

Beef Day 2021

North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center: A comprehensive needs assessment in South Dakota

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Objective

The overall objective of this project is to work with mobilized partners to form the North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center (NC FRSSAC). The NC FRSSAC will create and expand stress management and mental health resources and services to agricultural producers, advocates and stakeholders who support agricultural producers. This project is led by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. South Dakota State University is one of the partners and our supporting objective is to establish a state-wide task force to develop an assistance network, conduct a comprehensive needs assessment, develop and implement educational workshops to producers and their families, and develop training on farm stress for health care providers.

Study Description

The basis of this work is preliminary data collected by Dr. Andrea Bjornestad (SDSU) on mental health outcomes among farmers and ranchers in Midwestern states. The results from surveys conducted with producers in SD, MI, MO, and KS show that 29% of the sample experienced mild or worse depression, 27% experienced mild or worse anxiety, and 3.7% were at significant risk of suicidal behavior. The specific stressors were: market prices, the weather, healthcare costs, and taxes. Based on this and other studies, depressive symptoms are increasing among SD farmers and ranchers; a comprehensive needs assessment is imperative in identifying and responding to the needs of producers and to determine future efforts to decrease mental health stress in our SD agriculture communities.

Over 3 years, we will implement our plan of work, which has already begun with a kick-off retreat with a state-wide task force. The Task Force is comprised of individuals that represent the following producer organizations: SD Cattlemen's Association, SD Farm Bureau, SD Grassland Coalition, SD Pork Producers Council, SD Sheep Grower's Association, SD Soil Health Coalition, SD Soybean Association, SD Stockgrowers Association, SD Wheat Commission, and the SD Department of Agriculture. The Task Force has provided input on major concerns, need indicators, and preliminary priorities. From the information provided to us by the Task Force, we will collect data from focus groups and complete key informant interviews with groups such as women in ag, young producers, clergy, mental health professionals, and agriculture industry supporters (e.g. bankers, veterinarians, feed dealers, NRCS staff). In addition to collecting data, we will offer educational workshops on farm stress and mental health first aid. The culmination of this project will be developing an Action Plan with our Task Force, which will set priority of needs, identify possible solutions, and determine next steps.

Take Home Points

Agricultural producers experience a plethora of stressors on a daily basis. Studies have demonstrated that farmers and ranchers experience greater psychological distress and depressive symptoms compared to the general population. Consequently, a comprehensive needs assessment is being conducted by SDSU



Extension and is being guided by a Task Force comprised of individuals from several producer organizations. Focus groups and key informant interviews will culminate in a state-wide Action Plan that identifies priority needs, possible solutions, and next steps.

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