

News Column for Use Week of 5/17/2021
Wade Reh, District Director/Community Vitality Agent
River Valley District
5/13/2021

Farmers and Ranchers: Connecting with the Community

With May being Mental Health Awareness Month, I wanted to encourage our farmers and ranchers to engage with their communities. Mental health has a wide scope and includes stress, mental exhaustion, and depression.

As a farmer or rancher, you have unique working hours starting before many have risen out of bed and often going late into the night. Further, you often work in isolation, with the pressures of your livelihood. This Isolation has only been exacerbated during the pandemic. These long and inconsistent hours make it difficult to stay involved in your local community.

Community provides many elements that are critical to mental health, but here are three of the most beneficial aspects. Belonging - If you have ever felt like you do not fit in, you know it can be a lonely experience. Community provides a sense of belonging to a group you identify as being a part of. Support - Who do you turn to when you need something? Knowing there are people who support you can help you feel cared for and safe and can benefit your outlook on life. Purpose - Having a purpose, and helping others, helps give meaning to life.

Community should be at the heart of farming and ranching. Building a strong foundation within your local community will help you stay connected. Here are some ideas to help you get more involved.

Youth organizations - Groups like 4-H and FFA encourage hands-on learning for youth. Getting involved in these organizations allows you to use your agricultural knowledge to help educate kids in your community and promote working in agriculture. There is an opportunity to present on topics you have a lot of passion about including livestock, farm safety, new farm technology, and more.

Agricultural boards and organizations - No matter what you produce as a farmer or rancher there is a board and an organization for you. Your Church, COOPs, Farm Bureau, Conservation Districts, and of course Extension are just a few of many organizations that are always looking for engaged Board members.

County fairs - From the exhibits to the presentations, county fairs are known for promoting agriculture and reminding the public of the important role that it plays in the community. Getting involved in the local county fair is a good way to not only connect with the community but also promote agriculture.

Field days – Is your local Extension office, crop consultant, seed dealer, or feed dealer having a field day or informational meeting? Get out there and see what they have to say. And while you're at it, see your neighbors and your friends. Connect with the community you love.