

Supporting the **MENTAL HEALTH** of Nova Scotia Farmers ❤️

BLUEPRINT FOR A MENTAL HEALTH ACTION PLAN FOR NOVA SCOTIA FARMERS

Calling for a united approach
with provincial and federal
counterparts. A policy brief
from Farm Safety Nova Scotia

WE
TALK
— WE —
GROW



WeTalkWeGrow.ca

FARM 
SAFETY
— NOVA SCOTIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



At the outset of 2020, Farm Safety Nova Scotia (FSNS) was in the initial planning stage of developing a mental health framework for Nova Scotia's farmers when COVID-19 made landing in the province. The response and impacts were immediate – farmers' markets closed, social distancing was enforced, shifts were made in protocols for temporary foreign workers and the community revamped the process of getting product to Nova Scotia's consumers.

This dramatic change in process and day-to-day operations has also shifted the approach Farm Safety Nova Scotia has had to take in addressing the challenges our farm community is facing in understanding and acceptance around mental health, as well as the effectiveness and accessibility of the resources and services available to provide support.

FSNS applied for and received funding through the Canadian Agriculture Partnership (CAP) COVID-19 Agriculture Response Program. The funding has provided immediate support for farmers, their employees and their families in the form of organized webinars and workshops that are offered through the FSNS at no cost to the participant.

While the webinars and workshops will provide a temporary solution, offering immediate support in a time of greater need with a pandemic, a long-term strategy is still very much required to create and maintain a healthier environment – both mentally and physically – for our Nova Scotia farmers.

CAP's funding has supported the development of this Blueprint for a Mental Health Action Plan for Nova Scotia Farmers, as well as the creation of a public awareness campaign - that will include the launch of a website serving to both educate and support the Nova Scotia farming community on maintaining strong mental health and wellness.

FSNS has positioned this report as a "blueprint" for an action plan, rather than an action plan itself. The reason being the approach needs to be shared-with, consulted-with and discussed-with our industry and government partners in order for the way forward to be fully embraced and supported by all necessary change makers.

What is absolutely clear is the need to act, and the need to **act now**.

The Report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, Mental Health: A Priority for our Farmers, was released in May of 2019, found that, "more than one in five Canadians experience a mental health problem at some point in their lives."¹ The statistics show that Nova Scotia fares worse in this regard than their provincial and territorial counterparts, with 9.2 per cent perceiving their mental health as fair or poor in contrast to the national average of 7 per cent.²

¹ Mental Health: A Priority for our Farmers (Report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, May 2019) <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/AGRI/Reports/RP10508975/agrip16/agrip16-e.pdf>

² Ibid





In preparing this Blueprint, a cross-jurisdictional analysis and literature review took place in order to determine what research had already been conducted and what best practices currently exist – both across the country and beyond.

We looked at provinces such as PEI and the **Farmers Talk initiative**, Quebec's **UPA- Sentinel Program** and the **Do More Agriculture Foundation**.

We took the findings from the literature review and jurisdictional scan to two separate focus groups to gauge whether the research reflected the current situation in Nova Scotia, and whether the programs and services being offered in other regions could be applied here at home. With these groups we also provided an overview of the current programs available through Farm Safety Nova Scotia to support farmers' mental health, and received input on what was working and what needed to be updated.

The research, consultation and recommendations are outlined in the following pages, all centering around the same themes:

- There is an existing gap in mental health supports and resources for Nova Scotia farmers.
- Stigma surrounding mental health – and accessing treatment – is still very much prevalent.
- The stressors and obstacles to treatment identified in consultations and research exercises in other provinces and territories are for the most part the same in Nova Scotia.
- Farming is a unique industry, with unique challenges. Any tool, treatment or support needs to reflect these unique aspects.

In spring 2021, Farm Safety Nova Scotia will be launching the Public Awareness Campaign, "We Talk. We Grow." through various communications channels – including traditional media outreach, social media platforms and member and stakeholder relations.

Complementing the public awareness campaign will be this Blueprint document which will be presented to community leaders including industry representatives, elected officials and provincial and federal cabinet ministers.





