

Fostering Resiliency in Agriculture

The Importance of Self-Care & Stress
Management to Maintain Mental Health



Introduction

Agriculture is rooted in strength and resiliency. It is more important than ever to have appropriate tools and supports available to producers as we continue to increase knowledge and awareness about mental health in agriculture. You and your family are the greatest assets on your farm: improve your resiliency and look after your mental health!

Farming can be both a rewarding and incredibly demanding occupation. Saskatchewan producers and their families experience a number of unique factors that can impact their health and safety, as well as overall happiness.

Factors affecting stress on the farm:

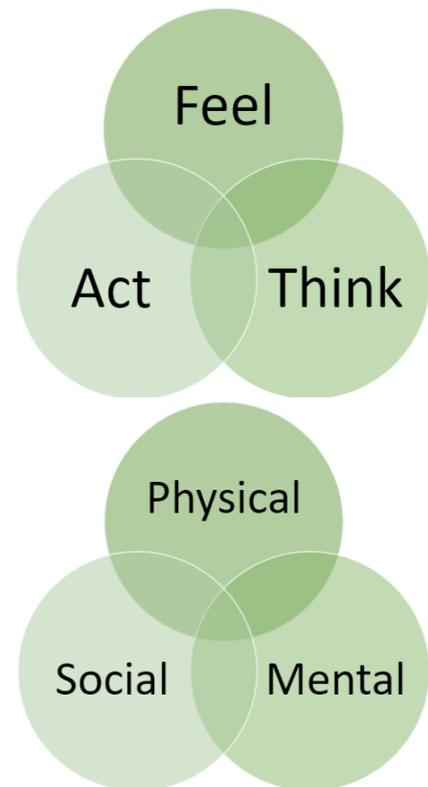
- Weather & uncertain crop yields
- Financial stressors & large debt loads
- Long working hours & strenuous physical labor
- Machinery breakdowns & livestock wellbeing
- Isolation
- And many others

As a result, farmers and their families are susceptible to high levels of mental health concerns, including chronic stress, depression, anxiety, and suicide. The Canadian Centre for Health and Safety in Agriculture, in conjunction with Bridges Health, has developed this resource to provide information and helpful strategies on how to improve resilience, prioritize self-care, and maintain mental wellbeing.

What is Mental Health?

Mental health is our emotional, psychological, and social well-being, affecting how we think, feel, and act. It also impacts how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental and physical health are equally important contributors to overall wellbeing. Mental health concerns can increase the risk of physical ailments, such as diabetes, heart disease, or stroke. Similarly, physical chronic conditions can increase the risk of mental illness.

Poor mental health and mental illness are not the same. All people will experience poor mental health at different stages of their lives but may not be diagnosed with a mental illness. Likewise, a person diagnosed with a mental illness can utilize healthy coping skills and experience physical, mental, and social wellbeing.



WE TREAT FARM EQUIPMENT WITH CARE, DOING REGULAR MAINTENANCE AND UPKEEP, BUT ARE WE PROVIDING THE SAME LEVEL OF CARE AND ATTENTION TO OUR OWN BODIES AND MINDS?

Stress on the Farm

What is Stress?

Stress is a normal human reaction that everyone experiences on a regular basis. When you experience changes or challenges (stressors), your body produces both physical and mental responses. These responses are designed to help us survive and adjust to new situations, but if you experience long periods of stress without relief, problems can occur.

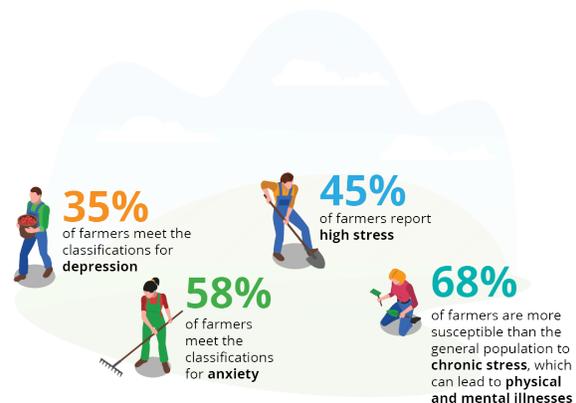
Long-term or chronic stress can cause physical, mental, and behavioral changes to develop:

- Chest pain/ rapid heartbeat
- Exhaustion or difficulty sleeping
- Headaches, dizziness, shaking
- High blood pressure
- Weakened immune system
- Anxiety, irritability, or panic attacks
- Low self-esteem, hopelessness, isolating
- Overeating or loss of appetite
- Engaging in unhealthy behaviors such as substance abuse



Is Stress a Bad Thing?

