

Rooted in
resilience



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Information provided in this publication is general content and is not a substitute for professional advice. Concerns of anxiety, stress, depression and other mental health impacts should be discussed with your doctor or other mental health professional.



Welcome to *Rooted in Resilience*: a publication from Farm Credit Canada dedicated exclusively to supporting mental health, being at your very best, and supporting family, friends and community to be at theirs. This is the second instalment of our periodic mental health series, the first of which is *Rooted in Strength*.

Psychologists agree that resilience means the ability to adapt well and recover from adversity and hardship. We aren't simply born with resilience – it's very much learned – and becoming more resilient can be empowering, resulting in profound personal growth. *Rooted in Resilience* is designed to help you do this, so you are better prepared with the skills and strengths to successfully adapt through difficult life experiences.

Within the pages of this magazine, we hope you will find support and inspiration via personal stories from farm operators and families who have experienced or are living and coping with mental health challenges – and thriving. Professionals share their expertise and advice on navigating specific situations, and recent farmer-focused mental health studies help to paint an honest picture.

While you read and browse, we'd like you to ask: "What does success mean to me?" Consider the tips, quotes and suggestions as opportunities to reflect on your core values and lifestyle, redefine success for yourself, and sharpen the focus on your "North Star" or purpose. You, and how you're feeling, matter.

Throughout, look for suggested actions you can begin taking right now, today, that will support you to become or maintain the best version of yourself as an individual, as a family member and as a business operator. After all, a healthy mind also supports a healthy farm!

We – the editor, writers and creators of *Rooted in Resilience* – care about your success as a whole, and we believe it's important, now more than ever, to reset and look after yourself and those you care about. We invite you to sit back, relax and read one or two articles at a time, giving yourself time to process and reflect in between. Thank you so much for what you do! ■

Put yourself up on the lift

BY RICHARD KAMCHEN

Farm equipment gets the maintenance it needs to work at peak capacity, but mental health tends not to receive the same vital attention.

The impact on a farm business can be significant because when your brain is under stress, your ability to make good decisions may become impaired.

And there are a lot of different sources of stress for farmers in any given year, from inclement weather that could wipe out crops or create feed shortages, to outbreaks of livestock disease, trade barriers and price volatility.

Rising to these challenges offers opportunities to discover your potential, grow and develop, and inspire others to be their very best, says Dr. Amir Georges Sabongui (aka Dr. Georges), psychologist and retired Canadian naval officer. Put yourself up on the lift and perform some maintenance to ensure you, like your equipment, are at your best.

“We can’t control what happens. We can control how it affects us,” says Dr. Georges.

A mental health dashboard tool can be used to inspire introspection, empowering you to take action for yourself. It offers four colours to help determine your stress levels.

“Green, you’re good to go. Yellow, operational, but not optimal. Orange, you’re already injured. When you’re orange, you’re barely functional, but you think you’re doing fine.”

The last colour is red.

“The only thing worse than that roller-coaster of hope and despair and exploding and imploding (shutting down) is apathy. It’s feeling nothing. Feeling like you don’t care anymore. That’s definitely a red light.”

Use the dashboard to check in with yourself and evaluate where some self-maintenance might be helpful. ■

Signs you may need to ‘put yourself up on the lift’



Sleeping more or less



Avoiding others



Eating more or less



Self-blame



Drinking more alcohol

Source: fmc-gac.com

Wellness dashboard

Balance is extremely important when dealing with stress. When you look at your internal dashboard, do you see all green lights? Are there any red lights tipping you toward overload and stress? Let's all take care of ourselves so we can continue to do what we enjoy most.

Green

Healthy | Optimal

Yellow

Reacting | Stress

Orange

Injured | Burnout

Red

Illness | Depression | Mental illness



Physical

Good sleep
Good appetite, want to eat healthy
Want to take care of physical health
Rarely or never sick

Mild insomnia
Tired
Attracted to junk food often
Unmotivated to exercise
Trouble relaxing without a drink

Moderate insomnia
Exhausted
Binge eating
Drinking too much alcohol or using drugs to relax
Various aches and pains

Constantly sleeping or periods of no sleep at all
Constant aching in body
Immunocompromised: always sick
Trouble getting off the couch or getting out of bed
Only moments of relief come from excessive drinking or drugs, or over-the-counter medication



Mental

Mentally clear
Focused
Good concentration
Creative problem-solving
Sees solutions

Easily distracted
Excessive worry
Procrastination
Avoidance
Sees obstacles

Chronically preoccupied
Inability to concentrate
Impaired decision-making
Memory loss
Constant focus on problems
Always negative

Impaired judgment
Paralyzed decision-making
*Suicidal thoughts or actions

*If you're having suicidal thoughts, seek help immediately and call 911 or see additional resources at the end of the magazine.



Emotional

Motivated
Excited
Good social network

Irritability
Loss of sense of humour
Discouraged
Impulsive
Seeing people is a chore

Anger
Anxiety
Low mood
Overwhelmed
Avoiding social situations

Apathy
Hopelessness or helplessness
Out of control: explosive-impulsive, holding it all in
Feeling like a burden
Isolating yourself from friends, family and your community



Strategies

Self care: physical, mental and emotional
Serotonin boost
Take a work break or vacation

Reaching out to friends and family
Doing something to relax
Seeing your family doctor

Peer support, assistance programs, mental health first aid

Professional or clinical support: doctor, psychologist

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If you need help or would like to talk

If you're in immediate crisis, CALL 911. Trained first responders are available.

Provincial distress and information lines

British Columbia: 1-800-784-2433
Alberta: 1-877-303-2642
Saskatchewan: 1-800-667-4442
Manitoba: 1-866-367-3276
Ontario: 1-866-531-2600
Quebec: 1-866-277-3553
New Brunswick: 1-800-667-5005

Nova Scotia: 1-888-429-8167
Prince Edward Island: 1-800-218-2885
Newfoundland and Labrador: 1-888-737-4668
Yukon: 1-844-533-3030
Northwest Territories: 1-800-661-0844
Nunavut: 1-800-265-3333



How your emotional awareness affects your mental health

BY EMILY LEESON



“We weren’t meant to do any of this alone.”

