



HELPING VERMONT FARMERS: A webinar for service providers

- " Agricultural risks
- " Farm First Program
- " Recognizing a farmer in need
- " Responding to a farmer in need
- " Connecting the farmer to resources

“ Myra Handy, MSW, LICSW- Presenter

“ Clinical Operations Manager, Invest EAP (Employee Assistance Program)

“ Farm First Program

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“ Special Projects, Invest EAP

“ Outreach and Promotion, Farm First Program

Contact:

Farm First @ (877) 493-6216



Photos of VT Farmers taken by **Earl Dotter**- award winning photojournalist- in 2014



Photos within this webinar are used with the permission of each VT farmer and are not associated with the **topic** of each slide.



Who is joining us for the webinar?

- “ Farm loan officers- FSA
- “ Agency of Agriculture employees
- “ Rutland Area Farm and Food Link employee
- “ UVM Extension employees
- “ VT Department of Health employees
- “ Food systems professionals
- “ Farm First professionals



Gail LaPierre of AgrAbility, UVM Extension, talking with farmer



Agriculture: High Risk Occupation



Farming one of most dangerous jobs

- “ Very high risk for fatal and nonfatal injuries
- “ One of the few industries in which family members (who often share the work and live on the premises) are also at risk for fatal and nonfatal injuries.



Stressors Unique to Farmers

- " Extreme weather events increasing w. climate change
- " Government policies: new water quality regulations
- " Milk prices dropping
- " Financial pressures
- " Long hours; no vacations
- " Machinery failures
- " Time pressures
- " Lack of money and time to drive to resources

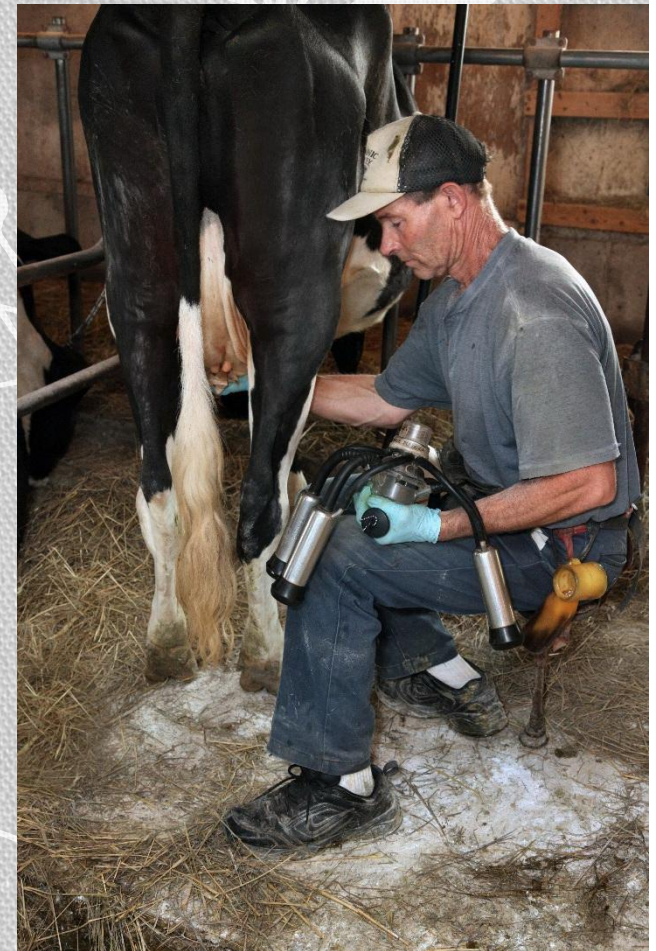


New water quality regulations combined w. low milk prices increase risk for depression amongst farmers.



Psychological Impacts of Events

- “ Sense of security and identity affected
- “ Less of a sense that they steer own lives
- “ Sense of uncertainty (Will things ever return to normal?)
- “ Anxiety
- “ Cumulative stress
- “ Loss
- “ Trauma & PTSD



Farm First



What is Farm First?