Not all stress is bad, in fact, it can be beneficial. Positive stress, or eustress, can help us respond well to challenges that we face and motivate us to accomplish tasks. This could include giving us the push we need to get through a busy harvest or seeding season. However, a build up of stress over time without the opportunity to recover can be very harmful, and that is when the negative physical, mental, and behavioral changes may occur.

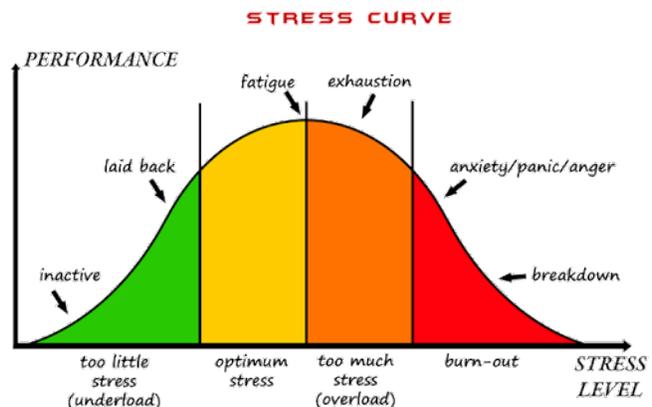


Farm Stress Inventory

Farming and ranching have unique occupational hazards and stresses, with strong traditions of being an independent occupation. Taking an inventory of your current situation is an important first step. To access the Farm Stress Inventory, visit:

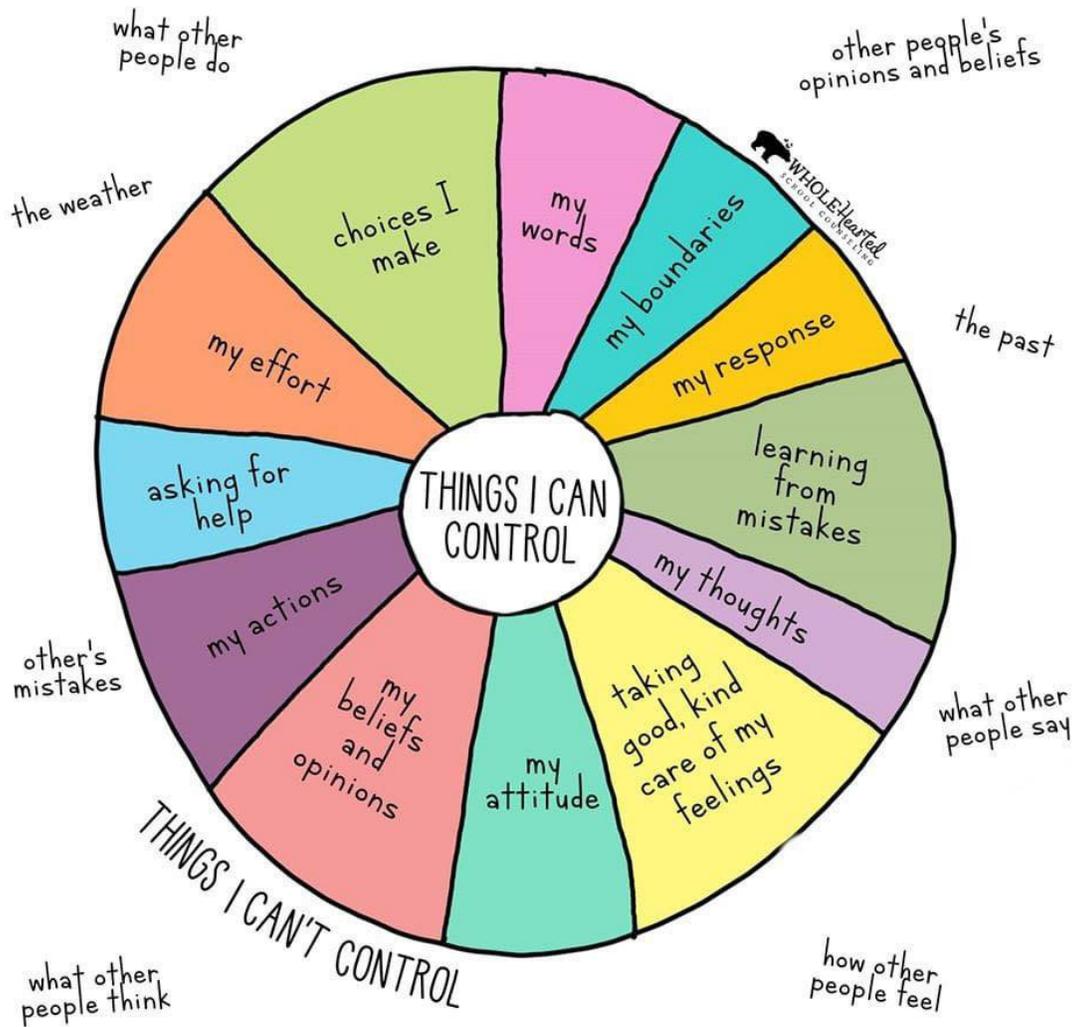
<https://www.casa-acsa.ca/en/safetyshop-library/farm-stress-inventory/>

