

EMERGENCY RESPONSE MODEL

for MENTAL HEALTH DURING AGRICULTURAL CRISES



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DURING AGRICULTURAL CRISES

Introduction

This guidance document outlines evidenced-informed recommendations for attending to farmer mental health during times of agricultural crisis (e.g. animal disease outbreak) or disaster (e.g. barn fire). The recommendations are framed around Kelloway’s model for mental health in the workplace (Kelloway, 2017), and are categorized under three main areas: Prevention, Intervention, and Recovery.

The data informing these recommendations were derived from research conducted out of Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton’s research laboratory at the Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph, including: a national survey of farmer mental health (Jones-Bitton et al, 2020); 75 qualitative research interviews with farmers and people who work with farmers (Hagen, 2020); and via a series of day-long meetings with, and feedback from, a stakeholder working group consisting of farmers, veterinarians, and people from the agricultural industry, government, and mental health sectors. A full list of stakeholder working group members is provided on page 10 of this report.

These guidelines are intended to help agricultural organizations, communities, and government best support farmers, farm families, and agricultural communities as they work through agricultural crises and disasters. Farmers serve a crucial role in society and it is our hope that these recommendations will contribute to the development of formal support structures that farmers so well deserve.

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Community education



Peer support and mentoring



Care made available to all family members



Initiate and communicate formal emergency plan for the farm



Agricultural-specific mental health literacy training



Formal emergency plan for the farm



24/7 hotline



Increased opportunities for social support / fostering community



Personal advocates



Free or subsidized access to mental health services



Child-care assistance



Easily accessible / readily available list of available mental health supports

Things we can do DURING a disaster/crisis to respond to farmer mental health.



Teleservices



Decreased wait times for mental health services



Farm assistance / relief workers



Farmer-specific mental health and well-being training programs



Farm insurance (animal, crop)



Respite / support homes



Reduce barriers to improve access to mental health services

Things we can do IN ADVANCE OF a disaster/crisis to reduce the impact on farmer mental health.



Things we can do DURING and AFTER a disaster to support farmers generally, so they can best access the interventions available and support their recovery.



Agricultural-specific mental health literacy training



Farmer insurance / group insurance plans for mental health



Promote, normalize, and engage in self-care



Ongoing support



Frequent reminders and assistance with self-care, including farmer-specific self-care apps

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for MENTAL HEALTH DURING AGRICULTURAL CRISES

Things we can do **in advance** of a disaster/crisis to reduce the impact on farmer mental health



Agricultural-specific mental health literacy training

...so that people are better equipped to recognize signs of mental health struggle in themselves or others, and access appropriate supports.

- Especially important for those individuals who farmers often turn to for support (e.g. veterinarians, industry representatives with frequent farm visits)
- Also important for primary health care providers (doctors, nurses, mental health workers), spiritual advisors, lenders, commodity group leaders, etc. Basically, anyone the farmer encounters and trusts.
- Several participants discussed incorporating this training into agriculture organization training and agricultural colleges.



Farm insurance (animal, crop)

...was described by some participants as being able to help decrease the financial impact of the crisis and associated stress.

- Increase access to plans (e.g. through national or provincial farm organizations).
- Research barriers to insurance and attempt to address.
- Explore potential of making insurance part of the lending process.



Easily accessible / readily available list of available mental health supports

... with supports most ideally being provided by people and organizations who are both qualified mental health providers and familiar with farming and understand agricultural realities. It is important that this information is readily accessible to farmers and to the people who commonly support farmers.

- Ideally, this would all be in one place, free, and available online 24/7. Paper copies could be distributed for posting in easily accessible areas (e.g. barns, offices, etc.).
- Until one universal system is in place, encourage agricultural organizations to develop these types of materials for their members.



Formal emergency plan

...and ready access to resources to implement the plan. A plan for what to do in the event of specific agricultural emergencies was described as important by many participants as it helped to reduce stress among both the farmers affected and the people providing support to farmers.