VISION + GOALS + OBJECTIVES + GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Farm Safety Nova Scotia has outlined the below vision, goals, objectives and guiding principles to guide the recommended approach outlined in the Blueprint for a Mental Health Action Plan for Nova Scotia Farmers.

Vision

A culture within the Nova Scotia farm community where mental health and well-being is valued, prioritized and protected.

Goals

To ensure the farm community has the support and resources needed to protect and promote mental health and wellness.

Objectives

- **Increase education and awareness** of mental health and wellness.
- **Reduce stigma** through continued communication of mental health best practices.
- **Empower individuals and organizations** to become leaders in promoting mental health and wellness.
- **Strengthen relationships** with partners to work together to enhance Nova Scotia's mental health offerings.
- **Coordinate delivery of tailored tools**, resources and supports for mental health and wellness.
- **Reduce stressors** negatively impacting mental health and wellness through advocacy and program delivery.

Guiding Principles

The Blueprint for a Mental Health Action Plan centres around four key pillars to make sure the consultation, design and implementation of a provincial mental health framework for Nova Scotia's farm community will accurately reflect the varied lives and needs of Nova Scotia farmers across the province.

- **Person-centred:** Decisions and actions on mental health supports revolve around what is best for the individual.
- **Evidence-based:** Mental health strategies and interventions for treatment, prevention and promotion need to be based on scientific evidence and/or best practice, taking cultural considerations into account.³
- **Industry specific:** Education, training and resources are all developed and executed through informed subject expertise of the farming industry in Nova Scotia.
- **Inclusive approach:** Taking account of the unique health and social needs across all demographics.

³ Ibid



LITERATURE REVIEW



Before embarking on developing a strategy to address the unique needs of Nova Scotia farmers, a review of current research recently conducted in regards to mental health and wellness within the agriculture industry was collected, as well as a high-level assessment of programs & initiatives being launched in other jurisdictions across Canada.

Some of the most impactful, and timely, information came from the recent Report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, *Mental Health: A Priority for our Farmers*, released in May 2019 which outlined the common challenges and opportunities found in every province and territory, and outlined recommendations to address both.

This analysis gathered the common stressors impacting the mental health of farmers in Canada, as well as some of the barriers faced in accessing effective supports, and also examined how the initiatives recently launched in other provinces could be tailored to support the unique needs of Nova Scotians.

In addition to looking outside of our provincial borders, it was also important to look within to examine the activities being led internally at Farm Safety Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture (NSFA) that are already positively impacting change.

For example, NSFA's "Meet Your Farmer" initiative is already working to address one of the recommendations outlined within the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food's report.

"Many witnesses said that farming needs to be promoted across the country to increase the public's understanding of and confidence in the agricultural sector."



Agriculture contributes \$111.9 billion per year to the Canadian economy, and accounts for 6.7% of Canada's gross domestic product. In 2016, the agriculture and agri-food industry employed 2.3 million, or one in eight Canadians. Canada has set a lofty goal of increasing agri-food exports to \$85 billion by 2025 (an increase from \$64.6 billion in 2017). It is clear that agriculture is vital for the Canadian economy. The well-being of farmers is key to a healthy agricultural sector. Yet, recent research indicates that 45% of farmers have high stress levels.

– Healthy Minds, Healthy Farms (Farm Management Canada, 2020)
(<https://fmc-gac.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ExecutiveSummary.pdf>)





Through the Your Farmer, Your Nova Scotia campaign, and events such as Open Farm Day, NSFA is making the work of Nova Scotia farmers accessible to all ages.

One common thread that emerged out of the research reviewed was that any transformative shift in how we perceive and address mental health will require organized advocacy efforts to address the significant and unique pressures faced by farm producers and their workers.

Even the act of seeing member organizations like NSFA advocating on these different issues will go great lengths to strengthen the trust and confidence given by farmers, knowing that their stress is being acknowledged and work is being done to make it better.

Common Stressors facing Canadian Farmers

From reviewing the research conducted through various surveys and information gathering processes, it would appear that the challenges facing farmers working across the country are incredibly consistent.

These stressors include:

Finances

The stress around finances includes volatile markets, debt incurred by purchasing land and machinery (and fixing machinery), and pressing concerns around the future sustainability of the farm, i.e. whether there will be the possibility of leaving the business to grandchildren.