This assessment can be completed at different times throughout the year as your life circumstances may have changed.



Control

On the farm, there are many stressors that are out of our control. Common challenges include weather uncertainty, machinery breakdowns, finances/ debts, and government regulations. Focusing on things out of our control will only add to existing stress levels, so it is important to dedicate our time, energy, and focus to things within our control.

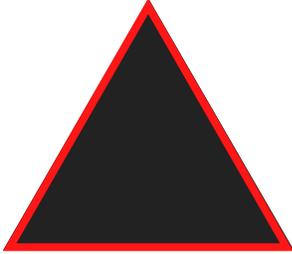


IN A WORLD OF
UNCONTROLLABLE
SITUATIONS, THE ONE THING
YOU CAN CONTROL IS HOW
YOU TREAT YOURSELF.

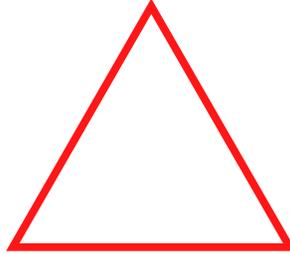


Warning Signs for Stress & Burnout

It is important to be able to recognize common warning signs and symptoms of stress and burnout in yourself and others:



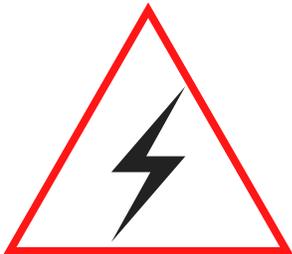
Feelings of hopelessness & helplessness



Feelings of worthlessness, guilt, & helplessness



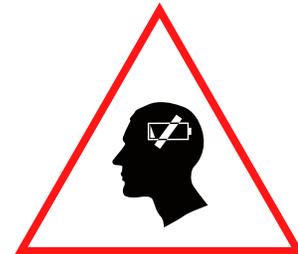
Thoughts of death or suicide



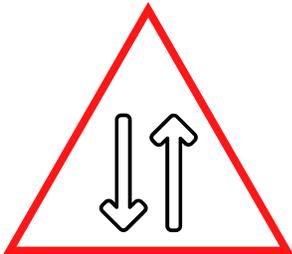
Restlessness/increased anxiety



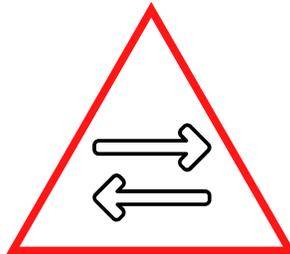
Sleeping difficulties



Decreased energy/increased sickness



Changes in mood



Difficulty making decisions, problem solving, concentration



Loss of appetite, sudden weight loss or gain



Tearfulness



Loss of enjoyment & interest in activities

Resilience



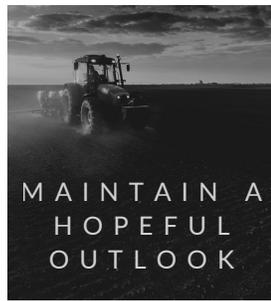
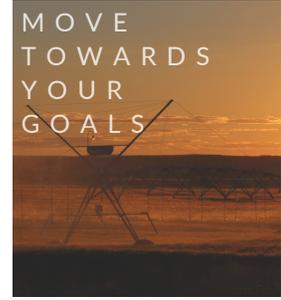
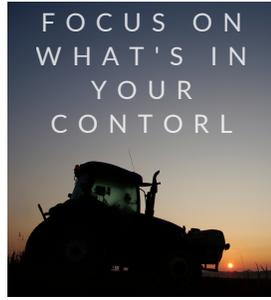
In life, we will all face inevitable adversity, trauma, and other stressful or life-altering situations. **Resilience** is the capacity to adapt and overcome these difficult situations and cope in a healthy way. Being resilient doesn't mean that a person won't experience these challenges, but rather empowers you to grow and improve your life along the way.

Resilience is also a skill that can be nurtured and developed over time. While some individuals have traits that may make them more naturally resilient, resilience can be developed through a combination of behaviors, thoughts, and actions that are intentionally practiced on a regular basis.

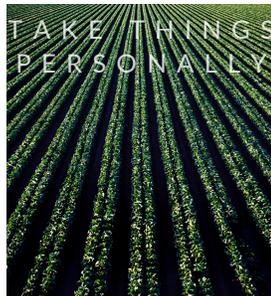
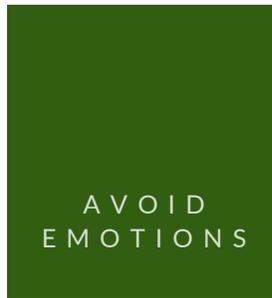