- “ EAP for Farm Owners to address day-to-day survival
 - “ A program of Invest Employee Assistance Program
 - “ Since 2009
- “ Free, confidential consultation, counseling, on-farm assessment, referral
- “ Counselors available 24/7
- “ On-ramp for all resources for all farmers
- “ Statewide in Vermont
- “ Funded by VT Agencies of Human Services & Agriculture (AHS, Ag)



Who is Eligible?

- “ All VT farmers grossing \$10K or more from their farms
- “ Farm owners and family members living on the farm
- “ Hired labor is not covered
- “ No waiting list
- “ No sign-up needed



How do Farmers Access Services?

“ Call 1-877-493-6216 anytime, 24/7

Or

“ Farm Service Provider calls

“ Find us on the web (password protected): www.farmfirst.org

“ Website org. password: ***farm***

“ Then, set up personal log-in



Farm First counselors make a difference



Farm First Counselors: Licensed with Extensive Training

- ” Agricultural Medicine Behavioral Health Training
- ” Motivational Interviewing

Counselors located statewide in every county

1-877-493-6216



Why do Farmers call Farm First?

- " Disability/injury obstructing farming
- " Stress, anxiety, depression, grief
- " Relationship or parenting issues
- " Eldercare, childcare, housing needs
- " Legal / financial guidance
- " Workplace conflict/ stress
- " Property boundary disputes
- " Crisis/disaster and more
- " **Service Providers are encouraged to call FF** for a consultation if you have concerns about a farmer or when you are with farmer. We will help w. solutions.



Farm First Visits Farms After Disaster

“Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

“Assists farmers in processing what happened

“**Management of traumatic reactions by survivors can be a valuable tool following a life-threatening event.**

“Farm First visits only by request of farmer. Service Providers are encouraged to help make that connection.

“Please refer farmers to us with their permission. How? Slide 36!



Scenario #1- Substance Abuse on the Farm

Adult son addicted to RX pills draining \$\$ from farm account

Farm First Services Employed:

- “ **Management Consultation**
- “ **Counseling**
- “ **Referral** for addiction treatment & ongoing family counseling



After year 1: Farm First gave me the confidence that I had my head on straight.

2 years later: Doing well, out of the woods now.



Scenario #2- Resource Needs on the Farm

Aging non-dairy farmer needed barn roof shoveled off and had landlord/tenant legal issue, all leading to stress/anger/physical

Farm First Services Employed:

“ Counseling support & resources

“ Legal referral



*Within 1/2 hour of our front porch forum posting I have a shoveller!
thankyou for the great suggestion; takes a lot of weight off my
shoulders.... thankyou for your simple wisdom*