Family disagreements

There is a distinct lack of separation between work and home on the majority of farms, and in many cases, farms are run by a number of individuals from the same family. This can lead to professional disagreements entering the private and personal space of the home.

Administrative burden

This burden includes the challenges associated with red tape and regulations, lack of access to hi-speed internet in rural areas and in a number of cases simply the lack of time to address the administrative aspect to farm work.

Long hours/Workload/Lack of Sleep

Farm work is physical work, and the hours are long and often inconsistent. The work requires early mornings and during seasonal work, very little opportunity to take time off.





Weather (uncertain yield, climate change)

The unpredictability of weather was one of the major stressors identified that impacted overall mental health and wellness. These shifts in weather patterns are growing to be more troublesome with the increase in climate change impacts. When reviewing the Report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, witnesses before the committee described symptoms of anxiety when describing their feelings of not being able to anticipate weather events, or the impact these events will have on their production, and thus their finances.

High-Risk Tasks

Workplace health and safety has increasingly become a large focus within the agriculture industry, with more steps being taken across the country to put in place procedures and protocols to protect farmers and their workers. While this has led to progress in how safety is prioritized, there is still stress associated with the more dangerous tasks that need to be conducted when doing farm work.

Livestock well-being

In addition to worrying about their families and their workers, farmers also are responsible for the care and maintenance of their livestock.

Stigmatization of Farmers (social media, i.e. animal rights activists)

The increase in access to social media has brought many positive attributes, such as the ability to reach out and share with other farmers working in different regions. However, farmers also say that this increased online presence has also brought more criticism and online bullying by groups such as animal rights activists who disagree with livestock farmers.

Obstacles to Accessing Treatment

Farmers across Canada also consistently raised the same list of barriers to accessing treatment and support for their mental health struggles that were both influenced by the nature of the work itself and in a majority of cases, the rural regions in which they reside.

Stigma

Farming is known as one of the oldest industries in the country, it's a traditional industry known for its perceived "grit, tenacity and resilience". These perceived characteristics both make farmers proud to be in their fields, but also contribute to a fear of being judged as weak for needing to access support for mental illness.

Stigma has also seen a rise through online interactions. The increase in access to social media has brought many positive attributes, such as the ability to reach out and share with other farmers working in different regions. However, farmers also say that this increased online presence has also brought more criticism and online bullying by groups such as animal rights activists who disagree with livestock farmers. Obstacles to Accessing Treatment Farmers across Canada also consistently raised the same list of barriers to accessing treatment and support for their mental health struggles that were both influenced by the nature of the work itself and in a majority of cases, the rural regions in which they reside.





Lack of insurance

Access to seeking mental health support can be limited due to a lack of health insurance coverage.

Home is Work/Work is Home

Taking the doctor's advice to just "go home and rest for a few days" doesn't apply in many cases – as a farmer's home is their work, and their work is their home. Work is therefore all consuming.

Lack of access to mental health professionals who understand the industry

The pressures facing farmers, and their lifestyles, are exceptionally unique. The treatment offerings that might benefit individuals in other industries just wouldn't apply for the vast majority of farmers. When seeking help, they want to access a professional that "gets it".



"Farmers are supposed to be the salt of the earth, strong people who don't need help from anybody. They are supposed to carry on no matter what happens to them," he says. "But I have come to realize that asking for help is not a bad thing."

– Interview with Sean Stanford, Farmer, Southern Alberta (CBC, The National, February 2020)



JURISDICTIONAL SCAN



A review of current mental health and wellness programs and initiatives in provinces and territories across Canada also took place in advance of the development of this blueprint for an action plan – with the intent on determining which programs could potentially be tailored to the unique needs of Nova Scotia farmers. There are a number of programs that stood out and were supported through the focus group discussions.

For a detailed review of the jurisdictional scan see the Appendix.

CURRENT MENTAL HEALTH OFFERINGS FOR FARMERS IN NOVA SCOTIA

Farm Safety Nova Scotia currently provides a number of mental health resources and supports for farmers. These resources are accessed regularly, which adds to the need to broaden our outreach and diversify our offerings.

