

Profile from the Field

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Trying Times: Alleviating and Understanding Farm Stress

Project Titles: Trying Times: Alleviating and Understanding Farm Stress

Coordinators: Meg Moynihan

Location: Minnesota Department of Agriculture

SARE Grants: \$72,714

Duration: 2016-2018

To read the full project reports, go to <https://projects.sare.org/> and search for project number ENC18-170.

Farmer stress levels are on the rise. Fueled by low prices, debt, inconsistent weather, isolation, marital stress, farm transfer issues, production challenges, the complexities of COVID-19, and other factors, some farmers are in trouble. As a producer who has experienced stress herself, Meg Moynihan is poised to help agriculture advisors better respond to the stress they encounter on farms and in rural communities through her advisory role with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

Moynihan and a team of experts have been designing, developing, and delivering trainings on farmer stress and mental health called “Down on the Farm” since 2017. These Down on the Farm workshops help people who work with farmers recognize and respond when they suspect that a farmer or farm family member needs help.

With support from SARE, they are building on that work. The farm stress team is working to reach federal agency staff, state regulatory staff, Extension representatives, lenders, faith and social organizations, and business people in Minnesota with skill-building workshops that focus on suicide and suicide prevention, community-level resource engagement, de-escalation,



Minnesota farmers Bryan and Sarah Klabunde shared their experiences and offered insight into dealing with a stressful harvest season in a Fall 2019 episode of the TransFARMation podcast.

rural adolescent stress, and conflict resolution. With partners at the Minnesota Department of Health, SAVE, and LivingWorks, they are adapting an evidence and skills-based suicide prevention training called safeTALK to address the unique characteristics of agricultural communities.

“This project addresses the sustainability of farmers themselves,” said Moynihan. “It’s developing curriculum to teach agriculture advisors how to respond when they see farmers in trouble.”

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Resources

In association with Meg Moynihan's work on farm stress, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and the Red River Farm Network have joined forces to create a new radio and podcast series called TransFARMation. The series is designed to increase awareness and reduce inhibitions about acknowledging farm stress, as well as highlight the resources available. Local farmers, ranchers, and agricultural stakeholders are featured, sharing personal stories and offering a message of hope. Find more information about the podcast at www.rrfn.com/transformation/

Moynihan described several components of her farm stress-related work in testimony to Minnesota House and Senate Agriculture committees in February 2020. The video is available at <https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hjvid/91/892586/> (starting at 01:50).

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