



What We Have Learned about Agricultural Behavioral Health from the 1980s to the Present-Day

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**Factors Impacting Socially
Disadvantaged Farmer and Ranchers
in the Southeast: Farm Stress, Mental
Health, and Social Structural
Components**

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Farming and Ranching Are Changing

- The number of large-scale industrial farm operations is steady, but these operations gradually acquire more land
- Organic, regenerative, and sustainable farmers who view farming as a calling comprise about 1.6% of farmers, but operate about 1% of the farmland and fisheries
- About 85% of current producers, mostly family-size farms, are somewhere in between these two approaches to farming and are the most vulnerable to leaving agriculture

Farmer Demographics Are Changing

- According to the 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture (published in 2018 and thereafter), 95% of farmers are non-Hispanic Whites, who produce about 95% of agricultural sales
- Hispanics accounted for 2.2% of agricultural sales in 2017, which increased significantly from 2012
- Asians accounted for 1.3% of agricultural sales, which is a small increase from 2012
- Native Americans accounted for .5% of agricultural sales in 2017 but own 5.6% of U.S. farmland, mostly sparse grasslands and other land unsuited for agriculture

Farmer Demographics are Changing cont.

- Farms operated by Blacks accounted for .4% of agricultural sales and 1.4% of the U.S producers in 2017
- From 2012 to 2017 the number of Black producers increased 5% but the number of Black-operated farms decreased 3%
- 88% of Black farmers and ranchers live in 12 southern states

Behavioral Well-being Is a Key to Healthy Food Production

- The most important asset for consumers in the food chain is the agricultural producers
- Farmers' and ranchers' behavioral health is positively correlated with optimal livestock health, crop production, sound decision-making, personal and family well-being
- Unlike the weather, government policies, consumer preferences, and COVID, farmers can control their behavior for the most part

Why Use “Behavioral” Instead of “Mental”

- Behavioral is more comprehensive and holistic: Includes addictions treatments, psychiatric care, psychological services, and any interventions that impact our behavior
- Mental suggests medications and counseling from others are needed, whereas behavioral health is understandable and makes us responsible for our thoughts and actions
- We are in charge of most of our behavior and can manage ourselves
- Behavioral is less stigmatizing and preferred by most US government agencies

There Is Good and Bad News about the Behavioral Health of Farmers: the Bad News 1st

- Regenerative, organic farming, and sequestering carbon-dioxide are increasing perhaps too slowly
- Major parts of U.S. agriculture are in their 6th year of economic recession
- Uncertainties about the near and longer term future are rampant due to: changing foreign markets for U.S farm commodities, the loosening or tightening of regulations, COVID-19, climate shifts, changing preferences of consumers, whether or not federal supplemental payments will occur, and the election of a new President
- Farm bankruptcy filings rose 13% from July 2018 to June 2019, and another 8% to June 2020 (U.S. Courts, 2020)

Good News about the Behavioral Health of Agricultural Americans

- Despite the worst economic recession in agriculture since the 1980s, the rates of bankruptcy, suicide, and farm loss are not nearly as great as during the 1980s' Farm Crisis
- Farmer-lender solution-seeking efforts have become collegial rather than adversarial since then
- There are better resources today to assist farmers, such as dispute mediation, helplines, ag safety & health programs, behavioral health services suited to farmers and rural residents, and more
- Farmers understand behavioral health better than ever before and view their behavior as something they can manage

ABFB Poll Indicates Improved Understanding of Mental Health

- 30% of farmers said poor mental health is a major problem for them or their workers
- 48% of rural residents said they are experiencing more mental health challenges than a year ago, with younger persons feeling the most vulnerable
- 31% of rural residents sought assistance; 21% of farmers and farm workers sought assistance
- Two of three rural respondents and farmers said they know where to seek mental health assistance and they know the warning signs of a mental health condition
- 82% of farm respondents said their mental health is important to them and/or their family

AFBF Poll Findings cont.

- 91% of farmers/farmworkers said financial issues and fear of losing their farm impact their mental health
- Stigma, cost, and lack of access to competent assistance are major factors to not seeking help
- The number of mental health professionals per 100,000 in rural areas is half that of urban areas
- Rural residents and farmers/farmworkers would like their primary care providers and mental health service providers to have specialized training about rural life and agricultural behavioral health
- The poll was conducted by Morning Consult on April 4-10, 2019 of 2004 rural residents, including 81 farmers and farmworkers; it has a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points.