These resources include:

- Farm Family Support Centre
- Mental Health First Aid Training
- Various educational webinars and resources

Additionally, there are a variety of in-direct initiatives including funding, programming support, advocacy initiatives and industry networking opportunities.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Two separate focus groups were held in October 2020 to review the findings of the literature review and jurisdictional scan, as well as discuss opportunities and challenges unique to Nova Scotia and provide feedback on logo and tagline options for Farm Safety Nova Scotia's mental health program.

A focus group was held with stakeholders (including brokers, equipment dealers) – and a separate focus group was held for farmers. For a detailed summary of feedback see the Appendix.



PROPOSED ACTION



Create and Launch Public Awareness Campaign/Online Resource

While there has been some growth in understanding the importance of mental health and wellness, and how making that a priority positively impacts individual and professional relationships and productivity of the farm – there still exists a culture that adheres by the “pull yourself up by the bootstraps and get on with it” mentality.

In the research reviewed and in the focus groups discussions, this existing mentality was reiterated and numerous examples were presented to show how prevalent this attitude still was in farms across the province; the stress, the exhaustion, the frustration – that’s what you sign up for as a farmer.

While farming undoubtedly requires a more intense level of physical labour and atypical work hours outside of the 9-5 structure, there is a growing call amongst the Nova Scotia farming community to invest more of a focus and resources on promoting mental health and wellness and educating farmers on how to proactively support mental health, and recognizing the signs that indicate when it may be time to seek outside help.

Action:

Farm Safety Nova Scotia will be launching a public awareness campaign in 2021 that will include a brand identity (logo and tagline), marketing collateral (brochures, posters, hats) and a website dedicated to learning more about mental health and wellness and promoting available resources.

The brand identity has already been established and a complementing marketing and communications campaign has been developed.

How to Support:

1. Visit the We Talk. We Grow. website.
2. Share messages and graphics on social media platforms.
3. Promote the campaign and link to information on your own website.
4. Participate in training and use available resources.



Supporting the **MENTAL HEALTH** of Nova Scotia Farmers ❤️





Delivery of mental health literacy training and resources.

Increasing the mental health literacy of the farm community must continue to be a priority over time. Ensuring that the community has access to the tools, resources and training needed to understand how to support oneself and each other is essential to the success of improving the mental health and wellness of our farmers.

Actions:

1. FSNS will continue to source and build resources to live on the website and to be distributed throughout the farm community.
2. FSNS will deliver the “In the Know” program across the province with support from identified mental health and industry partners.
3. FSNS will continue to listen to the farm community to ensure the training and resources available are meeting the needs of the community.

How to Support:

1. Provide funding to support the development and delivery of mental health literacy training and resources tailored specific to Nova Scotia's farm community.
2. Partner with FSNS to deliver mental health literacy training in your community.
3. Partner with FSNS to develop mental health literacy resources.





Engage leadership within the farm community.

To achieve our vision, it is essential that we collaborate with our farm community to engage leadership in taking an active role in promoting and prioritizing mental health and wellness.

Actions:

1. FSNS will deliver the We Talk. We Grow. Ambassador* program to communicate and support the mental health and wellness of the farming community. With education and training, the We Talk. We Grow. Ambassadors will help reduce stigma, increase awareness of the various phases of mental health, and refer those in the community to the available mental health support and resources.
2. FSNS will support We Talk. We Grow. "Champions"** by providing tools, resources and supports to amplify the We Talk. We Grow. message.
3. Establish the We Talk. We Grow. Leadership Charter for leaders across the industry and province to make a commitment and promise to do all they can do to support the mental health and wellness of Nova Scotia's farm community.

*Ambassador:

The We Talk. We Grow. Ambassador will help communicate and support the mental health and wellness of the farming community in Nova Scotia through the We Talk. We Grow. Mental Health Awareness Campaign. With education and training, the We Talk. We Grow. Ambassador will help reduce stigma, increase awareness of the various phases of mental health, and refer those in the community to the available mental health support and resources. The ambassador will promote the campaign on an ongoing basis, do it at no cost, have used training, tools, and resources available; and fully and wholeheartedly support the campaign.

