

Educating Ohio Mental Health Counselors to Understand the Stressors in Agriculture

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BACKGROUND

Mental health is a concern in rural communities, and especially for those involved in agriculture. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2016 that the suicide rate for males in farming, fishing, and forestry is higher than the total study population. Farmers and ranchers face unique stressors within their occupation, that many outside of agriculture don't understand.

To confound the problem, rural communities lack access to trained mental health providers. When services are available, many do not have counselors with an understanding of the unique challenges farmers and farm families face on a daily and seasonal basis.

PROGRAM GOALS

Recognizing the seriousness of the problem, a cross-disciplinary team of Ohio State University Extension colleagues came together to create a new training program for mental health professionals. This team of educators represent three program areas: agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, and community development.

The new program, Farm Stress Certified, has an overarching goal to teach mental health professionals about unique agricultural stressors.



OBJECTIVES

- The objectives of the Farm Stress Certified Program are to:
1. Improve behavioral health awareness and health literacy for mental health service professionals.
 2. Increase capacity of mental health service professionals to serve in a rural community.
 3. Improve outcomes and experiences for agricultural workers and their families.

METHODS

Mental health service providers are required to obtain Continuing Education Units (CEUs) to maintain their license. Our team developed a partnership and memorandum of understanding with the Ohio State University College of Social Work. The College of Social Work agreed to advertise and manage CEUs for interested providers. The program is valued at \$100 per person, but a grant from the Ohio Department of Agriculture allowed our team to offer the program free of charge.

The curriculum includes three modules, with each module being two and one-half hours in length. Each module provides 2.5 CEUs. Credentialing CEUs were available by either the Ohio Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist Board (CSWMFT) or the Ohio Chemical Dependency Professionals Board.

Providers who complete the entire series receive recognition as being "Farm Stress Certified."

Module 1 – Farming 101

- Identify unique stressors in the agricultural industry.
- Examine the structure of Ohio's farming community.
- Recognize the barriers to seeking mental health treatment for the rural communities.
- Discuss how weather plays a much larger role of stress for our farmers than we realize.



Livestock farmers struggle with on and off-farm tasks as they care for their herds.

Module 2 – Managing the Farm

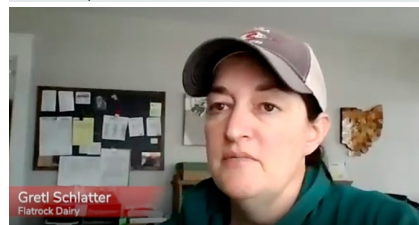
- Assess how passing on the farm affects the farm family.
- Evaluate the impact of agriculture economic fluctuation.
- Recognize the stress of legal complexities in the farming community.



Multi-generational farms have unique business models that are challenged with transition plans.

Module 3 – Farming - The Real World

- Examine the Agrarian Imperative.
- Illustrate the impact of full-time farming on the family.
- Evaluate healthcare system issues for the agricultural community.
- Question farmers about the challenges they face and their mental health impact.
- A farmer panel discussion.



A farmer panel shares insight into how they manage farm and personal stressors.

RESULTS

The team developed a cross-disciplinary program to deliver a series of professional development programs focused on farm stress. Extension educators from agriculture and natural resources, community development, and family and consumer sciences program areas co-taught the 7.5-hour program.

- The program has been offered in multiple formats.
- 1-day workshop was offered in August 2021.
- 18 webinars were offered in 2022, where Modules 1, 2, and 3 were available on a monthly rotation.
- An asynchronous course is available on the CFAES Scarlet Canvas website to meet demand between live course offerings.

Over 1,000 professionals and community members have attended at least one module. As of November 2022, nearly 400 professionals completed all three modules, earning a total of 7.5 CEUs, and designated as Farm Stress Certified.

Of those 400 designees, 38 have opted into being listed on our farm stress website for farmers to have access to the names of professionals with this certificate.

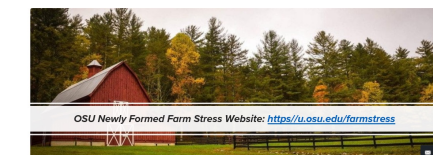
A post-program evaluation was conducted after each session where results included: course content was suitable and useful (97.5%), instructors presented course content effectively (98.9%), and the course content met expectations (98.6%).

Due to the success and feedback of this program, a Farm Stress Certified 2.0 version is in development for 2023 for counselors seeking a more in-depth study of agrarian lifestyles.

Rural and Farm Stress

Creating Resilient Farms and Families in Ohio

Get Help Now! Stress Hazards/Disasters Finance Legal Products Fact Sheets/Articles Training Events



OSU Newly Formed Farm Stress Website: <https://u.osu.edu/farmstress>

CONCLUSIONS

This course helps bridge the gap for mental health counselors as they try to understand the unique challenges facing the farming community. Following the course, mental health professionals report having a better understanding for agricultural issues affecting the mental well-being of farmers.

The Farm Stress Certified program has created a new audience for OSU Extension educators. Providing agricultural awareness training to Ohio mental health providers has opened doors for new relationships in the county.

By working together, OSU Extension and mental health professionals can positively impact rural and agricultural communities facing stressors in agriculture.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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