

HOW*TO

How do you Cope With Anxiety in your Ag Legacy?

Rick and Lori faced tough times in the past but recently the farm's financial situation has gone from bad to worse. With lower commodity prices and the hail that took out much of this year's crop, they face the possibility that they could lose the farm. Lately, Rick has not been himself. While typically outgoing and involved in the community, more and more he has become withdrawn, absent from football games, skipping church services and not returning phone calls. His fields and livestock are looking more neglected all the time. Lori is becoming increasingly concerned and has expressed her fears to their good friends and neighbors, John and Sheila, who share similar worries about Rick. How can Lori approach Rick without making things worse?

Common Stress Factors

Farm and ranch families experience stress from a wide variety of factors, including:

- Operational Stressors
- Environmental influences
- Family stressors

Situations where money is tight represent another case that can lead to stress for both farm families and the agricultural business. The financial ties between



the operation and the families involved is often challenging. In addition, these tensions can lead to frustrations for young families not yet considered to be “on their own” by the retiring generation.

One of the most stressful intergenerational farming issues is the transfer of the family farm or ranch to the next generation. Even talking about the transfer of management and ownership brings up and amplifies many of the stressors already mentioned.

Stress and Anxiety in Agriculture

Stress factors can, and often do, affect everyone involved in the family farm or ranch business, even if they are not directly involved in day-to-day operations.

A variety of coping mechanisms can be employed to help address or mitigate the effects of these factors. Three specific strategies that can help address stress in the moment include self-talk, breathing, and acceptance. Exercise can also be a helpful coping mechanism. Research shows that even a brisk 10-minute walk can reduce the brain’s level of the stress hormone cortisol by 50 to 70 percent. But one of the best coping strategies for managing intergenerational stressors is open communication, especially for farm or ranch families.

Don’t Forget the Children

The unique arrangement of families on the farm or ranch means that the children are often very involved in day-to-day operations, often working alongside their parents or other family members. Thus, they feel the stress and are aware when the operation is not doing well. This may show up as trouble with schoolwork, difficulty sleeping or concentrating, or stomachaches.

Anxiety and Depression in Individuals

A stigma exists among the general population when it comes to asking for help with anxiety and depression. It has been said that many men were raised to be John Wayne types, especially in rural families. They were taught to not ask for help and to not show any emotion. This can lead to cultural obstacles that often times keep people from reaching out.