- All emergency plans should include addressing mental health during the crisis.
- It is important for farmers to implement plans to self-prepare (e.g. standard operating procedures, insurance, etc.).
- May require motivating/incentivizing farmers and/or reducing barriers (e.g. contracting people who can do this work; running training events at agricultural meetings).
- Research investigating motivations and barriers to emergency planning would be beneficial.





Farmer insurance / group insurance plans for mental health

...many participants spoke of financial barriers to mental health supports (e.g. private therapy and medications) given a lack of benefits. Several participants discussed wanting financial support for mental health treatment, or access to better group insurance plans.

- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) are being used successfully by farm associations in some regions (e.g. PEI Farmer Assistance Program, ON Lennox and Addington Farmer Wellness Program). These programs allow farmers to access several hours of in-person counselling at no cost. Similar programs – either provincially, or ideally, nationally – would be useful.



Farmer-specific mental health and well-being training programs

...would help to promote mental health and well-being generally, and potentially reduce the impact of the crisis event promoting quicker recovery.

- Well-being training to boost self-worth and value.
- De-mystify and de-stigmatize counselling in the agricultural community by making “ag literate” counsellors available at agricultural conferences and events.
- Mental and physical health promotion.



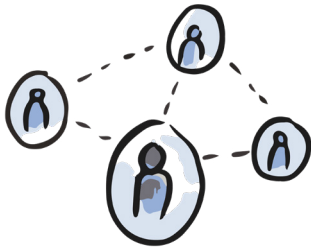
Promote, normalize, and engage in self-care

- Engage in activities that bring joy and relieve stress
- Spend time away from the farm: time with family and friends; hobbies; sports; volunteering; humour; nature; etc.



INTERVENTION

Things we can do **during** a disaster/crisis to respond to farmer mental health



Increased opportunities for social support / fostering community

...many participants spoke of feeling ostracized / isolated during crisis events related to animal infectious disease.

- Opportunities for responsible social support should be actively promoted (e.g. phone calls, online chat rooms, means for virtual socialization).



Peer support and mentoring

...being put in touch with someone who has gone through something similar would help to debrief the situation, normalize the experience and feelings, discuss ideas for recovery, etc.

- The need to “normalize” farmers’ responses to the crisis and to seeking help for their mental health during this time was commonly discussed.



Community education

...on the risks associated with affected farmers feeling ostracized/isolated.

- Several participants spoke of feeling isolated from the community due to contamination concerns (e.g. children were picked on in school; people wouldn’t sit next to participant in church), as well as education on risks this poses and how the community can support affected farmers in a way that doesn’t pose disease risks (in instances of infectious disease).
- Public service announcements to help educate community on the emergency situation and to provide specific guidance as to how people can be supportive.



24/7 hotline

...many participants spoke of the need to have mental health support available at all times of day, especially in the evenings when feelings were often particularly intense and others may not be around.

- Similar to all areas for mental health supports discussed, participants described having someone familiar with agriculture as an essential element to this support.
- Participants indicated that this should be delivered at the national level. The current lack of availability in some areas and different systems across different regions was described as confusing and inequitable.



INTERVENTION

Things we can do **during** a disaster/crisis to respond to farmer mental health



Teleservices

...many participants spoke of barriers to access to traditional psychology services including geographical barriers, time barriers, and financial barriers.

- Psychology services offered via telephone and online means were frequently discussed as a positive way to overcome some of these barriers.



Personal advocates

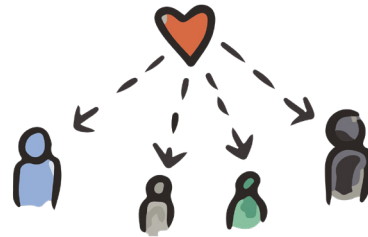
...to help connect affected individuals with mental health service supports, to help organize things at home, and deal with other issues associated with the crisis (e.g. insurance paperwork), which are especially difficult to manage in affected state of mind.

- “Buddy systems” whereby 2-3 people from community are ‘assigned’ to each person affected.
- This could also include Emergency Response Planners (by commodity or geographic area) who could help respond to the emergency and ensure that attention to mental health is part of the response.
- This could also include trained advocates to help deal with any unwanted third-party activities at the farm.