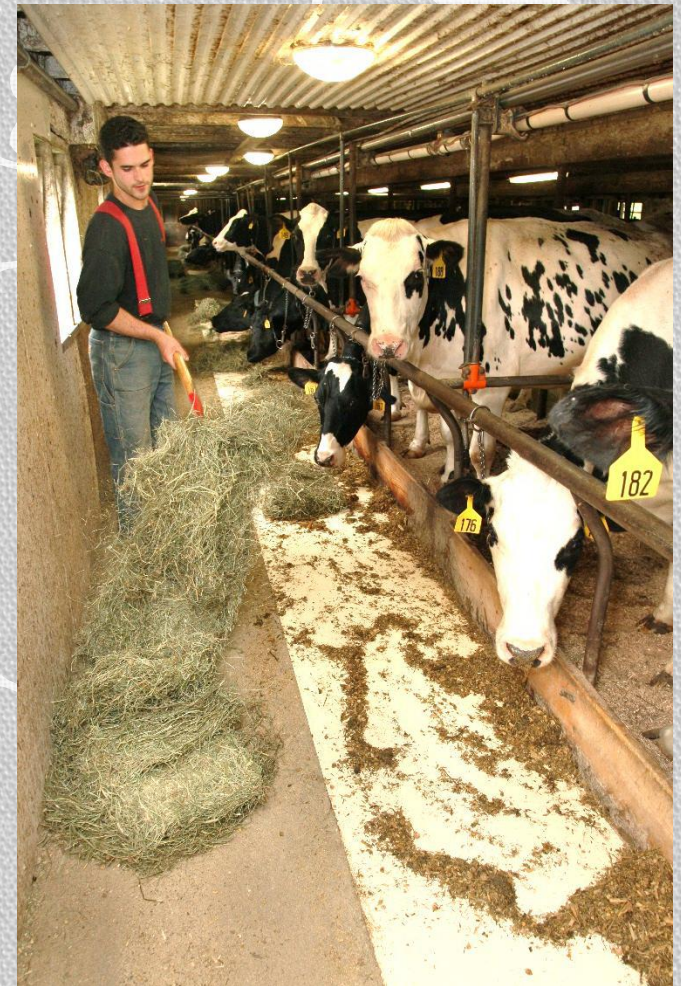


Scenario #3- Stress in the Young Farm Family

Young dairy farmer called with situational stress due to new parenting role while expanding farm with new barns: Feeling overwhelmed

Farm First Services Employed:

- " Assessment of all needs
- " **Counseling**



Scenario #4- Addressing Financial Stress

Farmer w. young family & new baby in financial straits

Farm First Services Employed:

“ Resource Specialist Consultation

- “ Obtained Release of Info (and Schedule F) to speak with DCF-Economic Services to make sure family is covered and eligibility is calculated accurately for Food Stamps, Fuel Assistance, VHAP, Dr. Dynasaur, WIC. Farmer found dealing w. these details alone very stressful and appreciated the help.



Scenario #5- Addressing Disability on the Farm

Farmer with serious medical / disability issues, forced to sell dairy cows but still farming with beef, crops & renting out some land.

Wife is afraid "*he'll sink into a deep depression and lose his will to live if he can't get back on his equipment.*"

Farm First Services Employed:

- “ Outreach from Farm First Counselor in his area
- “ Farm First Vocational Rehab Counselor provide employment-related assessment/assistance since disability preventing farming.
- “ On-farm AgrAbility Assessment for adaptive equipment with VT Center for Independent Living (VCIL) so he can get on machinery.



Scenario #6- Farm Succession

Farm owners ready to retire and wish to pass farm on to children. Diversity of ideas and needs. Needed help from Farm First to facilitate discussions.

Farm First Services Employed:

- “ **Family counseling** at Farm First counselor’s office
- “ **Resource Specialist** assisted elders in thinking through how to move forward on decision-making with lawyer and accountant
- “ **Other Referrals as Needed**



Recognizing a Farmer in Need



Red Flags that a Farmer is Struggling

“Stress plays out in our lives in observable, profound ways.

“Behavioral

“Farmstead

“Psychological

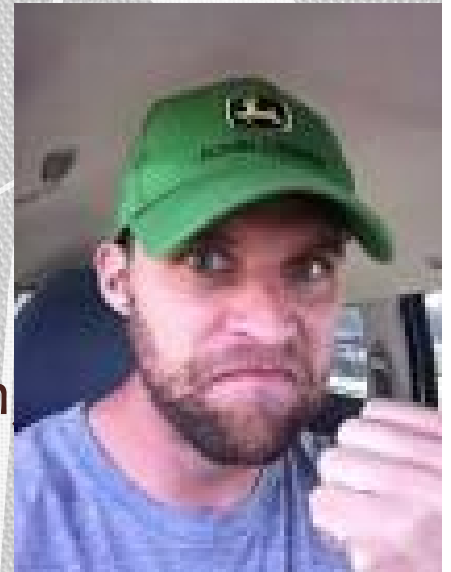
“Physical- chronic health issues

Tom Younkman, VCIL, talking with farmer While standing on tractor steps.