– Dr. Jody Carrington

Resilient, tough, capable of meeting any challenge – these are the narratives that producers tend to perpetuate about themselves, explains Dr. Jody Carrington, psychologist, best-selling author and public speaker.

But that doesn’t paint the full picture. The data is clear: the last few years have been stressful for Canadians. Carrington points out that since the beginning of the pandemic, domestic strife is higher and divorce has increased by 30 per cent.

Producers are not immune – and they endure the stress of hard work, long days and fluctuating economies on top of it all.

Carrington knows the unique demands producers face. “We put a big emphasis on how to fix our finances, what we’re growing, what the cattle prices are doing,” she says. But the reality is that the industry is always going to have ups and downs.

“It’s so critically important that we are OK,” Carrington says. “Our farms will not be OK unless we are OK.”

Producers who recognize, acknowledge and address the pressure they’re under are better equipped to take the steps needed to survive and thrive in stressful times.

Emotional awareness, also referred to as “emotional intelligence” is the ability to identify and regulate emotions – and is considered one of the key attributes of successful leaders.

This includes emotional literacy, that is, the ability to recognize the nuances of what you’re feeling.

For example, you may feel angry at first, but when you dive deeper, you realize that you’re actually frustrated or anxious.

Producers don’t need to be stalwart beacons of silence through tough times – they need to be equipped with the skills to identify and deal with emotions constructively.

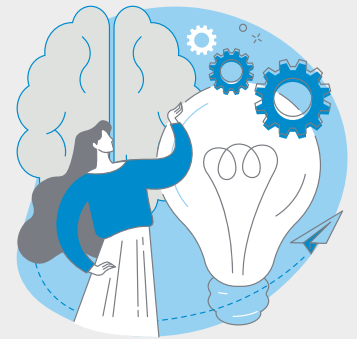
When you’re emotionally aware, you can engage in constructive conflict and work through strong emotions to help in the decision-making process. Leaders with strong emotional awareness can guide their team and their business through adversity – and improve their own mental health in the process.

For farm leaders, Carrington says communication is really where the need is highest.

“We need an emotional language,” she says. Producers need to be able to discuss their challenges and their successes. They need to connect. They need others to lean on. They’ve got to be able to talk it out.

“We have never been this disconnected,” she says – and it’s not just due to the global pandemic.

Over the course of a generation, the industry has undergone a seismic shift in both the



Harvard suggests 3 steps to improve your emotional awareness:

- 1** | Recognize and name your emotions (refer to the "Feeling Wheel," pg 12).
- 2** | Ask others to rate your emotional awareness – they may have helpful insights into your strengths and areas to work on.
- 3** | Read literature with complex characters. This is known to enhance empathy and social awareness.

Source: professional.dce.harvard.edu

boots-on-the-ground management and the day-to-day reality of farm family life.

How farm families function has changed. While today's producers may well be sending texts rather than sorting out the details at the dinner table, that doesn't change the need for level-headed thinking and carefully considered communication.

Being mindful of your own emotions – able to identify what it is you are truly feeling – opens the door to those more authentic conversations.

The close-knit nature of farm life may have expanded and evolved, but those same old ties still bind.

"We still base this industry on a handshake," says Carrington. "We will never automate the importance of looking each other in the eye." Rekindling that connection is key, explains Carrington.

"When's the last time you played cards with the neighbours?" she asks. "Let's do Sunday

dinner again. Let's gather around that fire pit again. That's what makes agriculture great: the people."

Building that connection and practicing community may well be the first step in growing your own emotional awareness.

Build emotional awareness into your life and business

Producers who cultivate emotional awareness are better equipped to steer their business through turbulent times.

Self-awareness can help pave the way toward open and honest discussion. Anger and silence don't solve problems. Paying attention to your emotions, reflecting on your actions and being willing to learn from your mistakes can all set the stage for building self-awareness – which in turn boosts confidence. ■

“Isolation is where mental health issues thrive. So make time to connect. Our burdens can be unbearably heavy when carried on our own, but if we all share each other’s burdens, they all become lighter.”

– Shannon Ferrell

Via Twitter @shanferrell
(Part of a DoMoreAg Twitter conversation)

Burnout

BY PIERRETTE DESROSIERS, M. Ps.
Occupational psychologist, speaker,
business coach and agricultural specialist

Burnout is the feeling of being exhausted after having deployed too much energy or resources in relation to our capacities and limits.



Burnout can feel like this:

- “Last year, I realized that I had less and less interest and motivation to go to the barn. I had lost the pleasure of taking care of my animals.”
- “For some time, I had been having various health problems: headaches, back aches, stomach aches, repeated colds and insomnia. I told myself it would pass.”
- “I started to change. I didn’t recognize myself anymore. I became more impatient and aggressive. Everyone irritated me. Even my children irritated me. My business partners told me I needed help, that I wasn’t myself anymore, but I didn’t want to see it.”
- “I was tired and less and less productive. I was working more hours for less output. I lacked focus. I was forgetting things.”
- “One morning, I found myself curled up in a little ball in the corner of the dairy, crying with discouragement. That’s when I had to admit to myself that I was at the end of my rope.”

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, seek professional help. The longer you take to act, the longer it can take you to rebuild.

Burnout is a depletion of physical, mental and emotional resources that sets in gradually, even if it seems to happen all at once. Don’t wait until you’ve reached your limit. ■

Make the most of relationships on multi-generational farms

BY MYRNA STARK LEADER

Having three to four generations on one farm is becoming more common. Each person brings unique values, behaviour and mental and physical capacity to the farm family and operation.