Free or subsidized access to mental health services

...like counselling, medications, etc. would help to address some of the financial barriers to mental health services.



Care made available to all family members

...recognizing the impact of the crisis on each member of the family, including the impact on family caregivers and supporters.



Agricultural-specific mental health literacy training

...for mental health service providers. This will help improve farmers’ access to service providers that have an understanding of the realities of agriculture.

- Ensure that local response teams and emergency response planners have this type of “Ag-101” training.



Things we can do **during and after** a disaster/crisis to support farmers generally, so they can best access the interventions available and support their recovery.



Farm assistance / relief workers

...to help with farm tasks would reduce the pressure on affected farmers and afford them the time and space to devote to their recovery.

- Creation of a “Farm Worker Reserve” of agriculture-minded and trained helpers



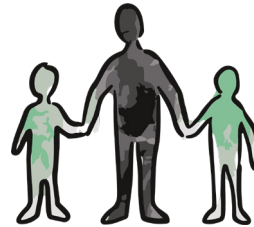
Respite / Support homes

...like that used in Quebec ([Au Coeur des Families Agricoles](#)), to allow farmers to get time away from their farms, where they can receive rest, and mental health supports as needed. Qualified support workers would look after the farm in their absence.



Decreased wait times for mental health services

...were discussed by many participants.



Child care assistance

...similar to farm assistance, child care assistance would help reduce pressure and afford parents time and space to devote to their recovery.

- Possible options may include churches, day care centres, non-affected neighbours, community groups.



Reduce barriers to improve access to mental health services

- Access to mental health services outside of traditional work hours would help reduce the time barrier associated with help-seeking.
- Insurance plans, EAPs, subsidized access to counselling / treatment could help reduce financial and geographic barriers.



Things we can do **during and after** a disaster/crisis to support farmers generally, so they can best access the interventions available and support their recovery.



Frequent reminders and assistance with self-care

...including farmer-specific self-care apps to provide self-care reminders, advice, guidance, etc.

- Participants emphasized that self-care was important for farmers, even with 'everything else going on'.
- Participants encouraged farmers to set aside time and space for activities that relieve some stress and help them reconnect with themselves and with the world around them.
- Other options for self-care may include spending time with friends/family/fellow farmers, church, getting off the farm, hobbies, physical activity, humour, nature, self-compassion, going to kids' sport events, etc.



On-going support

...it is important that supports around the event are on-going (i.e. don't end once the crisis is "cleaned-up").

- Farmers need support in the months (not just days) that follow the crisis.
- Participants suggested that people with lived experience with mental health crises and peer supports could check in on a regular basis (e.g. monthly, quarterly, on anniversary dates).

NOTE: Multiple participants also spoke of the need for a **national strategy** for farmer mental health (e.g. a National Centre of Excellence), whereby research, support services (peer support, crisis response, advocacy teams), and knowledge translation and transfer could be coordinated and shared equitably across the country.



LIST OF MY SUPPORTS

Wellness Together Canada (mental health and substance use support): www.ca.portal.gs

Crisis Services Canada:

- Call 1-833-456-4566 (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year)
- Text to 45645 (available from 4pm to midnight EST. Standard text messaging rates apply)
- In Quebec: 1-866-277-3553
- www.crisisservicescanada.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA): www.cmha.ca

Local CMHA telephone (visit www.cmha.ca to find yours): _____

Mental HealthLine:

- Call 211
- Visit www.211.ca

Kids Help Phone:

- Call 1-800-668-6868
- Text to 686868

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention: www.suicideprevention.ca

Centre de Prévention du Suicide de Quebec: Call 1-866-277-3535

OTHER SUPPORTS

	Name(s)	Contact Information
FRIEND(S)		
FAMILY DOCTOR		
VETERINARIAN		
PLACE OF WORSHIP		
FARMER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM(S) / FARMER ORGANIZATION(S)		
INSURANCE PROVIDER(S)		
OTHER		



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Hagen BNM (2020). Investigating mental health, help-seeking, and tailored mental health programming among Canadian farmers [Ph.D. thesis]. Guelph, Ontario: The University of Guelph.

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