

News Column for Use Week of 9/20/2021
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River Valley District
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Remembering those in Agriculture during Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

As we are in the midst of Suicide Prevention Awareness Month (September), I thought it was important to remember our farmers and ranchers.

Those employed in agriculture face unique stress factors that are largely uncontrollable on their part. The weather conditions, interest rates, production costs, and commodity prices can have such an impact on the bottom line.

This can lead to a bevy of financial concerns and a lot of uncertainty about the future of their farms and families. Further, their careers often lead them to long periods of isolation.

Add in other life stressors such as relationship problems, physical health problems, or substance abuse you can see the potential for a lot of heavy stress and worry.

It has been a good year on many of those fronts, with higher commodity prices and overall good rain. Maybe it is a good time to look at stress and mental health with a clear head.

Symptoms of stress can manifest physically with headaches, ulcers, eating problems, sleeping problems or exhaustion, and increased frequency of illness.

Emotional and behavioral signs of stress can include sadness, depression, irritability, anxiety, loss of any joy or sense of humor, or increased use of drugs and alcohol.

Stressed individuals may also experience decreased ability to concentrate or make decisions and on occasion may experience memory loss.

Periods of chronic stress may affect the overall mental health of an individual. This can be especially serious when it starts to lead to a serious decline in self-worth.

If you or someone you know is thinking they are a burden to their family or saying things like “life isn’t worth living” or “I feel there is no way out”, it’s time to seek some help.

Talk to someone about these feelings. This can be a trusted loved one or it can be someone outside the family. Get a physical checkup and talk to your doctor about it. Consider someone you trust from Church, especially your pastor. We in the Extension Office are also ready to lend a listening ear and have a good understanding of the pressures of agriculture. If there is a struggling youth, our school counselors are great resources.

Also, please seek help at your community mental health center. That would be Pawnee Mental Health for much of the north-central region of Kansas.

Pawnee Mental Health has recently developed an Agriculture Assistance Program to assist self-employed farmers, their families, as well as those they employ. Those who qualify can access four free mental health therapy sessions with a licensed mental health provider through Pawnee Mental Health.

These providers are specially trained on the unique mental health aspects of those in the agriculture field, and these services can be accessed either in person, via phone, or Zoom. For more information, please contact Pawnee Mental Health.

If you are seriously struggling with thoughts of suicide, please call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or the Pawnee Mental Health crisis hotline at 1-800-609-2002.

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