As Cynthia Beck knows, reconciling generational perspectives offers challenges and possibilities. She, her husband and two children operate a grain and cattle farm in Saskatchewan, along with her husband's parents and his brother's family.

Learn from each other

"The knowledge spread between generations has increased. Our son comes home from his summer job in crop science or from university and makes suggestions that my husband acknowledges he's not thinking of," Cynthia says. It takes courage

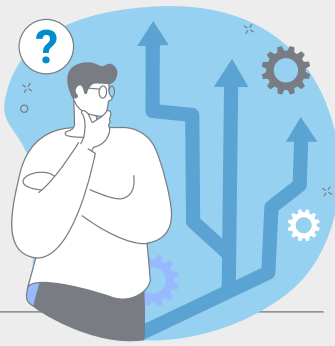
for younger generations to speak up, especially with multiple interwoven relationships and blurred roles.

At 50, Cynthia recently added clinical psychology master's graduate to her multiple roles, including farm business partner, co-worker and family member. Having experienced postpartum depression as well as serving as a telephone suicide intervention responder, she wanted more education to better help others.

"The impact when roles, finances and transition plans are unclear is apparent in many of those phone calls. The root issue is often feeling no autonomy, no control over their current situation or what the transition plan is going forward," Cynthia says.



Stats at a glance



Agriculture's top three stressors:

- 1 | Unpredictability
- 2 | Heavy workloads
- 3 | Financial pressure

Farmers under 40 are more likely to report high stress due to farm transition uncertainty and family conflict

88% of farmers say a business plan has contributed to their peace of mind

Source: fmc-gac.com

"It's all about trying to find the right balance between focusing on the health of the family and the business."

Make clear plans together

Transition can be a stressful area for all family members. Talking about intergenerational farm challenges around this and other management topics is part of FCC business advisor Annessa Good's job. She's noticed that getting clear about the future and documenting it on paper is one of the biggest areas of stress reduction, as it removes ambiguity and guess work.

"It's all about trying to find the right balance between focusing on the health of the family and the business," Annessa says.

A third party can also make it easier to talk about the culture of the farm, personal values or fairness. Clarity in these areas makes it easier to discuss compensation and financials, potentially huge stressors that can affect all generations.

Practice healthier behaviour

In addition to making decisions about the business together, family members can learn how to best navigate difficult situations with each other's support.

Sometimes, "unlearning" is helpful. For example, a family may share unhealthy coping strategies, such as avoiding conversations or turning to alcohol when stressed. Actively recognizing these behaviours and making positive changes together is a constructive way forward.

"My husband and I are really working with our kids to have more open communication. We've tried to normalize talking about our coping strategies, recognizing them, identifying them and actually verbalizing them," Cynthia says. ■

TIPS FOR INTERGENERATIONAL FARM FAMILIES



Respect individual physical and mental stamina and coping levels.



Initiate intentional one-topic discussions.



Listen to others' perspectives without judgment. Differing opinions are not signs of disrespect or disloyalty.



Do a 1-10 stress level check-in plus a brainstorm with family members on how to reduce stress.



Write down what's weighing on your mind, and name who is supporting you.



Write down family and operating agreements. Businesses don't operate well on unwritten promises.



Start or continue conversations about transition planning – for tips and inspiration visit fcc.ca/Transition



Seek third-party help to facilitate conversations.



Avoid defining yourself by your farm business.

Managing your emotions to better manage your business

BY CÉLINE NORMANDIN

Life on the farm is filled with challenges big and small, exciting and energizing, but also stressful. With the ups and downs come emotions that can be difficult to manage or communicate. And when family is involved, it can be even more complicated to maintain a constructive relationship dynamic.

Learning to recognize your feelings, to listen to yourself and to others can significantly improve the harmony in your business and increase its efficiency, not to mention help you retain personnel.

No good or bad emotions

“The first thing to realize is that emotion is a normal, but uncontrollable, reaction,” explains Jean-Christophe Durand, psychologist and business transfer consultant at Groupe ProConseil. Emotions are neither good nor bad. You can be comfortable or uncomfortable with what you’re feeling, but what you do with these feelings is what matters. Managing emotions positively involves regulating them, slowing down to name them, understanding them and acting on them in a calm and composed way.

Emotions are human and natural, and we all have them, regardless of age or gender. “Emotions carry messages and you have to listen to them,” adds Durand. “We need to learn what they mean. Displaying emotion doesn’t make you weak. It takes strength and kindness to talk about them.”

“Emotions express a need. For example, the desire to feel respected,” adds Audrée Bourdages, a counsellor with Au coeur des familles agricoles – an organization that provides psychosocial assistance for Quebec farmers and their families.

When emotions are running high, both experts recommend taking a step back to analyze what’s happening in order to communicate effectively. “You set yourself up for success so you can communicate better,” says Durand.

“Talking also puts into perspective what you have felt, while informing those around you, which avoids isolation,” Bourdages says. ■



Tools to better manage your emotions:

- 1** | Recognize that intense emotions can be beneficial - aim to regulate, not repress.
- 2** | Take a pause by creating physical (a walk) or mental (a distraction) distance from the feeling, temporarily.
- 3** | Keep a daily mood journal to record your emotions, reactions and outcomes.
- 4** | Talk to an expert or therapist for personalized advice.

Source: [healthline.com](https://www.healthline.com)

The importance of self-care

BY REBECCA HANNAM

Bailey Kemery's story

When Bailey Kemery was four years old, a nearly fatal farm accident left her with lifelong physical injuries. But it wasn't until she was an adult that she realized how profoundly the experience impacted her mental health, too.

She and her brother were playing on a ride-on rototiller when it shifted into gear and she fell into the power take-off and rotors. After numerous surgeries and years of intensive rehabilitation, she was able to walk again and tried to resume a childhood similar to other kids her age.