**Champion:

The We Talk. We Grow. Champions are pillars of the farming community, stakeholders and government representatives with strong reputation, have a dedicated and prominent following, and the ability to reach a wide audience within the farming community. We will work to engage these Champions from time-to-time to help amplify the mental health campaign, and generate greater awareness around the availability of resources, training and supports.

How to Support:

1. Become a We Talk. We Grow. Ambassador or Champion.
2. Sign onto the We Talk. We Grow. Leadership Charter.
3. Provide funding to ensure continued delivery of education training to We Talk. We Grow. Ambassadors.





Develop a peer-to-peer support program.

Create a peer support program for Nova Scotia farmers based on the success seen in other jurisdictions. The program would need to make sure peers who were placed in the supporting role were adequately trained to provide that level of support to those in distress.

Actions:

1. Conduct a review of peer-to-peer programs and assess their applicability.
2. Establish a peer-to-peer support program – further resources required.

How to Support:

1. Become peer-to-peer support person.
2. Provide funding to support the establishment and continued delivery of a peer-to-peer support program.

Advocate for improved accessibility and farm specific mental health offerings.

Ensuring access to mental health support in rural communities, with an additional requirement to make sure that support has an understanding of the industry.

Actions:

1. Advocate for increased mental health support in rural communities
2. Advocate to address the financial barriers to accessing the required support
3. Review current Farm Family Support Centre and establish a program and network with professionals who have a keen understanding of the agriculture industry.

How to Support:

1. Provide funding to support the delivery of the Farm Family Support Centre.
2. Increased financial support for mental health supports and services.
3. Become part of the mental health professional network supporting Nova Scotia's farm community.





Support farmers in taking a break from the farm.

A repeated refrain from farmers in Nova Scotia is that it is close to impossible to “take a break” from the job to regroup when so often home is where you work and where you work is home. Currently, there is few to no options for farmers to escape from their farms to decompress and address mental health concerns, and few to no options for people to come in and continue the work needed on the farm, which would allow for the opportunity to get away.

Accompanying this initiative would be the establishment of a farm worker group that would be comprised of volunteers in each region committed to supporting farmers by completing work in their absence while they seek respite support.

It was also made clear in the focus groups that informal social gatherings hosted by NSFA have always been a positive contribution to mental health and wellness, especially for people who are often isolated due to the nature of their work schedules. NSFA will look at establishing more opportunities for the farming community to connect – without necessarily labelling these get-togethers as activities aligning with a mental strategy in case people who need the social interaction don’t attend due to worry about perceptions and associated stigma. This is perhaps where the concept of creating groups bonding over a shared project, as raised in one of the focus groups, could fit in.

Actions:

1. Seek member benefit discounts for vacation rentals, hotels, etc.
2. Investigate the development of a farm relief worker program.
3. Provide social and networking opportunities.

How to Support:

1. Become a member benefit partner.
2. Become a farm relief worker.
3. Host and/or fund social and networking opportunities.





Reduce stressors through advocacy and program delivery.

It is essential that government and industry associations continue to collaborate and advocate in reducing the stressors negatively contributing to farm mental health and wellness.

Actions:

1. FSNS continued delivery of farm safety programming.
2. Continued advocacy in partnership with NSFA .
3. Align advocacy efforts with mental health strategy.

How to Support:

1. Continue advocacy efforts aimed to minimize stressors on farm businesses – hi-speed internet, trespassing laws, regulatory burden.
2. Continue funding and delivery of programs supporting farms in managing business risks – farm safety, HR/labour, public trust, environmental.
3. Continue funding and delivery of extension services to the farm community.
4. Continue to ensure financial assistance program meets the needs of the agriculture industry.
5. Incorporate the lens of mental health into advocacy work.

NEXT STEPS

Farm Safety Nova Scotia is grateful to all who contributed to the development of this Blueprint for a Mental Health Action Plan for Nova Scotia Farmers; including FSNS' Board of Directors and the individuals who took part in the focus group consultations.

There is no question that 2020 and the advance of COVID-19 contributed to much higher levels of stress and uncertainty than typically experienced in the farming industry. While we have been constantly told there weren't any "new stressors", the existing stressors were definitely exacerbated and compounded by the global pandemic. The workshops and immediate support initiatives provided a stop-gap solution, but ensuring the mental health and wellness of our current farmers and future generations requires a long-term strategy with sustainable funding and partner engagement.

