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Cornhusker Economics

Nebraska Extension: Supporting the Well-Being of Farmers and Ranchers

Nebraska Extension is a proud member of the North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center. A regional center funded by USDA NIFA, it delivers farm and ranch stress and mental health resources and services in 12 states, including Nebraska.

Since 2021, several programs delivered by Nebraska Extension and its partners have been supported with these funds. This article will review the key programs supported in Nebraska.

Rural Response Hotline

Established in 1984 during the 1980s farm crisis, the Nebraska Rural Response Hotline continues to be a valuable and proven resource for farmers, ranchers, and rural residents who experience hard times. Trained and experienced staff help callers assess their needs and direct them to resources specific to those needs. The Hotline is administered by the Rural Response Council and the Farm and Ranch Project in Legal Aid of Nebraska's Bancroft office. The hotline assists in four main areas:

1. Financial Assistance - Callers can consult experts in the areas of farm finance and management for help in analyzing a financial situation, exploring options, and making informed decisions. These one-on-one consultations with financial counselors are free and confidential.
2. Disaster Relief - Floods, fires, storms, drought, and other natural disasters can have devastating and long

-lasting effects on farm and ranch operations. The Rural Response Hotline can refer callers to resources during these difficult times.

3. Legal Assistance - In the face of legal issues and sometimes daunting decisions, it is critical to know and understand your legal rights. Free and confidential one-on-one consultations with an experienced attorney can be scheduled through the Rural Response Hotline.
4. Emotional Support - Financial worries, mental and emotional distress, substance abuse, anxiety, depression, and suicide take a toll on farm families; however, there is hope. Positive emotional and behavioral health can be achieved. Free mental health vouchers for counseling sessions may be obtained through the Counseling Outreach and Mental Health Therapy (COMHT) program, administered by the Rural Response Hotline.

For more information about the hotline, visit <https://farmhotline.com/> or call 800-464-0258.

Communicating with Farmers and Ranchers Under Stress

This workshop is designed for individuals who work with farmers and ranchers on a regular basis, such as bank lenders, ag suppliers, insurance agents, healthcare professionals, and anyone involved with the lives of farmers and ranchers.

Workshop objectives include:

- Build awareness around potentially stressful conditions affecting some farmers and ranchers.
- Learn stress triggers, identify signs of stress, and review helpful techniques for responding.
- Learn techniques for identifying, approaching, and working with farmers who may not cope with stress effectively.
- Learn where to find additional help.

In addition to being helpful for working with farmers and ranchers, the workshop educates participants about managing stress in their own lives and teaches how stressors can affect physical health and relationships with family or coworkers.

Mending the Stress Fence

It is important that we all learn how to manage our stress levels and reduce the effects of unwanted stress. Farmers and ranchers are no exception to experiencing stress. In fact, stress seems to be prevalent in the agriculture sector. Too much stress can make us more accident-prone, and it can affect our overall health.

This 20- to 30-minute presentation/workshop is available upon request and can be delivered virtually, in person, or as an important addition to other agriculture programs. It is designed for farmers and ranchers, their families, and others that work closely with them in the agricultural industry.

This program provides information on identifying common stressors, recognizing stress symptoms, and managing stress.

Program objectives include:

- Understanding signs and symptoms of stress in agriculture.
- Learning the eight dimensions of wellness.
- Learning how to ask open-ended questions.
- Improving understanding and awareness of the warning signs of suicide and knowing how to access resources to help support someone in need.

Question. Persuade. Refer.

QPR Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper Training is an online program that teaches warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to respond.

Three steps can help prevent suicide. The three steps include:

1. Question the individual's desire or intent regarding suicide.
2. Persuade the person to seek and accept help.
3. Refer the person to appropriate resources.

Know Your Numbers, Know Your Options

This course is designed to help farmers and ranchers understand their current financial position and how big decisions like large purchases, new leases, or changes in production will affect their bottom line. Participants will work through the financial statements of a case study farm, watch pre-recorded videos, complete assignments, and participate in video chats. Upon completion of this program, participants will have a better understanding of how financial records can be used to make decisions and confidently discuss their financial position with their family, business partners, and lenders.

The course includes a “Mending the Stress Fence” presentation.

For more information about these efforts or to schedule one of these programs in your community, visit <https://ruralwellness.unl.edu/>

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