But she looked different than them, and it took a mental toll.

When Kemery moved away to college, a friend identified her heart-attack-like symptoms as undiagnosed anxiety.

"At 18, I was figuring out something that I had been dealing with my whole life but was never talked about," she says.

Now, Kemery is a farm safety and mental health advocate who shares her story publicly. Being a mom to three young children further motivates her to speak out and normalize the conversation about mental health.

"If we as adults can't talk about our stressors in normal everyday conversation,

how are our kids going to know to reach out for help when they're stressed?" she asks.

Sharing her experience and teaching first aid, psychological first aid and emergency medical response courses educates others, while helping her cope with her own reality.

Psychological first aid courses give people the tools to focus on self-care and help others with it – something the farming community could use more of. "The more I talk about it, the more comfortable I feel with my situation, including my scars, physical limitations and self-worth."

Belinda Bowman's story

Belinda Bowman came face-to-face with mental illness after the sudden and tragic loss of her fiancé Troy Snobelen, who was killed in a snowmobile accident in 2019.

After the initial shock of the accident, she struggled to communicate her distress to those around her and used farm work as a coping mechanism.

"It was unhealthy and toxic but working harder was the only way I could recognize any sort of self-worth," she says.

Bowman began working with a therapist and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety. Over many months of sessions, she learned how important it is to be present in the moment, process your feelings and understand why you're feeling that way. She used a 'feelings wheel' to help identify emotions and what triggers them.

"Finding self-awareness, being able to identify my feelings and taking time to sit with my feelings has changed how I live my life," she says.

Since she only talked to a few trusted people about her mental health, writing became an outlet for Bowman. She started by writing letters to Troy and transitioned to journaling her daily emotions.

Then she started writing Instagram posts (@bb_cattleco) and learned that her support network reached far and wide. She has since connected with many people who have experienced similar loss, and her story has helped others.

"The best coping mechanism I've found is steady support," she shared. "I surround myself with kindness, compassion and love and embrace all of these to my fullest capacity." ■

Stats at a glance

Farm women report higher levels of anxiety, depression and exhaustion than men

Source: "The 2021 Survey of Farmer Mental Health in Canada" led by Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton at the University of Guelph.



"Take time for self-care. Even if you have to write yourself a 'permission slip' – it's so important."

– Shany Silinski

Via Twitter @mystichanyn
(Part of a DoMoreAg Twitter conversation)

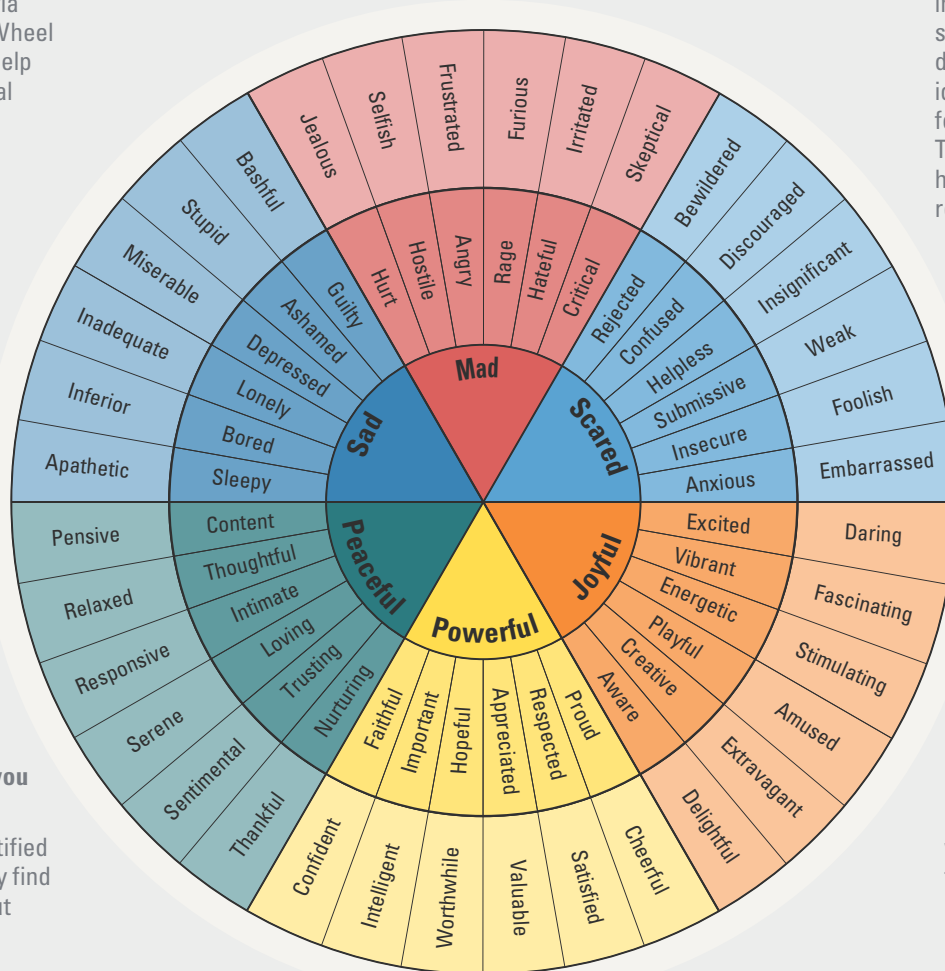
The Feeling Wheel

What is the Feeling Wheel?

Developed by Dr. Gloria Willcox, the Feeling Wheel is a tool designed to help expand your emotional awareness.

What are you feeling?

When you experience an intense feeling it can sometimes be difficult to describe. Start with identifying your primary feeling in the inner ring. The outer two rings will help you name secondary, related feelings.



Communicate what you are feeling.

Now that you've identified your feelings, you may find it's easier to talk about them – whether with family, friends or a therapist.

Regulate your feelings.

