

Agricultural Mental Health Literacy Programs: Emerging Evidence from Michigan

Dr. Courtney Cuthbertson

Assistant Professor
Extension Specialist
Human Development & Family Studies
University of Illinois
cuthbert@illinois.edu

Background

- Agricultural producers have worse mental health than the general population.
- About 60% of mental health professional shortage areas are in rural counties.
- Stigma and norms make help-seeking difficult.
- Mental health literacy programs have demonstrated effectiveness outside of agricultural contexts.
- In 2016, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development requested Michigan State University Extension do something to help agricultural mental health.

Methods

- MSU Extension created *Communicating with Farmers Under Stress* as a mental health literacy program tailored to agricultural audiences.
- In one year starting October 2016, MSU Extension offered 25 workshops to 1,024 participants.
- N=342 from 18 workshops completed post-training retrospective evaluations.
- 58.2% female, 96.3% white

People want to help agricultural producers cope with their stress, and tailored **agricultural mental health literacy programs** are **effective** at **improving** their **skills and confidence** to do so.



Take a picture for more information!

Results

Program objectives	Improved		Already knew	
	n	%	n	%
Gained new understanding of current agricultural financial situation	251	75.4	77	23.1
Increased understanding of impact stress has on our bodies	301	88.3	39	11.4
Learned how to recognize warning signs of depression, suicide, and mental illness	311	91.5	28	8.2
Learned where to send people for help	325	96.5	10	3.0

Because of attending the farm stress workshop..	% Reporting agreement
I am more comfortable talking with others about chronic stress.	93.6%
My understanding of rural stress issues and warning signs of stress challenges has increased.	95.7%
I am more comfortable being in a situation with someone in distress.	100.0%
I know where to go for community resources to help others or myself.	97.9%
I understand the impact of stress on the body.	91.1%
I am aware of stress issues and taking steps to manage stress.	95.7%
I recognize where to send people for help and available resources.	89.4%
I shared workshop information/resources with others.	79.2%

“This past year has been tough in the community and if I can help alleviate even some of their stress – I’m glad to do so.”

Lessons Learned

1. Be intentional with language to be both inviting and direct.
2. Multiple methods of delivering information are crucial.
3. Knowledgeable partners can help reach the audience of interest.
4. Collaboration can maximize opportunities and resources.
5. Continue the conversation: mental health is broader than stress and suicide.

References

Please see the full text linked at the QR code to the left.