In order to solidify that engagement and necessary funding support, this Blueprint will serve as a guide for discussions with our industry partners and elected officials and representatives at all levels of government.



APPENDIX A – JURISDICTIONAL SCAN



The Row Worker

The “Row Worker” is an initiative developed by Maria Labrecque, the founding director of Au Coeur des familles agricoles. Labrecque wanted to create a model where trained individuals could serve as rural outreach workers making contact with farmers to detect warning signs of distress.



“The row worker has the role of establishing contact with isolated people where they are. This field worker values justice, equality, human dignity and solidarity. He is on the lookout for needs and ensures that everyone finds their place on the farm. It does this by forging links and putting people in contact. It identifies talents and interests. Networking allows him to identify leaders, caregivers and other resources to make them allies who will be called upon to invest in a collective project from which they will benefit.”⁴

The ACFA House

The ACFA House is another program offered through Au Coeur des familles agricoles in Quebec. It serves as a type of respite home where farmers can find a safe space away from the farm and their source of mental distress. Members of our focus group noted the inability to escape the “work from home/home is work” mentality of operating a farm – and Quebec appears to have found one solution. The Respite home can accommodate four people, or two couples (which focuses on supporting relationships that are strained), at a time. The stay is usually two to four days and does not exceed a week. The services are free and confidential and include access to a variety of mental health specialists and support workers. For many farmers in Quebec, the program’s most impactful benefit is being away from the farm itself, “In times of intense stress, a producer does not want to find himself in an environment that confronts him daily with the vision of the work to be done in the fields. Feeling unable to accomplish his daily tasks, for whatever reasons, this situation could increase his stress level without allowing him to take the time or perspective necessary to find solutions to his problems.”⁵

⁴ <https://acfareseaux.qc.ca/fr/le-travailleur-de-rang>

⁵ <https://acfareseaux.qc.ca/fr/maison-acfa>



APPENDIX A – JURISDICTIONAL SCAN



Saskatchewan Farm Stress Line

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture has recognized the problems that farmers and families in rural areas experience, which is why they mobilized human and financial resources to establish a farm stress line for farmers and rural residents.

The calls to this line cover a wide variety of topics: mental health issues, stress, depression, suicidal thoughts, family conflict, teen-parent conflict, seniors' health problems, abuse and neglect, relationship issues, parenting, addiction, gambling, alcoholism and substance abuse.⁶

Manitoba has established a similar phone line for their provincial farmers.

FarmersTalk.ca

In February 2020, PEI launched FarmersTalk.ca to support mental and emotional health of farmers and their families. The site encourages farmers, producers and family members to open up about the challenges they face. This helps to allow them to support one another and reach out for assistance with any mental health struggles. The resource also links to support services and advice on how farmers can pro-actively take care of their mental health before it becomes a crisis.⁷

PEI Farmer Assistance Program

Prince Edward Island's Farmer Assistant Program is an initiative providing confidential, professional counselling services to farmers and their families. The program recognizes that some problems can affect home life and work performance; as such, help may be required in resolving these problems through the assistance of a trained professional counsellor. The Assistance Program counsellors are trained to provide short term counselling or refer farmers to other professional services and resources in the community.⁸ This service supports a number of identified concerns in the community such as: stress and anxiety, trauma/critical incidents, alcohol and substance misuse, couple and marital counselling, elder care concerns, depression and many others.

⁶ <http://www.mobilecrisis.ca/farm-stress-line-rural-sask>

⁷ FarmersTalk.ca

⁸ Farmer Assistance Program | PEI Federation of Agriculture (peifa.ca)



APPENDIX A – JURISDICTIONAL SCAN



Guidance on Business Management

Farm Management Canada's (FMC) report, *Healthy Minds, Healthy Farms: Exploring a Connection between Mental Health and Farm Business Management*, was released in May 2020 and provided a number of interesting insights to help alleviate some of the stressors identified by Canadian farmers.