Behavioral: what may be noticed

- “ Can’t Concentrate- makes mistakes/ productivity down
- “ Big weight loss or gain
- “ Loss of energy, lethargic
- “ Can’t sleep
- “ Accident prone- drive thru barn door/ over person
- “ Angry, conflictual

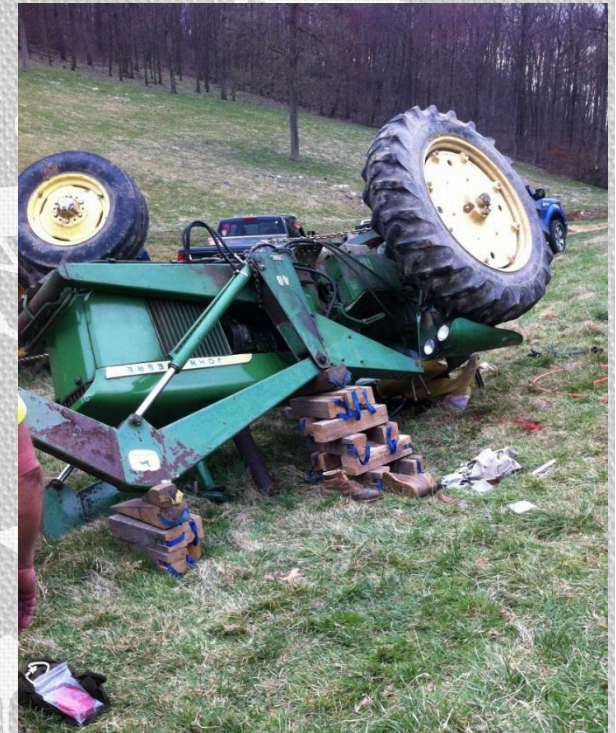


Farm First helps by working with farmer on recognizing the problem, accessing services such as mediation or counselors and working on self-care.



Signs of High Stress on the Farmstead

- “ Change in routines
- “ Increase in illness- people or livestock
- “ Appearance of farmstead declines
- “ Care of livestock declines
- “ Number of farm accidents increases
- “ Children show signs of stress



Psychological: what may be noticed

- " Appearance could be disheveled
- " Irritability
- " Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- " Negative thinking
- " Loss of pleasure in activities
- " People problems
- " Depression
- " Suicidal talk or ideation



No farmer should go it alone. Farm First can begin counseling on same day if urgent, or at the most within a week, and will case-manage the situation so that the farmer is connected to the needed resources.



Signs of Suicidal Thinking

- " Helplessness and hopelessness; bleak future
- " Neglected appearance
- " Withdrawal or isolation
- " Alcohol abuse
- " Asking for help
- " Anxiety or depression
- " Previous suicidal attempts
- " Suicidal plan
- " Giving things away
- " Talking or writing about killing oneself
- " Seeking things that could be used in a suicide attempt

Call Farm First to trouble-shoot if you are worried. Call 911 if in immediate crisis.



Physical: what may be noticed

“ Chronic stress contributes to serious health issues which may lead to disability or inability to perform one’s chosen occupation.

“ Diabetes

“ High Blood Pressure

“ Arthritis



“ Heart Disease

“ Asthma

“ Obesity

“ Gastrointestinal



Farm First connects farmer to Vocational Rehabilitation and VT Center for Independent Living for adaptable equipment and to health care for continued assistance so that farmer can continue farming.



Responding to a Farmer in Need



How Can I Respond Best?

- “With respect
- “With sincerity and honesty
- “By listening and hearing their pain and worry—not by pitying them
- “By caring



Source: Adapted from Bosch K., & Griffin, C. (2002, September 5). *Weathering tough times: Responding to farmers, ranchers and rural businesspersons* [Satellite Video Conference]



How to talk with a stressed farmer

CARP:

1. Connect
2. Acknowledge
3. Refocus
4. Problem-Solve



1. **Build a Connection** by listening with empathy and heart.

“ Put yourself in their shoes; feel what it’s like to be in their situation.