FOR PEOPLE WORKING IN AGRICULTURE, RESILIENCE IS A KEY REQUIREMENT TO THRIVE AND BE SUCCESSFUL THROUGH CHALLENGING OR UNCERTAIN TIMES.

Saskatchewan farmers and producers have demonstrated their resilience and ability to move forward after challenging situations time and time again. This resource is intended to assist individuals in identifying ways they already display resilience, as well as suggestions for new coping skills. By intentionally drawing upon one's strengths, as well as incorporating new techniques, we can further foster our resiliency skill.

10 Ways to Build Resilience



Things Resilient People Don't Do



Self-care

When it comes to farm safety concerns, stress and mental health issues are known contributing factors. That's also why it comes as no surprise that self-care, both prioritizing and neglecting it, has a significant impact on farm safety.

Many people have a preconceived notion of what self-care looks like, or what it is supposed to look like. Self-care is not simply a day of pampering or a relaxing bubble bath, but rather *any activity that helps someone emotionally, physically, or mentally*. Self-care is self-defining as it will look different for everyone!



Credit: Farm Safety Nova Scotia

Do what works for you!

Self-care Strategies

Some suggestions to consider when “I don’t have time!”

1. Begin by focusing on the basics: Eating, sleeping, and moving.
2. Sneak it in: Have quick go-to options that can be squeezed into a few minutes; Call a friend, read a few pages, or take a quick walk.
3. Start your day off right by doing something that makes you feel good in the morning. It can be as simple as thinking, "What do I have to look forward to today."



You cannot *drink* from an empty cup

Fill yourself up. You're worth it.

“SELF-CARE IS THE FOUNDATION OF A HEALTHY LIFE. WE CAN’T BE, FEEL, OR DO OUR BEST – AND THIS INCLUDES WORK, RELATIONSHIPS, HEALTH, HAPPINESS, EVERYTHING – WHEN WE SHORT-CHANGE OR SACRIFICE OUR OWN HEALTH AND WELL-BEING FOR PROLONGED PERIODS.” – REBECCA BYERS

Self-care Strategies

HEALTHY SLEEP

Try to get seven to nine hours of sleep each night. Avoid caffeine later in the day. Create a relaxing bedtime routine, and if you must use screens an hour or two before bed try using a blue light filter on them.



