



Southwest Center
FOR AGRICULTURAL HEALTH, INJURY PREVENTION, AND EDUCATION

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To everyone in agriculture, we say THANK YOU! You keep the farm moving and the world turning. Although, we feel it is necessary to recognize the immense pressure that accompanies this lifestyle.

Currently, many farmers and ranchers are struggling to cope with the stresses of COVID. If I had a nickel every time I heard someone say, "I'm just ready for 2020 to be over". My response would be, "Aren't we all?" However, we must realize that,

"long before the pandemic hit, farmers and ranchers were struggling".

(Managing Stress in Farm Country, 2020)

The life of a farmer has always come with its fair share of stress. For most, mental health is not on the top of the priority list. Specifically, male farmers are not always apt to seek the help they need due to these 4 traditional attitudes about masculinity:

1. Men should not be feminine ("no sissy stuff").
2. Men should strive to be respected for successful achievement ("the bi wheel").
3. Men should never show weakness ("the sturdy oak").
4. Men should seek adventure and risk ("give 'em hell").

(Trannel, 2018)

This traditional view of being male causes many men to hesitate to seek help. For example, "some men are taught that masculine power, dominance, competition, and control are essential to proving one's masculinity; that vulnerabilities, feelings, and emotions in men are signs of femininity and are to be avoided; that masculine control of self, others, and environment are essential for men to feel safe, secure, and comfortable; and that men seeking help and support from others is a sign of weakness, vulnerability, and potential incompetence."

(Trannel, 2018)

Here are real life examples of how men sought the support they needed to deal with the stress in their life.

Nick Baker, a Michigan farmer, has found talking with others to be his solution for stress management. "You can't just bottle things up," Baker said. "If you don't have a built-in network of farmers, go talk to a professional. In some cases that may be even more beneficial because their opinions may be more impartial." (*Managing Stress in Farm Country*, 2020)

In Texas, Brian Wuebker says his list of stresses continues to grow. "Weather is a constant stress, very seldom do we get exactly what we need. It's either too wet or too dry, too hot or too cold. Then there's the stress of prices, **I can work hard all year to grow a crop and in the end, it's possible that it won't cover the cost of growing it.** One of the largest stresses I face lately is urban development. The cost of land is going through the roof, everyone wants to live in the country now.

I've lost over 300 acres in the last five years due to people moving to the country and buying land. That adds up to about 30,000 less dollars in my pocket each year. For the price they're giving per acre, I can't buy the land and make a payment from farming it. My way of life and many friends of mine is being taken away."

Brian raises cattle and grows corn, wheat, and oats. He prefers to deal with his stress by going hunting or fishing for a couple of days. "I'll dread leaving the farm but once I'm gone, I actually forget a lot of my problems for a day or two. Although, once I start to head back home, it all starts flooding back in." For Brian and many others, the problems and stress do not just go away. However, it can be managed.



Brian with his sons Nick and Nate on a hunting trip.

The things that cause us stress come in several different forms and at varying times. For those in agriculture, it's just an occupational hazard.

juggling act, and I have dropped the ball a time or two. I can't take all the credit, I have some good neighbors that help me when I can't leave the field. It's really made me want to leave them something to build on, yes I'd like to see them stay on the farm some day but I understand if they don't choose this way of life."

Brian has realized he can't do it all on his own. He was brave enough to ask for help knowing it was best for his family.

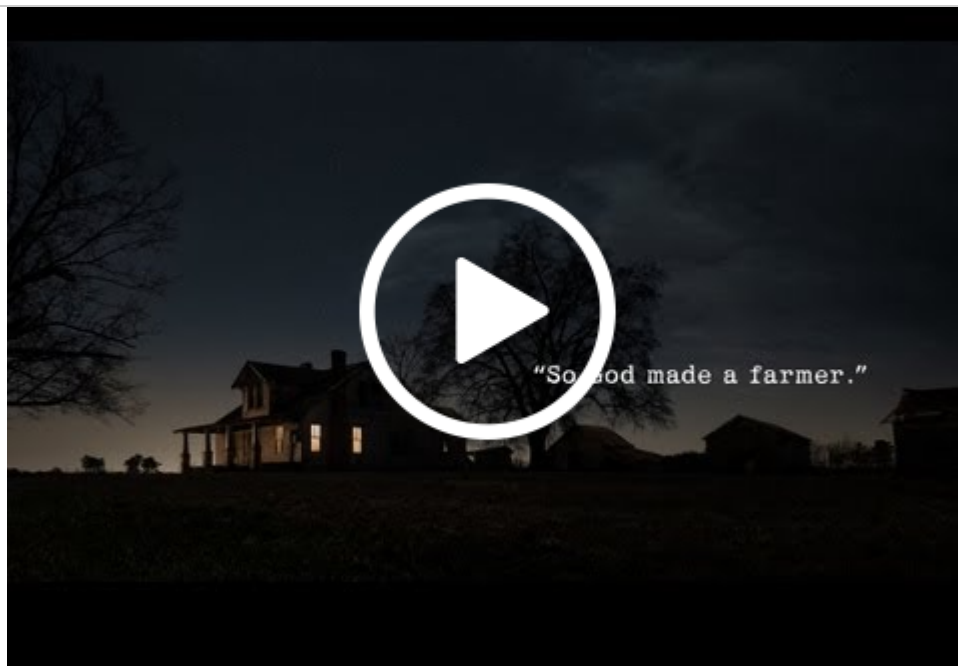
Farmers across the country are finding alternative methods to managing stress. Some include:

- **Meet up with friends regularly to talk about various stressors**
- **Write a list out of the things that bother you**
- **Find a meaningful activity to do away from the farm**

Larry Tranel, Psy. D. from Iowa State University Extension suggests these mindset strategies to help men emotionally survive a crisis and may offer support and encouragement:

- **Let the crisis teach you about yourself.**
- **You may not be able to control the crisis, but you can control your attitude toward it.**
- **Accept your emotions. Don't deny them.**
- **Connect with other men.**
- **Decide when to worry.**
- **Don't shut out your family. They want to help you.**

"Though farm crisis, family crisis, and personal crisis are all different, the human response is similar. **'Anyone can give up, but only the strong will continue to battle.'** Men can use male identity value of **"Take the Bull by the Horns"** using mindset strategies, and deal with crisis or stress in competitive ways." (Tranel, 2018)

**Citations:**

Farm Stress Facts Sheets, North Dakota State University Extension, 2016

<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/publications/kids-family/farm-stress-fact-sheets-stress-management-for-farmers-ranchers/fs284.pdf>

Managing Stress in Farm Country, Farm Bureau, 2020

<https://www.fb.org/viewpoints/managing-stress-in-farm-country>

Helping Farm Men Under Crisis!, 2018

https://www.extension.iastate.edu/dairyteam/files/page/files/men_and_farm_stress_2018_0.pdf

Additional Resources:

God Made a Farmer

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AMpZ0TGjbWE&feature=emb_logo

Mental Health in Rural America

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFfYBykLt14&feature=emb_logo

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