



TIPS FOR COPING WITH DROUGHT-RELATED STRESS

FARM /RANCH STRESS AND DISASTER STRESS

Disasters create stress in our lives. For farmers/ranchers and people in agricultural industries, drought adds to other stresses already experienced by farm / ranch families.

Stressors identified by farm/ranch families¹	
<i>Farm/ranch-specific worries</i>	<i>Worries shared with most families</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising expenses & low prices • Concerns about farm/ranch finances • Machinery breakdown • Prolonged bad weather or natural disaster • Weather-related crop loss • Delay in planting/harvest • Time pressures & long work hours • Farm viability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Death in family • Divorce or separation • Major illness or disability • Aging parents who need care • Worries about owing money • Few vacations • Changing economic conditions

Studies show that stress may be even greater for young farmers/ranchers, farmers/ranchers holding a second off-farm/ranch job and women in farm/ranch families.

Drought stress may be different than stress in other disasters because a drought is an extended event and does not have a single moment of impact. The anxiety builds over time and becomes chronic, making it less noticeable to ourselves and those around us. The drought may not be viewed as seriously as a tornado because the damage is not as visible and its impact is worst for already stressed farm/ranch families and communities.

SIGNS OF STRESS

Some common signs of distress are:

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| ✓ Irritability and anger | ✓ Forgetfulness |
| ✓ Feelings of anxiety & worry | ✓ Fatigue |
| ✓ Headaches or gastrointestinal complaints | ✓ Sense of helplessness |
| ✓ Increased risk-taking behavior | ✓ Lack of concentration |
| ✓ Changes in eating & sleep habits | ✓ Avoidance or denial |
| ✓ Increased alcohol or drug use | ✓ Sadness |

Farmers/ranchers and their families should remind themselves that these are common stress reactions. Once recognized, realize that stress is a natural by-product of both internal and external circumstances. It is important to recognize that these are normal 'stress' responses to an unusual situation.

¹ Walker and Walker, 1987 and 2003 USDA Small Farm Digest. Missouri Department of Mental Health

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT STRESS?

Stress unrecognized is often referred to as the silent killer. It is the number one variable that affects our, emotional, mental and physical health. Experiencing the effects of stress and taking ownership over our feelings associated with stress will empower us to find peace in the midst of the stressful situation rather than the stressful situation slowly taking pieces of you, i.e., your happiness, appetite or the many other facets of your mental, physical and emotional health. When we are proactive at facing the challenges each day, the stronger we will be in the face of other difficult circumstances that life will inevitably throw our way. Focusing on our own strengths and partnering with our community supports, we can take steps to grow ourselves and our families by:

- **Acknowledging feelings and talking them out.** We have feelings for a reason, they serve as our barometer, measuring our internal pressure. Family, friends and neighbors can be helpful listeners and may share some of the same worries. Participating in church or spiritual renewal activities can also be sources of comfort and assistance in difficult times.
- **Paying attention to health, nutritious diet and adequate sleep is important.** Engaging in recreation or a favorite hobby, getting away for a few hours with close friends, reading a good book, volunteering to help others, and finding time to laugh can give your mind and body respite from the constant relationship we have developed with stress and worry.
- **Nurturing personal relationships should be a priority.** Couples should make time to be alone, to talk and to have fun. Families should re-establish important rituals such as mealtimes and holiday celebrations. Listening to and reassuring children who may need additional support is significant in dealing with the stressful situation and critical for continued healthy development.

The good news is that, with time, we will bounce back and return to what is normal for us and our families. Keep in mind, it may be a 'new normal', but it will be a normal that serves our well-being.

WHEN SHOULD WE SEEK HELP?

If stress, anxiety, depression or physical problems continue for more than a few weeks or if someone is having feelings of extreme hopelessness or extreme anger, talking about suicide or is violent, it is important to seek help immediately. Contact a physician or community mental health center as soon as possible.

HOW CAN WE FIND WHAT HELP IS AVAILABLE?

Information about community mental health services in Nebraska can be found at:

COMHT Program 1-800-464-0258 - COMHT- The Nebraska Counseling, Outreach and Mental Health Therapy offers no-cost vouchers for confidential mental health services for persons affected by the rural crisis.

http://dhhs.ne.gov/behavioral_health/Pages/behavioral_health_index.aspx

or dhhs.ne.gov/behavioral_health

Official Nebraska Government Website with a listing of licensed mental health counselors throughout the State of Nebraska.

<http://droughtresources.unl.edu>

An index of articles provided by the University of Nebraska Lincoln Extension that address drought issues that affect farmers and ranchers.

Peer reviewed by Dr. Deanna Vansickel- UNL Extension Educator 10.30.12; Ann Fenton, Amy Timmerman, Ruth Vonderohe, LaDonna Werth, Extension Educator. Tonia R. Durden, Early Childhood Extension Specialist.

Web Resource Listing for Stress Management for Farm/Ranch Families



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Nebraska Farm Hotline – 1-800-464-0258

Farm Mediation Clinics 1-800-464-0258

Farm Mediation 1-800-446-4071

<http://www.legalaidofnebraska.com>

Nebraska Legal Aid

<https://nrns.ne.gov/>

The NRRS is a statewide database created with input from Nebraska families, service providers and organizations. The NRRS provides 1-800 numbers as well as websites and email contacts to help you connect faster to the services you are seeking.

www.ndvsac.org

The Nebraska Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault Coalition.

www.canhelp.org

Community Action of Nebraska

www.ACCESSNebraska.ne.gov

Department Health and Humans Services- food stamps, Medicaid, Kid Connection etc.

<http://extension.missouri.edu/main/family/index.shtml>

An index of articles provided by the University of Missouri Cooperative Extension system that address strong families and programs to help families cope.

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/issues/stress-safety/index.html>

This site for the University of Wisconsin Extension offices provides an index of resources for recognizing, responding to and relieving stress targeted for farm families.

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/extreme-weather/drought-fire/>

University of Minnesota Extension Service sponsors drought and fire information.

<http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/famf2/mf1062.pdf>

A guide for helping farm families in distress has been developed by the Cooperative Extension Service of Kansas State University and posted as a publication on their web site. The four page brochure includes listening skills and a referral guide for people who need more assistance.



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