HEALTHY EATING

Try not to skip meals. Try to eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, and limit less healthy foods to only three servings per week if you can. Try to drink up to eight glasses of water a day. Adapt foods to your own culture and to what is locally available.



PHYSICAL FITNESS

Try to do some regular exercise that gets your heart pumping. You could go for a fast walk or bike ride. Or you could try joining a gym or working out at home using an exercise app.



WATCH YOUR TECHNOLOGY USE

Try to be aware of the time you spend on technology. Think about what kinds of technology use make you feel better and are part of your self care, and which might be working against it. The amount of time you spend using technology can also have an effect. If you feel overwhelmed by technology or social media, try taking a break from it to see if that is helpful.



RELAXATION

Take time each day to internally relax. Experiment with different relaxation techniques to see what works best for you. Relaxation can be as simple as enjoying a calm walk. Slow, deep breaths can also help you relax. Or you might try progressive muscle relaxation: In turn, hold different muscles as tight as possible, and as you relax them picture your tension disappearing. YouTube and many other apps can help you with relaxation, meditation, and mindfulness.



JOURNALING

Sometimes writing things down can help get them out of your head. Try taking 5 minutes to think and write about the events of your day. For example, you could list three things from each day that you are thankful for, or personal strengths that you drew upon today.



Remember, self-care looks different for everyone!

Self-care Plan

The following plan outlines different types of self-care and examples of each. Take a few minutes to reflect and identify what you are currently doing to practice self-care in each of these areas. Are there areas that you are prioritizing over others? What changes would you like to make? Write down your answers and identify new ways that you can incorporate self-care into your life.

TYPE OF SELF-CARE	EXAMPLES	WHAT AM I CURRENTLY DOING?	WHAT WOULD I LIKE TO DO?
PHYSICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eating healthy Physical activity Adequate sleep 		
MENTAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading Journaling Mindfulness 		
EMOTIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gratitude Self-compassion Forgiveness 		
RATIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spend time with friends/ family Connect with the community 		
SPIRITUAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spend time in nature Pray Volunteer 		
PROFESSIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set boundaries Leave work at work Take breaks 		
WHAT MIGHT GET IN THE WAY?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not enough time Other priorities/ responsibilities 		
WHAT MIGHT HELP ME?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family/ friends support Staying organized Setting reminders 		

Supports for Farmer Mental Health

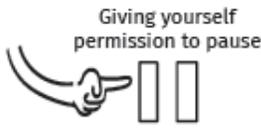
Developed by farmers, for farmers.



Volunteering



Church groups



Giving yourself permission to pause



Spending time with family and friends

...as well as having your own space



Community dinners (often advertised in local newspapers)



Service clubs



"Solo work" on the farm to give your mind a rest



Sleeping well (including naps)



Eating well



Spending time with pets



Playing cards



Puzzles



Fishing



Sports



Hunting



Supports for Farmer Mental Health

Taking walks in your field...



...or your neighbour's field



Social media



...as well as "cell phone free" time



On-farm "stay-cations" or "home days"...



...and off-farm vacations (within driving distance)



Access to help lines, doctors, mental health workers, and other health professionals

Connecting with ag service "gatekeepers" to supports



On-site therapists

Self-help groups

Farm financial advisors and succession planners

Accepting help from others



Help at home or with kids

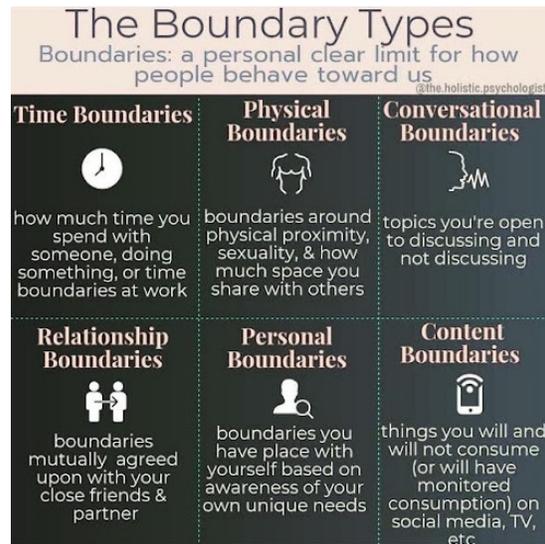
On-farm help

Developed by the Stakeholder Working Group for farmer mental health at the University of Guelph
 Contact: Dr. Briana Hagen et Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton, University of Guelph
 Illustrated and designed by Dr. Alex Sawatzky, www.alex-sawatzky.com