Look directly across the wheel from your identified feelings. Here are suggestions for how you might aim to transform a negative or uncomfortable experience. Think of things you can do to get there.

Source: gottman.com

The Hunter Brothers' keys to building resiliency

BY OWEN ROBERTS

Gathering to talk about farming's ups and downs with a cup of coffee in hand is a long-standing tradition in Canadian agriculture. Some even consider it therapeutic.

But given how modern production can eat up every minute of the day (and sometimes, the night) isn't such banter a waste of time?

Not to southern Saskatchewan farmer Dusty Hunter, drummer of the popular country band The Hunter Brothers.

"I've heard people say that if you're spending time talking, you're not getting work done," he says. "But if you're dying inside because of stress and anxiety, the work's not getting done anyway."

Talking about challenges sounds simple. But it can be an active, accessible coping strategy for farmers, says mental health expert Professor Andria Jones-Bitton of the University of Guelph. She gives it two thumbs up.

"It would be great if more farmers, especially men, talked with others about their problems, about how they shift their perspective and approach problem solving, rather than getting stuck in self-blame and isolation," she says.

The Hunter Brothers – Dusty, Ty, J.J., Luke and Brock – know about stress. They balance a hectic schedule that sees them onstage for dozens of engagements a year, while still contributing significantly to the family's expansive 24,000-acre grain farm.

Maybe it's not surprising that even on the farm, music helps them handle stress. Lead singer Ty gets a lift from 1970s artists like Alabama and The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, influences that can be heard on the band's latest single, Peace, Love and Country Music.

But the brothers also recognize that sometimes, professional help is needed to handle mental health challenges. For example, Ty deals with a clinically diagnosed mood disorder that he manages with regular counselling and medication.

He says opening up about it was key.

"One day I just said to my brothers 'I need to go get help.' I had to take that step and find the proper resources. Keeping things to yourself will take you down the abyss."

At some point though, working solo in the field is almost inevitable. If the walls start closing in on Ty, he stops and regroups – and suggests others give it a try.

"Get out of the cab," he says. "Take a deep breath. Smell the earth. Get down and feel the dirt. That takes me back to reality."

And like all the Hunter brothers, Dusty takes a spiritual view, and feels this is his number one coping mechanism.

"Few farmers are so naive as to think they're in control of everything," he says. ■

When anxiety runs your business and your life

BY PIERRETTE DESROSIERS, M. Ps.
Occupational psychologist, speaker, business coach and agricultural specialist

People with anxiety can spend a lot of energy worrying – energy that could be spent in more productive ways. Anxiety can also become overwhelming, affecting quality of life – and can even lead to depression.



TIPS FOR LOWERING ANXIETY IN THE MOMENT

“We all go through stressful times in our lives. To a certain extent, worrying can help us prevent, cope with or avoid certain dangers.”

But no one has to live with anxiety indefinitely – it is treatable via medication, therapy, counselling and lifestyle adjustments. And seeking help to deal with it can be very empowering.

A client of mine, Philippe, confided to me that he was very anxious at the idea of leaving the farm, even for a few hours.

“I’m always afraid that the barn will burn down while I’m gone, just as much as I’m tormented by the idea of not making it financially, of losing animals, of learning that my children have had an accident,” he says.

We all go through stressful times in our lives. To a certain extent, worrying can help us prevent, cope with or avoid certain dangers. However, feeling too much anxiety in relation to the importance of the events at hand can become debilitating.

Philippe worries disproportionately and unrealistically about everything, which is characteristic of generalized anxiety disorder. This disorder significantly affects his personal and professional life. “I often have insomnia. My hamster wheel keeps spinning, and in the end, there’s no disaster,” he says.

People with generalized anxiety disorder create catastrophic scenarios in their minds that probably won’t happen, and they develop hypervigilance.

“As soon as there’s a risk of something happening, I cling to that idea,” says Philippe. Faced with a specific scenario, individuals tend to overestimate the probability of danger or its consequences, or to underestimate their ability to cope with situations.

The good news is that, in most cases, chronic anxiety can be effectively treated through self-care, therapy, medication or a combination of treatments. Consulting with a specialist is a good idea, as being proactive is the best way to deal with this type of difficulty.

“Because I’ve always been anxious, I thought nothing could be done, and I felt like I might just die,” he says.

However, by taking actions on a daily basis and using positive coping strategies, Philippe has learned to recognize the resources available to him and when to call on them – and over time, he’s significantly reduced his anxiety level.

“I realized that I can’t plan for everything, that imagined disasters often don’t happen. Finally, when I get into trouble, I’m able to deal with it. Besides, if someone had told me one day that I would learn to meditate and breathe, I wouldn’t have believed it,” he adds with a smile. ■

If you’re feeling anxious, try these techniques to ease your symptoms:

The square breathing

technique: Breathe in deeply for a count of 4, hold for a count of 4, breathe out for a count of 4 and wait for a count of 4. Repeat.

Ground yourself in the present:

Think of one thing you can see, hear, feel, taste and smell.

Remember that the feeling will pass:

Anxiety comes in waves and will subside.

Research and practice the above and other techniques that work best for you.

Longer-term, persistent feelings of anxiety may warrant counselling and/or medication. There’s no shame in asking a professional for expert advice.

Source: mentalhealthcommission.ca

If you or someone you know is experiencing anxiety, you’re not alone:

20 per cent of farmers

reported moderate to severe anxiety disorders – significantly higher than the Canadian general population during the pandemic.

76 per cent of farmers

classified as experiencing moderate or high perceived stress.

Source: 2021 survey of farmer mental health

Reach in and reach out

BY RICHARD KAMCHEN

Farm operators can find themselves overwhelmed by stress, but like many, it's rare for them to reach out for help when they need it most.