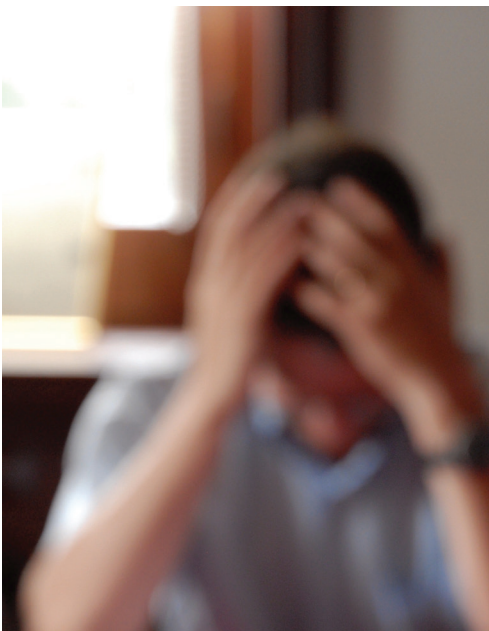
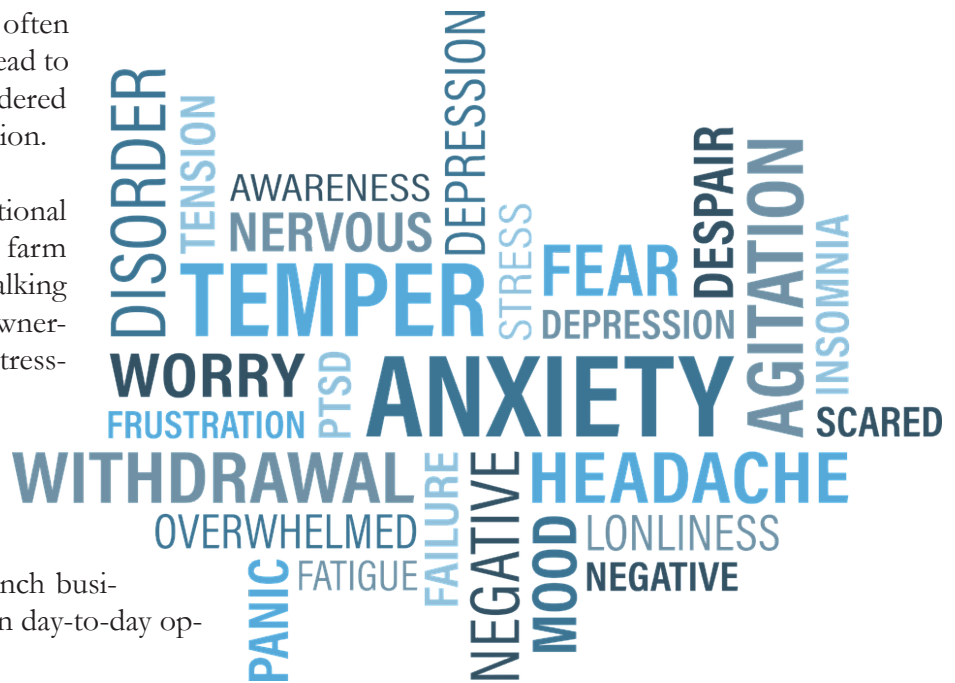
Thoughts such as:

- “I don’t need to see a counselor; I can solve my own problems.”
- “I don’t trust psychologists.”
- “Why should I tell a stranger the intimate details of my life?”
- “Even if little else is left, I still have my privacy.”

It’s interesting to note, that in the last bullet, “privacy” could be replaced by “pride.” Often, pride stands in the way of asking for help. It is important to understand that it is not a sign of weakness to ask for help. In reality, it can take much more strength and courage to ask for help than to suffer in silence.

Seeking Professional Help

Making the decision to seek professional help can be intimidating and knowing how and where to start can feel daunting. It might start with talking with a spouse, close family member, or friends. A friend who has had a positive experience with counseling is a good place to start. A referral can also be helpful as you search for the right counselor.





Communication is Key

In an article titled Practical Ways of Dealing with Stress on the Farm, Ted Mathews, director of Minnesota Rural Mental Health, and a long-time mental health practitioner, shared two coping strategies that he says he shares with all couples that he works with:

"I recommend to all couples that I work with that they spend a minimum of 15 minutes every day talking about their common daily occurrences. Before you think how easy that would be, do it for 7 days, most will see it is more difficult than they thought. The simple reason for that is that 2 heads are better than one and bonding comes with communication."

He goes on to encourage people to 'BE NICE'. This begins by looking in the mirror first. If you can be kind to yourself, you will have a greater capacity to be kind to others.



Removing the Stigma

This is not a new problem, not new to society, and not new to agriculture. However, if we are going to remove the stigma that keeps people and their families from feeling safe and getting to a point where they are okay with asking for help, we must begin by talking about it. As the Do More Ag Foundation promotes: Talk More, Ask More, Listen More.

Online Module


AGLEGACY.org hosts a set of online modules to allow individuals and families to explore legacy concepts further. Modules are available free of charge to all who are willing to register to participate (self-registration is available 24/7).

Modules, posted in Moodle courseware, offer

the opportunity for individuals to engage anonymously around the topic of leaving a legacy. Sections of this module provide participants the chance to interact with one another, explore the topic of leaving a legacy and what it means, discuss strategies that work and those that have not, and test their knowledge about available resources. Each module includes several components to allow participants to engage the topic from several different perspectives.



How do you Cope With Anxiety in your Ag Legacy?