Boundary Setting

Maintaining healthy boundaries is an important way to look after one's mental health. Boundaries are guidelines, rules, or limits that a person creates to identify for themselves what are reasonable, safe, and permissible ways for other to behave around them. Personal boundaries are unique and may change over time. These boundaries help you decide what types of communication, behavior, and interaction are acceptable.

Boundaries are a part of self-care. They are healthy, normal, and necessary.



9 Healthy Ways to SAY NO

Saying 'No' does not have to be disrespectful or uncomfortable. When you gain confidence, saying 'No' feels empowering!

- 01 I am not comfortable with that.
- 02 I have another commitment.
- 03 Some things have come up that need my attention
- 04 I know of someone who could help you.
- 05 I need to focus on myself/my personal life/my career.
- 06 I know you will do a wonderful job yourself.
- 07 I am not qualified for that job.
- 08 Not right now, but I can do it later.
- 09 **NO!**

Tips to Establish and Enforce Boundaries

1. **Focus On Yourself:** A lot of the time we allow our boundaries to be crossed because we feel guilty or fear a negative reaction. Prioritize your wellbeing and practice self-respect and self-love!
2. **Practice Self-Awareness:** Your boundaries may change over time or in different situations, so it is important to continually check-in with yourself to see what your boundaries are in that situation. Listen and trust your gut- if a situation is making you feel uncomfortable, a boundary might be being crossed.
3. **Name Your Limits:** Identify what you need physically, emotionally, and mentally, and communicate these boundaries to those around you. Be proactive and discuss your boundaries before they are crossed.
4. **Use "I" Statements:** "I statements" keep the focus on your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Use these statements to describe your reaction to an unwelcome situation and shift the focus to what you need moving forward. "I feel ___ when ___ because _____. What I need is _____."

Additional Stress Management Strategies

Mindfulness is the ability to be fully present, aware of what we are doing, and focused on what we are thinking without judgement. Being mindful allows us to be not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what is going on around us, and practicing over time helps increase self-awareness. Try practicing mindfulness by:

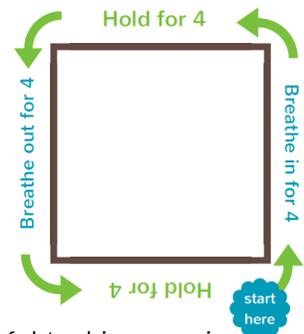
1. **Bring awareness to your breathing.**
2. **Ask yourself "How am I feeling right now?" and name the emotions.**
3. **Use your senses to focus on your surroundings by identifying things you can see, hear, touch, and smell.**
4. **Monotask by focusing on only one thing at a time.**

STOP SKILL
DBT Distress Tolerance
(Dialectical Behavior Therapy)

Use these skills to manage your response in a distressful situation

<p>S STOP</p> <p>DON'T REACT. STAY IN CONTROL.</p>	<p>T TAKE</p> <p>A STEP BACK. A DEEP BREATH. DON'T ACT IMPULSIVELY</p>
<p>O OBSERVE</p> <p>WHAT ARE YOU FEELING OR THINKING? WHAT ARE OTHERS SAYING OR DOING?</p>	<p>P PROCEED</p> <p>MINDFULLY. THINK ABOUT YOUR GOALS & ACTIONS</p>

Deep breathing, also known as diaphragmatic or abdominal breathing, involves fully engaging the stomach, abdominal muscles, and diaphragm while breathing to help fill the lungs more efficiently with air. Deep breathing can help soothe the stress response or "fight-or-flight" reflex by slowing our heart rate and decreasing blood pressure. Search for guided breathing exercises online, or try out this **Square Breathing** technique:



