Agent  
River Valley Extension District  
4/17/2020

### **Check On A Farmer, They Are NOT OK!**

Most people have probably seen the social media meme: “Introverts, check-in on your extrovert friends. They are not OK!” This is a tongue-in-cheek phrase but has become all too real for our farmers. This COVID-19 Crisis has been difficult for everyone but the disruption in the agricultural world has had a brutal impact on farm income. In many cases, our farmers are not OK, and we need to make a special point to call and check-in on our farmer neighbors.

We know in normal times, agriculture is a stressful and hazardous occupation. When we add the loss of markets, plummeting commodity prices, and uncertainty of the future, we see increases in domestic abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, depression, and suicide.

As we add mandated social distancing to an occupation that is often solitary in nature, we compound the problems and make the warning signs even more difficult to notice. Therefore, it is more important than ever that we check-in with our farmer friends, ask those probing questions, and let them know we care.

Here are a few warning signs of depression and or chronic stress:

- change in routine
- care of farmstead and livestock declines
- increase in illness
- increase in farm accidents
- children exhibiting signs of stress
- sadness or loss of sense of humor
- loss of spirit
- irritability.

Farmers in this situation may exhibit difficulty in making decisions, express feelings of not being able to “fix things,” and feel like a failure that cannot do anything right.

Here are a few warning signs of increased risk of suicide:

- expressing things like “life is not worth living” or “I feel there is no way out of this”
- feeling like a burden to the family
- withdrawing from others
- suddenly getting legal affairs in order
- giving away very personal items
- loss of interest in hobbies
- loss of pleasure in normal activities
- fatigue
- thoughts of death or suicide
- writing a note
- acquiring a means such as a weapon

For those in the River Valley District, Pawnee Mental Health is our public mental provider. The Pawnee Mental Health day number is 785-243-8900 and the emergency number is 1-800-609-

2002. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-TALK (8255), soon to be 988. The Kansas Ag Mediation Service phone number is 1-800-321-FARM (3276).

Although our doors must be closed to the public, the River Valley District Extension staff is just a phone call away and still here to provide education and assistance. Call 785-632-5335 for Clay Center; 785-243-8185 for Concordia, 785-325-2121 for Washington, and 785-527-5084 for Belleville. Make the appropriate selection and it will ring directly to our cell phones. If you do not know who you need to talk to, simply select John Forshee and I will get you to the appropriate agent. The following is an overview of our job responsibilities:

- John Forshee, Director, Community Vitality, and Farm Management
- Monica Thayer, Individual and Family Resource Management
- Deanna Turner, Adult Development and Aging
- Sonica Cooper, Food, Nutrition, Health and Safety
- Brett Melton, Livestock Production and Farm Management
- Kelsey Hatesohl, Horticulture
- Rebecca Zach, Crop Production and Farm Management
- Jordan Schuette, 4-H and Youth Development

-30-

K-State Research & Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.