

Hunter Nickell

Managing Farm and Ranch Stress

Farmers and ranchers are often considered one of the most resilient groups of individuals. They face challenges daily that are out of their control and that impact their financial well-being and livelihood. Some of the recent challenges they have faced, as you may have heard or even experienced, include drought, wildfires, and extreme heat. What is the one thing these factors have in common? They cause stress to farmers and ranchers.

In recent months, most of the state of Kansas has been in some form of drought. More specifically, parts of South Western Kansas have seen moderate to exceptional drought through the 2022 calendar year. In times of uncertainty, farmers and ranchers become stressed, but ultimately find ways to continue to persevere. Whether they have to sell animals, buy hay or rely on crop insurance, they usually always find a way to make ends meet.

No matter the devotion to their livelihoods, sometimes things don't work out. For example, cattle die from heat and humidity, the grass doesn't grow to make hay and the ponds dry up. Losing your livelihood is never going to be easy; it is hard to see everything you and your family have worked for be destroyed with no way to change it. While these scenarios are highly stressful, there is always someone willing to help you cope with the losses.

Stress and losses contribute to both physical and emotional tiredness. Do you find yourself with a constant headache, tense muscles or feeling hopeless? These are the tell tale signs of stress. There are many ways to cope with stress like getting plenty of sleep, participating in physical activity, and focusing on the factors you can control. For example, watching the weather forecast and hoping for rain to come is not a healthy coping mechanism. I know it may seem like

the best way to cope at the moment, but don't sit around waiting for rain. It will rain again, I promise.

While no one likes to talk about our struggles in life, it is important to know that unbearable stress and suicide rates go hand in hand. In the United States, the general suicide rate is 13.42 per 100,000 individuals. Due to high-stress working conditions, suicide rates in the agriculture community are 36 per 100,000 individuals; more than 2.5x the national average according to asfp.org. The farming and ranching profession ranks in the top 10 jobs with the highest suicide rate. These numbers are extremely concerning. Most people don't know the resources for managing stress and depression or are too prideful to ask for help. While there are general resources like the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, there are also specific Kansas based resources such as the Kansas Department of Agriculture's kansasagstress.org and Kansas State Research and Extension's Stress and Resiliency Team.

If you ever find yourself needing the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, just **call or text 988** 24/7 and someone will assist you and talk you through your situation. Maybe you prefer talking to someone you know who can relate to you. I encourage you to reach out to them, there is always someone willing to listen. Call a neighbor, parent, grandparent, or even an old friend and just talk to them. In today's society, we all have to work together to better each other. If you take away one thing from this article it is this: be open to seeking help before it is too late. There is a community of people who are there to support you and provide resources.

While I know the climate outlook is grim for a while, I promise you it will rain again. Your grass will green up and you will have full ponds. Your animals will be happy and you will breathe easily again. Times are tough with rising inflation and input prices, along with decreasing animal prices, but we will rebound from this. If you are struggling, please seek the

help that you need. There are so many great resources out there for everyone; tell a friend, neighbor, or colleague. You never know when they may need the resources too. For more information, please contact Hunter Nickell, Livestock Production Extension Agent, at nickell99@ksu.edu or by calling 620-365-2242. If you or someone you know is in need of immediate assistance please contact the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988.