Barriers to reaching out

Psychologist and retired Canadian naval officer Dr. Amir Georges Sabongui explains that someone might not reach out because they:

- Believe there's no access to support.
- Think a professional couldn't possibly know what they're going through.
- Feel that those close to them don't really want to know how they're doing.
- May be unaware they would benefit from support: "The biggest blind spot in the world is yourself. The one thing that an eyeball cannot see is itself," Dr. Georges says.

He also points out that men are less likely to reach out, especially those who consider themselves to be strong. "When asked, 'strong men' will say they're fine," Dr. Georges says. "Take it from a guy who's 'fine' – we're not fine."

"Brain sprain"

Dr. Georges recalls a mission in his previous military career that devolved into complete chaos, putting his team in peril. Despite his best efforts to solve the situation, it just worsened, causing him to become "unglued."

Those who counted on him the most urged him to seek counselling, explaining they'd never seen him lose control of himself like this before and that his erratic behaviour, poor judgment and bad decision-making were putting their safety at risk.

It was a real punch to his ego. His identity and sense of self-worth had been built on the idea he was the pillar everyone could lean on during a crisis. And yet, he was hearing that the biggest danger to his team's safety wasn't those shooting at them; it was him and his reduced judgment.

"That's a bad day at the office. Why didn't I see it?" he asks.

Dr. Georges' example may seem extreme, but it could happen to anyone who's very stressed and tasked with important decision-making. The reason he couldn't see he was struggling, and indeed why it might be hard for anyone under extreme stress, is what could be considered a "brain sprain."

"If you sprain your ankle, you're the first to know you're injured. But if you 'sprain your brain' you might be the last to know, because the tool needed to diagnose the problem is injured," Dr. Georges says.

Allow others to reach in

Sometimes, allowing others to reach in is the first step to becoming more self-aware and recognizing you may benefit from mental health support. Few people reach out, so it's vital to listen to the judgment of others, the ones closest to you, who are telling you something might be wrong. Allowing others to reach in just might pave the way to being able to reach into yourself. ■



When family or friends are attempting to reach in, these tips may be helpful:

- 1 | Multiply whatever they tell you by 10 and remember that it's coming from a place of caring. It's not to hurt your ego.
- 2 | Create an environment where people can be authentic and feel safe to tell you the truth.
- 3 | When friends and family have to reach in, have the humility to listen and avoid reacting defensively.

Self-care tip

Feeling irritable?

Reduce caffeine and alcohol intake, acknowledge the source, have compassion and go for a walk.

Source: Farm Safety Nova Scotia



Make time to connect

BY MATT MCINTOSH

The abundance of digital communication tools means that reaching others has never been easier. Having meaningful face-to-face interactions is not as easy.

“When I find myself consuming more than connecting and creating, it’s time to take a break.”

In an industry built on handshakes and connection, taking time to communicate with family, friends and colleagues on a personal level supports mental health. It also makes good business sense.

Spend more time together

Dr. Jody Carrington, psychologist, best-selling author and public speaker, says prior generations were much more present with each other, both physically and mentally, than those of us living in a digitized age.

Larger houses and farms mean people are more easily separated for longer periods of time, and we have more distractions in general. Fewer social opportunities to express powerful emotions such as grief, combined with potential discomfort with talking about how you feel, increases disconnection.

This reality takes a psychological toll on everyone in the industry – but particularly on middle-aged men, a demographic with the highest rate of suicide among farmers according to research.¹

“The biggest issue we’re facing in agriculture is disconnect,” Carrington says. “We used to at least have dinner with the kids. We’d say, ‘Let’s ride in the tractor. I’ll show you how to do things.’”

Connecting regularly, even in seemingly small ways, can have a big impact on strengthening relationships.

Build a healthy relationship with technology

Proactive use of digital tools can facilitate meaningful connection as well. Tiffany Martinka, a Saskatchewan poultry and sheep farmer, began using social media to remedy feelings of isolation after shifting from an active career to becoming an at-home mother.

The trick was to “connect and create, rather than consume.” For Martinka, that meant diving into agriculture advocacy by sharing her story – farm life, business challenges and parenting three children, one of whom has a medical condition which can further limit opportunities to gather. Social media has helped her engage with others including farmers, parents, industry groups and schools despite being remote.

“It can be a great tool if we are able to use it in the best way possible. But it can be a bit of a black hole,” Martinka says. “When I find myself consuming more than connecting and creating, it’s time to take a break.”

Martinka’s advocacy also generated in-person connection opportunities, including as a participant in Chicken Farmers of Canada’s Young Farmers Program, and as director for Farm & Food Care Saskatchewan.

“You need other things to get your mind off everyday challenges. We need multiple sources to fill our cup.” ■

¹ Government of Canada, 2022. Suicide in Canada: Key Statistics (infographic) – Canada.ca.

“Take care of yourself first so you can care for others.”

– **Cathy Chauvin**

Via Twitter @CathyChauvin
(Part of a DoMoreAg Twitter conversation)

TIPS

Want stronger connection?

Dr. Jody suggests you begin with these three things today:



Tell people they matter

Take the time to remind someone you’re thinking about them. They need you as much as you need them.



Drop your shoulders

Notice physical tension and try to relax by lowering your shoulders, exhaling, relaxing your jaw – this helps to lower cortisol levels and stress.



Gather more often

Make supper together, ride along in the combine, gather around the fire – make being present with one another a priority.

Something isn't right

BY PETER GREDIG AND CYNTHIA BECK

This fictional scenario shows how challenged mental health can impact a farm family. For those living or working with people struggling with mental health, there are warning signs and steps that can be taken to help. For anyone dealing with mental health challenges, getting support can make a difference.

Grace had a feeling that something was wrong, and she was worried about her husband Zach. Married 20 years, Zach was the most capable, confident, optimistic and loving person she knew. Her sense that Zach wasn't himself began six months earlier.