“ Show you care

“ Stand at a slant when listening/ be on their side

“ Listen reflectively

Connect, **Acknowledge**, Refocus, Problem-Solve

2. **Acknowledge** feelings.

- “Acknowledgement must happen before an upset person is ready to problem-solve. Ask if you are getting it right...”
- “Help the other person maintain his/her dignity
- “Escalation decreases when we feel understood.



Connect, Acknowledge, **Refocus**, Problem-Solve

3. **Refocus** on problem.

- “ Once he/she feels heard, you will notice a readiness to refocus and you will harness the moment to transition.
- “ Reassure him/her that the concerns are legitimate.
- “ Refrain from judging the behavior.
- “ Ask what he/she thinks is a workable solution.



Connect, Acknowledge, Refocus, **Problem-Solve**

4. **Problem-Solve.**

- " Getting and giving information
- " Suggesting possibilities / being on their side
- " Agreeing on a course of action
- " Offering choices..... and
- " Following through.



How to Respond to Suicidal **Red** Flags

- Speak up if you're worried. *Are having thoughts of suicide?*
- Take it seriously. Let them know they're not alone.
- Encourage person to call National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255 to talk to a professional

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Those at the highest risk for suicide in the near future have a specific suicide **PLAN**, the **MEANS** to carry out the plan, a **TIME SET** for doing it, and an **INTENTION** to do it.

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- If imminent risk, say *"I feel as if I need to call for help."*
- Call 911. They will connect you with a local crisis center or hospital. If safe, you can drive the person to hospital.
- Help farmer call Farm First for appointment if risk is not imminent
- Tell a family member or friend right away.
- Do not leave person alone. Do not try to handle it alone!



Connecting Vermont Farmers to Resources

**While you are sitting with the farmer,
make the Farm First connection or referral.**

1. Offer to call Farm First with the farmer: 877-493-6216 **OR**
2. Offer to have Farm First call the farmer.
 - “ Get their e-mail address, phone # and best time to call.
 - “ Call the Farm First # with farmer's contact info.
3. If referral is refused, give card to farmer; try to post on fridge...

Once you make the referral to Farm First, we will assess all issues and connect them to all resources needed.

Farm First is an on-ramp for services.

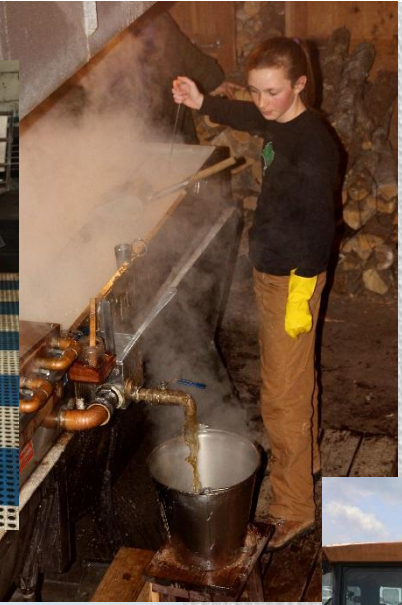


Other Resources Out There

- " Farm First for consultation & referral to the services below
- " Extension- for hard numbers/ number crunching
- " Lender- refinancing, restructuring debt, creating budget
- " Extension or VT Farm & Forest Viability- business planning
- " Tax Planner, Banker, Extension, Farm First- exit planning
- " VT Agricultural Mediation Program- agricultural dispute resolution
- " VT Agriculturally Knowledgeable Lawyers
- " VT Ctr for Independent Living (VCIL)- Advocacy and lobbying for people w. disabilities. Peer-to-Peer.
- " Farm First VT Vocational Rehabilitation- Services to help farmers w. disabilities continue employment
- " **CALL FARM FIRST FOR CONTACT INFO FOR ANY SERVICE!**



VT Farms in Action



Reminders

- “Remember to call Farm First at any time with your own questions or for help in assisting farmers. We are happy to help you.
- “Please invite Farm First to your meetings so that we can get the word out!

1-877-493-6216

