



P.O. Box 27766  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27611  
919.782.1705

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the  
**LEADER**



**STRONGER  
TOGETHER**

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and a good reminder for all of us to check in with our family, friends, and neighbors. It's also a good time to learn how someone might show signs of mental health struggles, what you can do to help, and where to turn for more assistance. No farmer should feel that they have to handle the troubles of this world alone. We are stronger together.

**STRONGER  
TOGETHER**



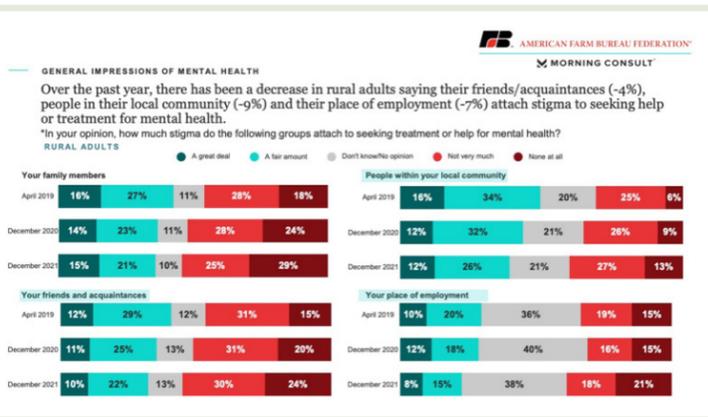


# STRONGER TOGETHER

## The Farm State of Mind

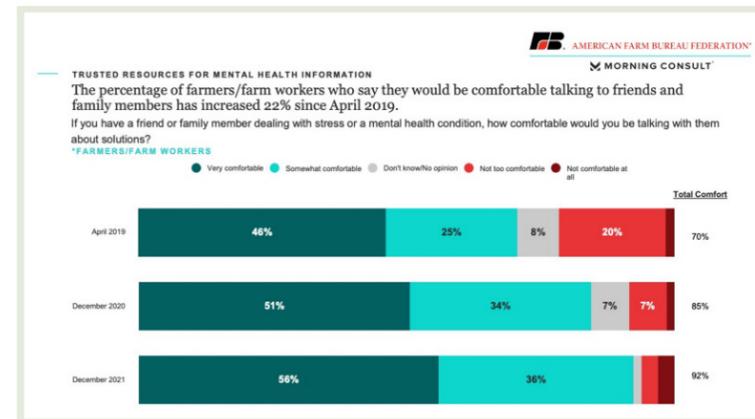
If you are reading this, you probably already know: farm life can be demanding and stressful. Farmers and farm families are some of the toughest, most resilient people around, but the past several years have presented a set of challenges we haven't seen in a generation, or more. It has reached a critical stage with pandemic impacts on top of natural disasters, extreme weather events, financial pressures due to fluctuating commodity prices, labor shortages, trade disruptions and the more recent issue of inflation and out of control input costs. Given these ongoing challenges, it's no surprise that more farmers and farm families are experiencing stress and mental health concerns.

But what can we do about it?



## It's OK to not be OK

The first step is to acknowledge and accept that it's OK to not be OK. Over the past several years there have been encouraging signs of reduced stigma around farmer mental health. Farmers and people in rural areas are more comfortable talking about stress and mental health challenges with others, and stigma around seeking help or treatment has decreased in rural and farm communities, but it is still a factor. These were some of the findings of a new American Farm Bureau Federation research poll conducted by Morning Consult among a national sample of 2,000 rural adults. The poll results were compared with previous surveys AFBF conducted in 2019 and 2020 on the impacts of the rural economy and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on farmer mental health.



## Know the Warning Signs

When loved ones, neighbors, or others you care about are experiencing mental health challenges, they may not even realize it. Here's how you can identify someone who may be at risk.

- Change in routines or social activities
- Decline in the care of domestic animals
- Increase in illness or other chronic conditions
- Increase in farm accidents
- Decline in appearance of the farmstead
- Decreased interest in activities or events
- Signs of stress in children including struggles with school

Learn more about recognizing the signs of chronic stress, depression or suicidal intent and what you can do to help at [nyfarmnet.org/farm-stress](http://nyfarmnet.org/farm-stress).

## Start the Conversation

Although it may feel like it's out of your comfort zone, you can start a conversation in any number of ways:

- **Remind them of something they've said and express interest.** Example: "You mentioned no one seems to understand what you're going through. Sounds pretty lonely, and I want you to know you can talk to me."
- **Acknowledge what they're going through.** Example: "Hey, how have you been handling all of this lately? I know it's been some tough times, can I help in any way?"
- **Share a habit you've seen change.** Example: "Hey, it's good to see you! I haven't seen you at meetings in a while. Is everything alright? Anything I can do to help?"

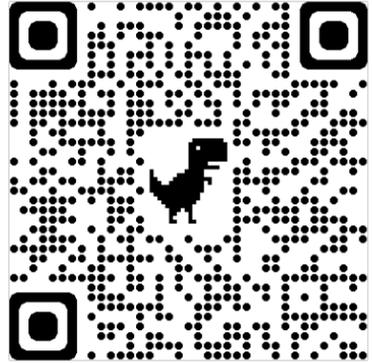
Don't wait for them to ask for help. Once you've started the conversation, it's important to listen and give them opportunities to talk about what they are going through. You don't have to have the answers. Try not to compare their challenges to someone else's, or minimize what they're going through. **What matters most is showing genuine care and empathy, and listening.** Be ready to share resources that might help them and if they're willing to reach out, encourage them. That might sound something like "It sounds/looks like you are feeling \_\_\_\_\_. I think \_\_\_\_\_ could help you deal with your situation." or "How do you feel about seeking help from this person/agency?"

### Five Steps to Help Someone in Emotional Pain

- 1 Ask
- 2 Keep them safe
- 3 Be there
- 4 Help them connect
- 5 Stay connected

## Where to Turn

Reaching out to someone in need and starting the conversation is a critical first step, but it's also important to know what to do and where to turn when professional help is needed. Thankfully, there are a number of resources, available for farmers both locally and nationally. In North Carolina, a great place to start is the North Carolina Agromedicine Institute. You can access their Farm Stress Resource Directory by scanning the QR code or visiting [ncagromedicine.org/pdf/farm-stress\\_resource\\_directory.pdf](http://ncagromedicine.org/pdf/farm-stress_resource_directory.pdf). The Agromedicine Institute also offers Farmer to Farmer, provides peer support for farmers and farm family members experiencing difficult times. Peers are farmers/farm family members or others working in agriculture that have received special training in peer support. To request a peer farmer and/or to learn more about Farmer to Farmer, please call 252.744.1008 or email [agromedicine@ecu.edu](mailto:agromedicine@ecu.edu). In the subject line, please indicate 'Farmer to Farmer Request'.



You can find even more resources by visiting [farmstateofmind.org/#directory](http://farmstateofmind.org/#directory).

A further step you can take is to complete Rural Resilience Training. Recognizing the high levels of stress affecting America's farmers and ranchers, Farm Credit, American Farm Bureau Federation and National Farmers Union partnered on a program to train individuals who interact with farmers and ranchers, providing them with the skills to:

- Understand the sources of stress
- Identify effective communication strategies
- Reduce stigma related to mental health
- Learn the warning signs of stress and suicide

To learn more and register, visit [farmstateofmind.org/#training](http://farmstateofmind.org/#training).

If you or someone you know is struggling with anxiety, depression or another mental health challenge, you are not alone. A healthy farm is nothing without a healthy you.