They'd met in university and returned to Zach's family farm where his father Vince still farmed. Vince was old-school. Fiercely determined and independent, Vince built the farm up from nothing and was known for saying, "If you need a hand, the first place to look is at the end of your own arm." Zach was a lot like his dad.

A gradual change

When Vince passed away 18 months earlier, Zach spoke highly of his dad, admiring his work ethic and dedication to farm and family. Zach spoke of carrying on the family farm legacy. Grace never saw Zach get emotional or cry at the funeral or any time after. As with most challenges, he forged ahead and seemed determined to take the farm to the next level like he and Vince had planned.

Over time, Grace saw changes in Zach's usual behaviour. Normally his truck radio was cranked, but lately it wasn't even turned on. He seemed more tired, chores went unfinished, and he didn't go crop checking anymore. She saw one of Zach's friends who joked that she must be keeping Zach busy because he kept turning down invitations to play golf, which was unusual. He made excuses to skip family gatherings. He even stopped shaving.

At times, Zach seemed like his old self but then Grace would find him in the shop, and he seemed distracted and far away. She asked Zach if he was OK and he brushed it off saying he was just tired.

Reaching out and listening

Grace planned a weekend getaway and they both enjoyed a break from the farm, talking and laughing like they always had, but her uncomfortable feeling didn't go away. One night when Zach came in late from spraying, she got out of bed to see how the day went and heard Zach crying in the shower. It scared her to the core, but she didn't know how to approach him. She didn't want to upset him but knew she had to do something.

The next day she talked to him, "I'm worried about you, Zach. Please know I'm here for you." Zach got angry and said he didn't have time for this. Grace stood quietly, hoping to give him the space he needed to talk. After a few minutes, Zach turned and said, "I don't know why I'm doing this anymore! All my life the farm has been about Dad and working to make him proud. I don't care about any of it anymore and I know he would be disappointed in me. I'm letting you down too. Some days I just want to leave this place and never look back. I don't know what's wrong with me, I just can't shake it."

Grace was stunned. Their whole life had been about farming, and they loved it. The farm was doing well under Zach's management and

How to help or find support:



Ask someone if they're OK

It may be uncomfortable but it's necessary.

Ask twice and then listen: "Hey, I've noticed some changes and I'm wondering if you're doing OK." Wait for a response, which is usually a brush off. Ask again, "Are you OK? I'm not here to judge you. I'm just here to listen." Please do just that: listen. Do not try to fix them.

Contact 211, available in every Canadian province and territory, and they will inform you of available mental health supports in your area.

Talk to your physician and ask for a referral for counselling or therapy.

Remember: Finding the right mental health support for you is a lot like trying on work boots. You may have to try on a few to find the right fit.

Remember: An angry reaction is typical, which is an avoidance coping behaviour. It is better to have someone angry with you for caring than not having them here at all.

financially they were in good shape. She didn't want to push with questions, so she said, "Thank you for telling me. I know this wasn't easy. We can get through this together."

Recognition and seeking help

Over the next few weeks, Zach and Grace talked more openly about what Zach was thinking and feeling. He realized that farming with his dad was a big part of his motivation. He didn't realize how much he would miss that relationship. Zach told Grace he hadn't been sleeping well and struggled to hide his unhappiness. Zach talked with his doctor who suggested he was experiencing symptoms of depression and recommended he see a counsellor.

Zach and Grace both met with a counsellor to help them understand and address their situation. The counsellor identified that farmers often work hard for their family, and changes due to death, divorce or transition can lead them to question their reason for continuing to farm.

Zach and Grace recognized that problems don't go away on their own. They needed mental health supports to understand what they were dealing with and to learn strategies for moving forward. They became aware of how mental health, good or challenged, impacts the whole family and the operation, and that it was worth their time getting some support. ■

VISIBLE WARNING SIGNS OF CHALLENGED MENTAL HEALTH:



Changes to usual routines (such as changes in sleeping or eating habits or hygiene practices)



Increased difficulty tackling workload



Withdrawing from usual social activities



Decreased livestock health, yard or building maintenance and crop management



Increased risk-taking behaviour or unusual decision-making



Difficulty regulating emotions (for example, increased difficulty controlling anger or frustration, less communicative)



Changes to substance use (for example, drinking alone, drinking earlier than usual, or relying on energy drinks or other stimulants to get through the day)

Redefine your success

BY CYNTHIA BECK, MSC CANDIDATE, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY



Have you ever thought about your definition of success? Do you have different expectations for your personal success than your agriculture operation's success?

Creating a definition for success in the agriculture industry can be a challenging task, yet it's an important one. A definition helps you plan, make informed business decisions and choose where to invest your time. All these pieces contribute to your state of mental health and well-being.

Success begins with you

A great place to start is at the root of your operation – you. What's important to you? Be aware of the expectations you're trying to meet for yourself and your operation.

Are the expectations you're trying to meet actually yours or someone else's? Following another's values and expectations can leave you feeling unfulfilled. It may feel a bit foreign to think about what's important to you. One way is to identify your core values. Think of core values as your thoughts or beliefs about how you prefer to live or who you

choose to be. Our values often guide our behaviour. Take a look at your core values and then at your actions in daily life. Do they line up? Do your actions support your core values or take you away from them?

Set realistic expectations

Unrealistic expectations consist of two parts: comparison to others and the amount we try to accomplish. Many farm operators set their expectations by comparing themselves or their operation to others.

Rethink comparison. Comparing your own situation to others' and being upset by this is referred to as 'toxic comparison,' and negatively impacts mental health. Instead, make comparisons to learn new information or business practices.

Revise your task list. The amount you try to accomplish can help or hinder by setting you up for success or failure. Have you had things on your to-do list for months or years? Examine it. Break down your tasks into realistic chunks to help set you up for success. Remove anything that's been there too long –

you don't need those reminders to feel bad about a perceived lack of accomplishment.