This report made the case for stronger farm business management planning, and how that focus on organization can positively support and address mental health issues.⁹



Connections between mental health and farm business management:

- 21% of farmers indicate they regularly follow a written business plan, and 48% indicate they never or rarely do.
- Farmer optimism contributes to farmers adopting more effective coping mechanisms and beneficial business management practices.
- Regularly following a written farm business plan contributes to peace of mind, more effective coping mechanisms, and adopting other beneficial business management practices.
- Business management practices are less frequent amongst younger farmers.
- Business management practices can improve on-farm relationships.
- Business management planning does not eliminate stress entirely.

Care Farming

The practice of “care farming” can be linked back to the 17th century, and has evolved to mean, “the use of farming practices for the stated purpose of providing or promoting healing, mental health, social or educational care services.”¹⁰

In 2014 a group of academics from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences took a look at the care farming practice in Norway, noting, “people in need of health-related support may on a regular basis participate in farm-related activities alongside a farmer. Most commonly, these are group activities, but they should always be adapted to each individual participant's mental and physical needs. Several studies on care farming highlight group participation, the social setting, and the farmer's supportive supervision as important. Furthermore, earlier qualitative studies have described care farming programs as a suitable transition between marginalization related to illness and inclusion in society.”¹¹

⁹ *Healthy Minds, Healthy Farms: Exploring a Connection between Mental Health and Farm Business Management*, Farm Management Canada, <https://fmc-gac.com/mental-health/>

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Care_farming

¹¹ Mental health rehabilitation in a care farm context: A descriptive review of Norwegian intervention studies. <https://content.iospress.com/articles/work/wor2213>, p. 32

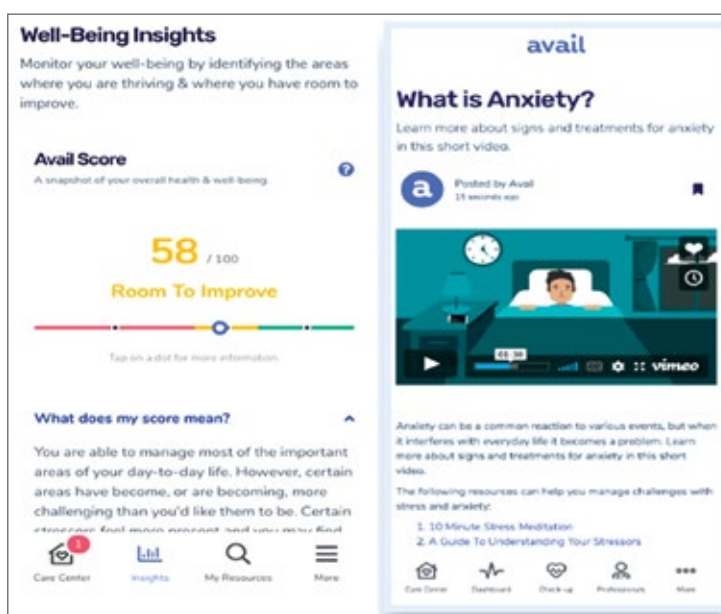




APPENDIX A – JURISDICTIONAL SCAN

Avail App

Bridges Health, a mental health service organization in Saskatoon, recently developed a mobile app called “Avail” to support Saskatchewan farmers in bettering their understanding and recognizing their stress levels and the source of their tension. Made possible through a \$10,000 investment from Innovation Saskatchewan, the mobile app analyzes multiple areas of wellness data – including stress, anxiety, relationships, healthy eating and physical activity.¹²



7 Cups

The 7 Cups program is not agriculture specific, but rather an initiative that is currently employed in Nova Scotia to support the mental health of post-secondary students in the province.

7 Cups is a service that connects people who want to talk, with those who are ready and able to listen. In the case of post-secondary students, the program allows students to talk to other students – so that they can connect with other people who “get it”.¹³

¹² <https://www.farms.com/ag-industry-news/new-app-helps-sask-farmers-manage-mental-health-045.aspx>

¹³ Online Therapy & Free Counseling, Someone To Talk To | 7 Cups



APPENDIX B – CONSULTATIONS



Stressors and Challenges to Treatment

The focus groups both agreed that the stressors and obstacles to treatment identified in the literature review were aligned with the current situation in Nova Scotia.

