



Farm Stress Program Details & Topical Information

May 1, 2020

#SoyHelp

How to Start the Conversation

- In agriculture, we take care of our people. Part of that is recognizing when someone might not be themselves. Research shows that while farmers experience higher levels of psychological distress and depression than the general population, they are less likely to seek help for mental health issues.
- Stress is a universal experience, and asking someone how they are doing is entirely okay.
- For an alternative to “How are you,” try “How are you taking care of yourself today?”
- The easiest way to let people know you are willing to talk about mental health is to be open about your own mental health. Try to think of it in the same way you think about your physical health. Allow it to come up naturally in conversation in the same way.
- The American Farm Bureau’s [FarmStateofMind](#) program has helpful tips for talking to someone potentially in need, including the following tips found on Bayer’s [acceleron.com](#).
- Although it may feel like a difficult subject to approach, you can start the conversation in any number of ways:
 - **Acknowledge what they’re going through**
“I know a lot of people have to plant late this year, which has got to be stressful. How are you holding up?”
 - **Remind them of something they’ve said, and express interest**
“I heard you say your meeting with John was a disaster. Can you tell me about it?”
 - **Share a habit that you’ve seen change**
“I’ve noticed you haven’t come to coffee for a long time. Are you doing okay?”
 - **Don’t wait for them to ask**
“You seem to have a lot on your mind. How can I help?”
 - **If they’re willing to reach out, encourage them**
“I’ve heard that talking to [a counselor, a doctor, a religious or spiritual leader, etc.] can be really helpful. Have you considered that?”
 - **Try not to compare their challenges to someone else’s or minimize what they’re going through. What matters most is showing genuine care and empathy.**
 - Listen. Provide opportunities for the farmer or family member to talk about what they are going through. You don’t need to have answers, but be aware of local resources so that you can refer them.
 - Listen for signs that the individual needs more than a sympathetic ear—signs that person needs professional help that you can’t provide, such as financial, legal, or personal counseling.
 - Access the agency or community resource most appropriate to address the person’s (or family’s) problem.

While these resources are by no means exhaustive, ASA hopes they will be helpful in seeking qualified professional care.



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- Discuss the referral with the person or family (“It sounds/looks like you are feeling _____. I think _____ could help you deal with your situation.”)
- Explore the individual’s or family’s willingness to initiate contact with the community resource (“How do you feel about seeking help from this person/agency?” or “Can I help you contact _____ at this agency?”)
- Harvard Business Review offers this article on [What Great Listeners Actually Do](#)
- Michigan State University’s Extension Program offers an extensive [how-to guide](#) on active listening, including questions and statements that might be helpful to use when talking to a farmer under stress.
- ASA has compiled both **national and state-specific stress resources**, including for C-19, [here](#).