The Most Common Diagnosed Behavioral Health Conditions of Distressed Farm People

- Relationship problems, such as partner and marital problems, domestic and child abuse, quarreling with elders, blame and anger are usually the first symptoms, about 40% of diagnoses*
- Adjustment problems, which are temporary exacerbations of anxiety, depression and other behavior problems that remit when stress diminishes, about 24% of diagnoses*
- Anxiety disorders, including excessive worry, panic, PTSD, 11% of diagnoses*

*Rosmann and Delworth, 1993; Rosmann and Stucker, 2008. Some people had more than one diagnosis. The 1993 study involved 122 cases; the 2008 study involved 43,852 farmers & 7,238 cases.

Behavioral Health Problems of the Agricultural Population, cont.*

- Forms of depression, with major depression more common than bipolar disorder, 18-33% of diagnoses, leading to increased risk of suicide
- Substance misuse, either alcohol, street drugs or prescribed medications, 7%, but often co-occurs about 40% of the time with other diagnoses
- Personality disorders are uncommon in the agricultural population, about 1.5%
- Psychotic disorders such as schizophrenia are rare, <1% of the agricultural population

* Rosmann and Delworth, 1993; Rosmann and Stucker, 2008.

Differences Between the Agricultural & General Populations in Their Behavioral Health

- Ag producers have fewer disabling mental health conditions such as psychoses and personality disorders than the general population
- Ag producers are more likely to experience anxiety and depressive illnesses than the general population, due to genetic predispositions toward ADHD and heightened alertness for threats
- Ag producers are more likely to undertake suicide
- Agriculture is one of the most dangerous and stressful occupations

Racial and Ethnic Differences of Farmers' Behavioral Health Issues

- Data from the Sowing the Seeds of Hope project (Rosmann & Stucker, 2008; Rosmann, 2014) over 15 years indicated similar behavioral health problems for 43,852 minority and white farmers in their calls to free and confidential farmer-friendly telephone and email services
- However, minorities did not seek free behavioral health counseling in numbers proportionate to their population makeup
- What is needed?

Ag Behavioral Health Services That Are Best Practices

- Telephone and email hotlines/helplines that are culturally acceptable, confidential, accessible when needed and free
- Follow-up counseling that is culturally appropriate, that is, provided by professionals who understand the culture of those needing assistance and they should be racially and ethnically compatible; services should be free, like EAPs
- Capacity to refer for ancillary assistance such as legal, medical, emergency, mediation, business consultation and other desired and useful services
- Community workshops that build relationships and provide education and emotional support
- Promote the services through the FSA, on radio, in local church and news bulletins, newspapers, and through personal appearances

Minority Farmers Experience Historical and Systemic Disadvantages in Addition to the Usual Behavioral Health Perils

- Historical disadvantage refers to long-term, culturally embedded prejudicial behaviors that discriminate against targeted minorities
- Systemic prejudice refers to practices that are carried out by government, public and private organizations, society in general, and individuals that do not treat all people equitably
- Historical and systemic disadvantage contribute to economic and behavioral health distress experienced by many Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian farmers
- Historical and systemic prejudice are often such serious stressors that they contribute to threatened loss of the farm, personal well-being, and dignity
- These factors lead to long-term societal disadvantages of minority farmers

Agricultural Behavioral Health Services that are A++++

- } Affordable and preferably without cost so as to not worsen financial problems or insurance coverage
- } Available at times and places suited to agricultural producers, such as during evenings, weekends, and on rainy days
- } Attuned culturally to the needs of farmers, ranchers and farm workers because the providers understand agricultural behavioral health and racial/ethnic matters
- } Accessible within acceptable driving distance, in-person, or via telehealth

Actions We Can Undertake

- } Contact legislators to fully continue the 2018 Farm Bill with its provisions for Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) programs
- } Encourage collaboration among farm businesses, ag industries, ag organizations, and local producers to provide resources and to conduct community workshops about agricultural behavioral health and how social disadvantage is perpetuated
- } Integrate ag behavioral health into FFA, 4H, high school, community college, undergrad and grad education programs

2018 Farm Bill

- } The Farmers First Act, sponsored by Senators Joni Ernst and Tami Baldwin, authorizes behavioral health supports and resources as part of the USDA Farm Bill
- } \$10M annually for five years; appropriation of funds must be finalized annually
- } Establishes 4 regional Centers to provide technical assistance, train professionals, evaluate the programs, and conduct research in agricultural behavioral health
- } Competitive grants set up farm crisis hotlines, free follow-up counseling, community workshops and other best practices that are culturally appropriate

USDA and DHHS

Thank You

- } For participating in the webinar today
- } For continuing the necessary work of farming and giving of ourselves in order to provide essentials for life: food, fibers, renewable fuels, and maintaining a democratic society
- } For contributing to healthy agricultural producers and to industries that benefit consumers, as well as our environment and the nation as a whole
- } Special appreciation to the Mississippi State University Extension Service for bringing attention to key issues, agricultural behavioral health and challenges that require correction