women in agriculture

Be an AgSafe FAMILY Appealing to Adults

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UNDERSTANDING STRESS

According to a 2005 report, almost two-thirds of Canadian farmers are feeling stressed on their farms. One in five farmers describe themselves as being "very stressed" while almost half (45%) describe themselves as being "somewhat stressed".[1] Stress is all around us, understanding it and managing it are essential in having healthy minds and bodies.

There are lots of negative stressors on the farm, including ongoing situations like debt loads or adverse weather. Other day-to-day stressors include long work hours, livestock problems and unexpected interruptions. There's also good stress!

Good stress is still stress. Weddings, promotions, new babies, harvesting a great crop are usually considered to be positive life changes. However, they still count as stress regardless of how excited we may be about them.

For women on the farm, there are a lot of expectations and responsibilities. Women are often primary or secondary farmers, take care of "the books", are responsible for raising children and/or looking after the needs of other family members and hold off-farm jobs. Farm women can feel like they have to sacrifice their own needs to maintain the everyday life of the farm. Farm women are vital to the success of the family farm, but their roles and responsibilities can be very stressful.

Recognizing the symptoms of stress can be difficult. Stress can affect your physical and emotional wellbeing and it can even affect your behavior.

[1] National Stress and mental Survey of Canadian Farmers: Report to the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association.



SOME SYMPTOMS OF STRESS INCLUDE:

PHYSICAL: headaches, stomach problems, chest pain, fatigue, rapidly beating heart, grinding or clenching teeth.

EMOTIONAL: increased angry blow-ups, frustration, low self esteem, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts.

BEHAVIORAL: overeating, increased drug/alcohol consumption or smoking, changes in sleep, forgetfulness, short-temper.

Understanding what stress is and how it manifests is the first step. Stress management is different for everyone, it's important to discover what stress management strategies work for you.



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STRATEGIES:

TALK ABOUT IT

Talking to a trusted friend, counsellor or other professional can help you alleviate some of your stress and even help you develop a strategy to deal with the stressors you are facing. Asking and seeking help is not a sign of weakness – it shows strength!

GET GOOD QUALITY SLEEP

Sleep is incredibly important to your wellbeing, both mentally and physically. The link between good quality sleep and health is well documented.

Here are some things you can do to get better sleep:

- A sleep routine will help make the most of the time you have available to sleep.
- Make your breaks a priority even when you are in the field.
- Try a 20-minute power nap even if you have to do it outside.
- Switch tasks whenever possible. For example, switch from combining to trucking.
- Stop to eat regularly and drink plenty of water.

GET ACTIVE AND EAT WELL

Physical activity and nutritious food are just like regular maintenance and fuel for your farm machinery. Eating well and eating regularly helps to fuel your body throughout a busy day. Drinking water and staying hydrated is also important. Canada's Food Guide has excellent information about eating well and making healthy food choices. Along with nutrition, exercise is essential in keeping your body well and your mind healthy. Note: Talk with your doctor before you start becoming much more physically active.

MAKE A PLAN

Long lasting problems that don't resolve can lead to long-term stress. Sometimes, making a plan is the best way to tackle these problems. If it's debt-related, seeking financial advice and making a plan could be an option. If it's health-related, talk to your doctor. Seek a second opinion. If it's relationship-related, talk to a qualified professional to help you resolve the issues. And sometimes, it may be that some things are out of your control.

Some other ideas to alleviate day-to-day stress include:

- Practice a hobby.
- Do some form of physical activity every day.
- Learn to relax and say "no" sometimes.
- Make time to sleep.
- Manage your time well.
- Prioritize (tackle one job at a time).
- Communicate your needs and listen to others.
- Spend quality time with friends and family.
- Write in a journal.
- Accept that some things are out of your control.
- Practice Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, yoga, deep muscle relaxation, and others.

Some of these stress-management strategies are easier said than done. However, if you don't look after yourself, you can't look after the farm or your family. Self-care is essential to the health of yourself, your family and your farm.

Klinic Community Health Program

Manitoba Farm, Rural & Northern Support Services

The Women in Agriculture series is a part of Canadian Agricultural Safety Week 2017. For more information visit agsafetyweek.ca

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