The discussion raised a number of additional stressors that were perhaps unique to our province. These stressors included:

- Isolation
- Availability of skilled and knowledgeable labour (specifically “middle management” and “harvesting labourers”)
- Business succession – age of farmers and challenges in transferring farm ownership
- Greater socio-economic issues in Nova Scotia

In terms of the obstacles to treatment, both groups noted that the stigma associated with mental illness wasn't so much about the mental health challenges themselves, but needing to seek treatment. There is an understanding within the farming community that being overworked is a sign of strength and success – that if you don't accept the extra hours you need to take on, you are not considered a “good farmer”.

It was also noted that there was a lack of real understanding about what mental health actually “is”. One farmer noted that the term had become somewhat of a “catch phrase” – and it was difficult for farmers to know when feelings of sadness transitioned into depression, for example. Or when worries about issues on the farm was possibly an anxiety disorder. Essentially, what constitutes an issue that requires outside help?



APPENDIX B – CONSULTATIONS



Another obstacle to treatment that was raised as being as being Nova Scotia specific was a lack of access to family doctors in the province. Often times, a relationship with a family doctor can support the disclosure of challenges around mental health, and a treatment plan or referral to a specialist follows.

Lack of time to seek support off the farm was also raised. When you work from “sun up to sun down” it feels impossible to stop and find time to access help for challenges to your mental health.

Both groups discussed challenges with access to child care, and the responsibility of caring for older family members raise both additional challenges to their work and present obstacles in seeking support.

A strong take-away from the two focus groups was that any approach to a mental health strategy for Nova Scotia needed to take into account the vast and diverse audience we would need to reach. Farmers in the province span multiple generations – some starting out in their early twenties to others still working late into their lives – and also hold very different life experiences, including challenging upbringings.

The groups also wanted to make sure that all workers, including temporary foreign workers were included in a mental health strategy – as these workers are far away from home and without their usual support network.

Feedback on Current Programming and Recommendation for New Initiatives

For the most part, participants in the two focus groups were aware of the current programming offered by Farm Safety Nova Scotia and Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture to support the mental health and wellness of Nova Scotia’s farmers.

It was suggested that in marketing and promoting these programs, the organization should try as much as possible to provide first-voice experiences to highlight the effectiveness of the resources – “I was struggling, I accessed this support, and it made a positive impact”.

Informal programming and social networking events that are typically outside of mental health specific programming were referenced by both the stakeholder and farmer focus group as having a positive return on mental health. This has been fully realized in the absence of such events due to COVID-19 public health protocols. The feelings of isolation and lack of peer-support are much more prevalent.



APPENDIX B – CONSULTATIONS



The lack of industry knowledge by mental health practitioners was raised as a real issue to access help. Having an understanding of the unique pressures and unique lifestyle of farmers is integral to build trust and a relationship where farmers will open up and share their struggles.

When reviewing the programs offered in other jurisdictions, the peer-support initiatives were embraced as something that the focus group participants felt would benefit Nova Scotia farmers greatly.

A great idea that was raised, as a way to address some of the stigma surrounding seeking support for mental health challenges, was to create informal “mutual support groups” where people could come together over a shared project – such as small engine repair – and seek comradery and solidarity on some shared stress.

Current Supports:

- Farm Family Support Center
- Mental Health Crisis Line
- Mental Health First Aid Training (Care for Mental Health disorders – provide initial support, provide guidance toward professional help)

Additional Resources Available:

- Psychological First Aid Training (tools for Mental Wellness, daily tools to deal with stress, promoting resiliency, and uses practical and supportive strategies to reduce impact of traumatic events).



APPENDIX B – CONSULTATIONS



In-direct Supports

- Emergency On-Farm Support Fund
- Essential Services Contingency Reserve
- Procurement Nova Scotia
- Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA)
- Temporary Foreign Worker Funding
- Ag On-Farm Student Bursary Program
- COVID-19 Ag Response Program
- NSFA & FSNS COVID-19 Resources

Farming can be a very isolating industry, finding opportunities to get together with peers is important. Here are ways that Farm Safety Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture and industry partners help to facilitate those gatherings:

- Commodity/Industry meetings
- Farmer town halls



Learn more
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