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Monthly Safety Blast

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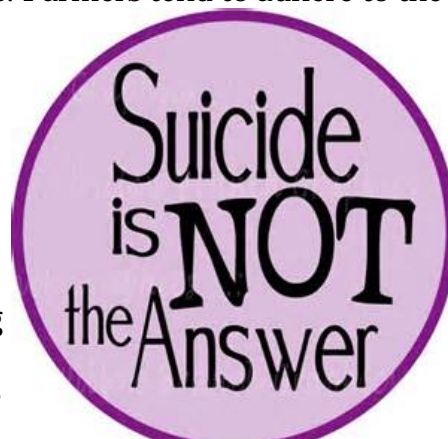
October 2016

Depression & Suicide on the Farm

The next time you're munching on that delicious corn or eating something that comes from a farm, think about this: suicide rates in farmers are the highest of any occupation. The Center for Disease Control's (CDC) recent study, which is based on the most recent data available from 2012; mined data from 17 states and included more than 20 different professional categories. Overall, the study found that, per 100,000 people, in farming, forestry and fishing group had a rate of 84.5 suicides.

There are stories of farmers jumping to their deaths from the top of silos, hanging themselves in wells or deliberately falling into harvesters. If you've idealized farming as an easy occupation, it's not. Farming is characterized by high stress. You live your profession 24/7. A farmer is both boss and employee. When it comes to sick benefits and medical leave, the farmer may not be able to afford these services for his family. Financial pressures, livestock disease, poor harvest, climate change, government policies and legislation can devastate farmers.

High stress combined with frustration can lead to depression. When you feel or believe you have nowhere to turn for help, the idea of suicide starts to look appealing. The label and lack of education about depression are, a couple of significant contributing factors to, farmer suicides. Farmers tend to adhere to the stereotypical image of the self-reliant, tough farmer who doesn't complain. Instead of talking about his depression, a farmer might say, "I'm just tired, worn out." Ignoring or hiding depression is not the way to deal with this serious condition. Talking about it and getting proper treatment is essential for overcoming depression, but most farmers don't consider depression to be a physical illness. Depression is not a broken leg or disease, something you can physically mend or see. Farmers are used to dealing with those issues



in livestock. Depression is mood and behavior that many farmers mislabel, dismiss or ignore. Most of this attitude has to do with lack of education and stigma about depression. While that's a start, family and friends can be judgmental, misinformed or too busy to deal with the issue.

Farming is a fairly isolated occupation with a small, close-knit community of co-workers and family. In the small farming community, the saying that 'everyone knows everything about each other' is true. Going to a mental health professional or admitting you are depressed quickly becomes the 'news'. This reduced sense of confidentiality further influences farmers to conceal their depression. You close down even more when you are worried what your neighbor is saying or thinking about you. There are stories of farmers working late into the night or mostly at nighttime so that neighbors won't talk about their moodiness or why it's taking him twice as long to harvest the crops as everyone else. When you feel you can't talk about or show depression, it's just a step deeper into the darkness.

So how can we help farmers reduce their rate of suicide? Setting up rural support networks is a great idea. From 1999 to 2010, the United States Federal Office of Rural Health Policy funded Sowing the Seeds of Hope, a network of phone hotlines for rural communities. The project was shut down due to lack of funding. NY FarmNet has since filled the void left by Sowing the Seeds of Hope. More information about NY FarmNet can be located at www.help.nyfarmnet.org.

The other and most important part of dealing with depression is conversation. Talking about depression is key to understanding and healing yourself. Talking removes or smashes apart stigma and brings new ideas, proper advice and sources of help. Talking about depression in farming at agricultural shows and events also helps. We know depression affects farmers. The old saying, "The more you know..." goes a long way in dealing with depression.



Take the [Depression & Suicide on the Farm quiz](#) to test your knowledge!

Resources:

- www.cdc.gov
- www.modernfarmer.com
- www.farmandranchguide.com
- www.suicide.org
- www.help.nyfarmnet.org

Disclaimer: The facts and information listed above are merely suggestions for your safety, but are in no way a comprehensive and exhausted list of all actions needed to insure your safety.

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