 This online component offers the opportunity for individuals and families to engage anonymously around the topic of legacy. Sections of this module provide participants the chance to interact with one another, explore the topic of legacy and what it means, discuss strategies that work and those that have not, and test their knowledge about available resources.

AG LEGACY Best Practices

Best Practices: offers the chance to learn when others teach. In this section you will be able to review a recorded version of the live webinar and view the slides presented, complete with the speaker's notes.

Best Practices -

Best Practices begins with a short recorded presentation on the topic. Slides with narration is one format, but materials are also available in audio-only (MP3) format, as well as a version with the slides and accompanying narration as text, for those more

AG LEGACY Ideas to Build On

Ideas to Build On: offers the chance to learn by observing others. In this section you will have the opportunity to engage in a discussion forum. You will have the chance to share what has worked for you and to learn what strategies others have used and how they worked as you each react to the posted discussion questions.

comfortable reading the presentation offered. A short Q&A session offers participants the opportunity to hear others' questions and the presenter's response.

Ideas to Build On -

Ideas to Build On offers discussion questions for families or individuals to respond to. These responses might include relating what has worked for you or stories you have heard of

techniques that have worked for others. In addition, you might also learn what strategies others have used and how they worked as you each react to the posted discussion questions.

Tips for Success -

The Tips for Success section offers a set of AGLEGACY newsletters for further reading, as well as a chance to teach others about resources you are aware of, approaches you have tried and that have worked, or to describe methods that families you are familiar with have used. In this way, you may uncover new ideas for yourself or help others refine an approach they might try.

AG LEGACY Tips for Success

Tips for Success: provides a chance for participants to teach others about strategies that have worked. In this section you can teach others about resources you are aware of, approaches you have tried and that have worked, or describe methods that families you are familiar with have used. In this way, you may uncover new ideas for yourself or help others refine an approach they might try.


AG LEGACY Practice

Practice: allows participants the chance to learn by practicing the concepts covered previously. Practice may include completing an assignment, submitting a document you've prepared for comment, or checking your knowledge level with a short quiz.

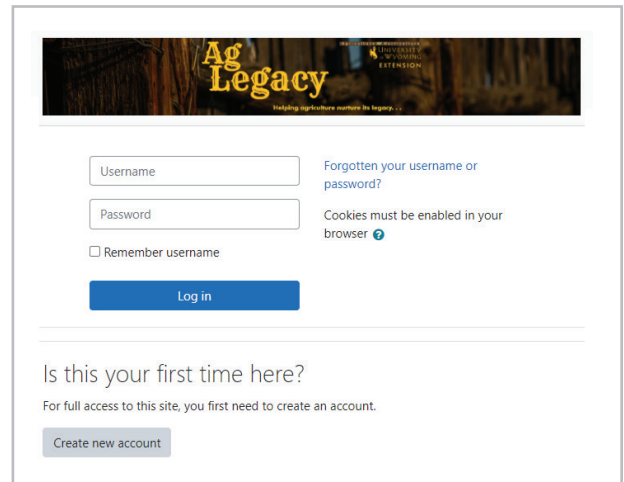
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ACCESS:

To access the online module, point your browser to [AGLEGACY.org](https://www.aglegacy.org). Click on the Modules tab (at the top) and select any module from the list with a Moodle icon. 

Click a title to begin your registration process if you have never registered for an Ag Legacy module before. Then click the Create New Account button to enter your registration information. An email message will be sent to the address you enter that includes a link allowing you to finalize your registration once you complete the form. Now login and enjoy your AGLEGACY online module!



Resources -

Ted Matthews is a mental health practitioner with over 30 years of experience in counseling in rural areas. His focus for the past two decades has been on farmer mental health support. www.farmcounseling.org/.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800/273-TALK (8255) or visit suicidepreventionlifeline.org/GetHelp/LifelineChat.aspx

Crisis Text Line: Text "GO" to 741741

Do More Ag: Champions for the mental wellbeing of all Canadian producers and changing the culture of agriculture to one where all producers are encouraged, supported and empowered to take care of their mental wellbeing. www.domore.ag

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