Journaling can be a helpful tool in managing anxiety, depression, and stress. Journaling can help manage one's mental health by tracking symptoms day-to-day, recognizing negative thoughts and behaviors, and providing an opportunity for positive self-talk. Journaling will look different for everyone, so here are a few tips to help you get started:

1. **Try to write regularly by setting aside a few minutes each day.**
2. **Have it easily accessible by keeping your journal handy, or even type a note in your phone.**
3. **Power of Gratitude** - at the beginning or end of the day, list 5 things you are thankful for.
4. **If you are stuck, search for "Journaling Cues" online to help you get started.**

Thinking Patterns to Avoid

- Catastrophizing:** Predicting not only negative outcomes, but outcomes will result in a "catastrophe".
- Personalizing:** Claiming too much accountability for things that happen around us - "It's all my fault..."
- All-or-Nothing Thinking:** The tendency to feel like if we don't get it all, we got nothing.
- Overgeneralizing:** Drawing a conclusion or making a statement that is more general than justified.

Thinking Patterns to Live By

- Realism:** Feeling empowered to accept the situation, confident to look at what's in your control and what isn't, and competent to problem-solve & find the most applicable coping strategy possible.
- Accountability:** Being accountable to ourselves - for ourselves, and learning to flex our 'NO' muscle.
- Prioritizing:** Especially when feeling overwhelmed, get in the habit of putting down your needs & wants on paper, & communicate those needs and wants with others.
- Optimism:** Practicing positive psychology by living a life full of optimism, gratitude, and kindness.

List of My Supports

It is important to have easy access to a variety of supports that can assist with one's mental health during an agricultural crisis. At times when you feel that you are struggling, it can be difficult to have the energy to search for services, so write down important contact information beforehand.

NAME	CONTACT INFORMATION
FRIENDS & FAMILY	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
NEIGHBOUR	<hr/>
DOCTOR	<hr/>
VETERINARIAN	<hr/>
PLACE OF WORSHIP	<hr/>
INSURANCE PROVIDER(S)	<hr/>
OTHER	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Additional Resources

Web Resources

Farm Stress Line: www.farmstressline.ca

The Do More Ag Foundation: <https://www.domore.ag/>

Farm Credit Canada: <https://www.fcc-fac.ca/en.html>

Canadian Mental Health Association: www.cmha.ca

National Farmers Union: www.nfu.ca/help

CCHSA: <https://cchsa-ccssma.usask.ca/>
(Canadian Centre for Health & Safety in Agriculture)

Farm Safety Nova Scotia: <https://farmsafetyns.ca/>

Mental Health Apps

(Available for download from the App Store)

 **avail**

Track health & wellness, access self-help resources, connect with others, and much more!



Improve sleep, meditate, and relax.



Reduce anxiety through mindfulness and meditation.



Free evidence-based mental health relief.



Crisis Lines

Farm Stress Line: 1-800-667-4442

Child Abuse Helpline: 306-569-2724

Saskatchewan Suicide Hotline: 306-525-5333

Saskatchewan Gambling Helpline: 1-800-306-6789

Crisis Services Canada: 1-866-456-4566

Adult Sexual Assault Helpline: 1-800-214-7083

Crisis Text Line: 686868

Mobile Crisis Services: 306-757-0127

Wellbeing Course for Agriculture Producers:

<https://www.onlinetherapyuser.ca/wellbeing-course-agriculture-producers>

The Wellbeing Course for Agriculture Producers, offered through the Online Therapy Unit, aims to provide free education and guidance on simple but effective techniques for managing farm related stress and depression and/or anxiety. The course helps Saskatchewan farmers and ranchers with thoughts, behaviors, and physical symptoms related to depression and anxiety.

Acknowledgements

Thank you, Saskatchewan Producers, for all your work and dedication to produce high quality food for our world! Your strength, resiliency, and perseverance through difficult times is admirable, and you continue to be a backbone in Saskatchewan. Remember, you are your farm's most valuable asset! Take care, and together we can stay safe and healthy on Saskatchewan farms.

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