For a list with positive impact, jot down what has to get done and can realistically be done in the morning. Cross off items as you go and identify what needs to happen in the afternoon. Creating opportunity for feeling a sense of accomplishment has long-term, positive impacts on well-being. It helps with motivation, confidence and self-worth.

Measure long-term success as well

Determining success also requires figuring out how to measure and look at results long term. Financial success may be measured by the dollars in your bank account but doesn't reflect the amount of work, problems solved or learning you've done.

Measure your personal success separately from that of the farm. Perhaps your success involves your health, personal relationships and business relationships. Keep in mind that your learning and growth as a person contributes to your own success plus the success of your operation. ■

Redefine your success – a “how to”

BY CYNTHIA BECK, MSC CANDIDATE, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

1. What is important to you in your life? Write down what comes to you here.

What are your core values? Include as many values as you wish.

2. Is how you live or act in line with your values? For example, if a person chooses kindness as a core value but takes their stress out on their family through anger, yelling, or aggression, that person is not living or acting in line with their values. It is important to be aware of the areas in your life where your actions or behaviours are not in line with your values. This is called incongruency, and it negatively impacts mental health. When you're not living in line with your values, you may not feel so great about yourself.

3. Think about the expectations you have for yourself or your operation.

Where did those expectations originate? Whose are they? Are those expectations realistic?

4. Write down your to-do list.

Recognize in the agriculture industry that our to-do lists are cyclical. You may find you have a similar to-do list for each high production season. A possible time-saver is to keep those annual to-do lists tacked up somewhere so you can just add to them and not have to recreate or remember items each season. For example, the same items need to be remembered for each branding day. Save time by having one list that you add to.

5. Who do you compare yourself or your operation to? Is it a helpful comparison (you learn and grow by comparing) or is it toxic and makes you feel bad about yourself or your operation?

6. Think about how to measure your success in the long term.

Write down the times that you problem-solve or overcome something difficult. Keep track of things you've learned throughout the year. Take note of evolving relationships. Track how you're feeling and your state of physical and mental health.



LIVE YOUR CORE VALUES

Here are some core values to help get you started

- | | | | | | |
|------------|--------------|-----------|------------|-------------|----------------|
| work ethic | creativity | honesty | curiosity | empathy | accountability |
| community | spirituality | family | fairness | consistency | wisdom |
| humour | optimism | kindness | generosity | innovation | friendship |
| usefulness | loyalty | integrity | courage | balance | stability |

“When feeling down or overwhelmed, reach out for help. Isolation makes it worse.”

– Ryan Bonnett

Via Twitter @RyanBonnett1
(Part of a DoMoreAg Twitter conversation)

More information

Don't be afraid to call for help

Mental health help lines are available in every province and territory:

BC: 1-800-784-2433

AB: 1-877-303-2642

SK: 1-800-667-4442

MB: 1-866-367-3276

ON: 1-866-531-2600

QC: 1-866-277-3553

NB: 1-800-667-5005

NS: 1-888-429-8167

PEI: 1-800-218-2885

NL: 1-888-737-4668

YT: 1-844-533-3030

NT: 1-800-661-0844

NU: 1-800-265-3333

Do More Ag

Get mental well-being information and support for Canadian producers.

domore.ag

Canadian Mental Health Association

With 330 community locations, CMHA is a nationwide organization that promotes mental health and supports people recovering from mental illness.

English: cmha.ca

French: cmha.ca/fr

Online Therapy Unit

This free service was the first online therapy clinic in Canada (2010). It includes therapy services with a primary focus on depression and anxiety.

onlinetherapyuser.ca

Manitoba Farmer Wellness Program

This program, created especially for farmers, offers six free, short-term counselling sessions for farmers and their families in Manitoba.

manitobafarmerwellness.ca

Farmer Wellness Initiative

Developed and launched by the Canadian Mental Health Association – Ontario Division and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, this telehealth service provides 24-7 counselling support (up to four sessions per issue per year) in various languages to Ontario farmers and their families.

farmerwellnessinitiative.ca

Rural and Remote Telepsychology Services

Laura Friesen is offering a rural and remote psychological counselling service in Alberta for the farm and rural communities.

farmmentalhealth.ca

AgSafe BC

AgSafe BC has partnered with mental wellness practitioners to provide completely free and confidential third-party counselling services for all members of the BC agriculture community.

agsafebc.ca

Mental Health Commission of Canada

English: mentalhealthcommission.ca

French: commissionsantementale.ca

Dealing with social isolation and loneliness

Social isolation is a serious issue on Canadian farms. This publication offers helpful tips in how to stay connected.

casa-acsa.ca/en/canadian-agricultural-safety-week/safety-is-our-standard

In the Know

In the Know is a mental health literacy program designed specifically for farmers, their families and those who are involved and/or support the agriculture sector. A free, four-hour training program helps participants start conversations around mental self-maintenance: Ontario.

ontario.cmha.ca/intheknow

Mental wellness dashboard

Learn to recognize common signs of addiction, anxiety, depression and suicide with this resource from AgSafe BC.

agsafebc.ca/mental-wellness

FarmersTalk.ca

The PEI Farmer Assistance Program offers resources and support for farmers and their families experiencing mental health distress.

farmerstalk.ca

Au coeur des familles agricoles (French only)

Nous visons à améliorer votre bien-être par de l'accompagnement, du soutien, ainsi que par des actions de dépistage et de prévention.

acfareseaux.qc.ca

211

211 is Canada's primary source of information for government and community-based, non-clinical health and social services. The free and confidential service can be accessed 24 hours a day, in more than 150 languages, by phone, chat, text and web.

We Talk. We Grow.

We Talk. We Grow. is an initiative of Farm Safety Nova Scotia raising awareness and taking action to protect and nurture the mental health and well-being of Nova Scotia's farming community, and enhance and maintain a culture where mental health is valued, prioritized and protected.

wetalkwegrow.ca