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Sustainable Agriculture Means Sustaining Farmers: Surveying the Field of Farm Stress Research and Outreach

**Dr. Courtney Cuthbertson (they/them)
University of Illinois**

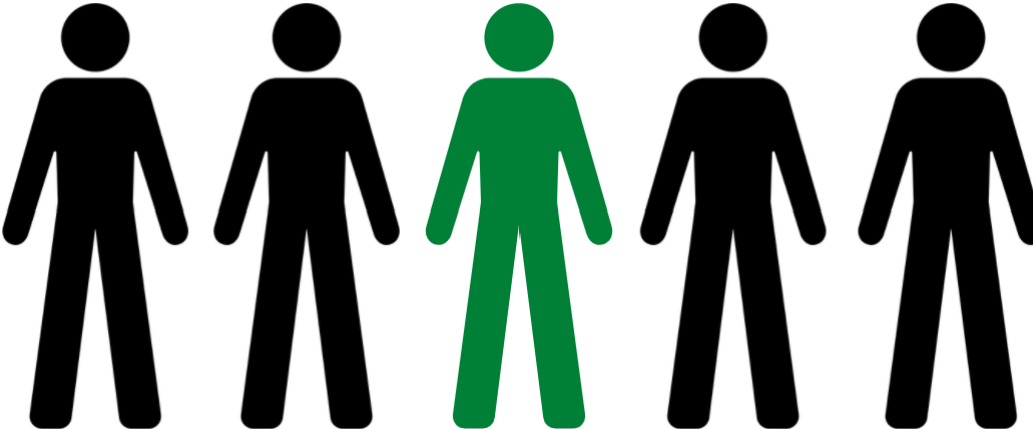
**USDA Agricultural Outlook Forum
February 25, 2022**



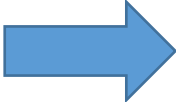
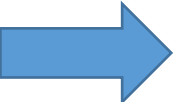

No farming without farmers.

No health without mental health.

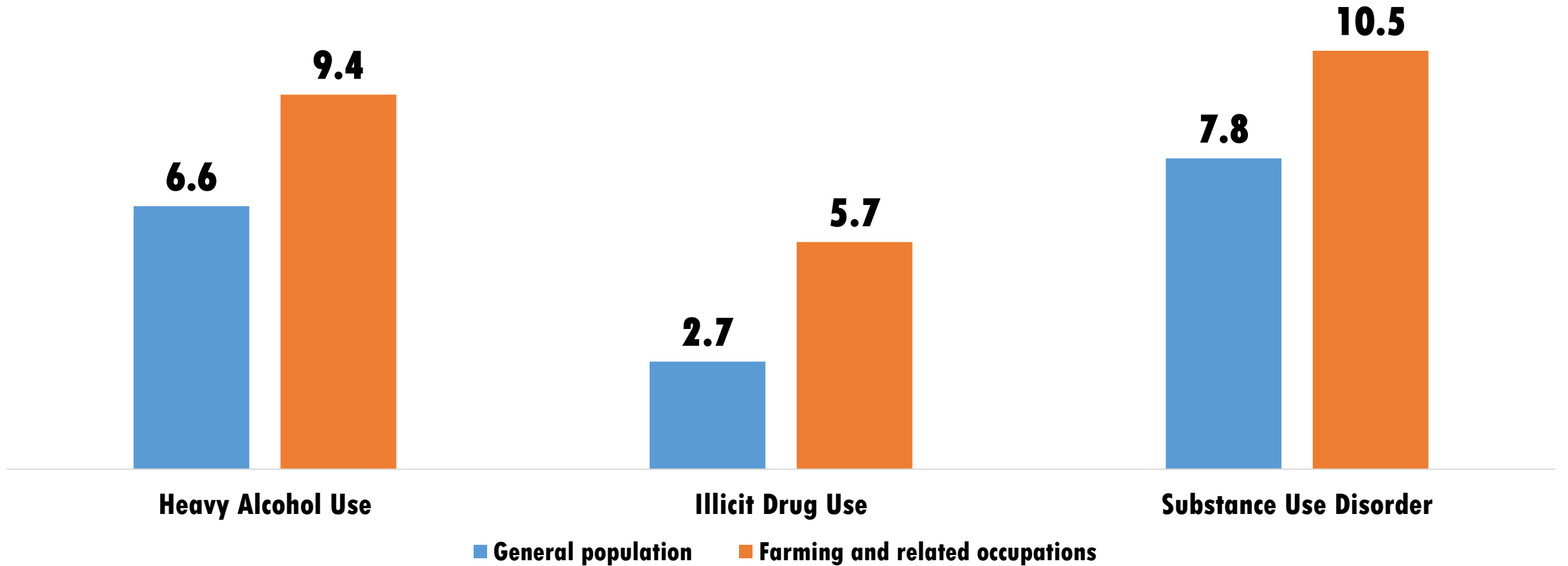




Mental health is worse among producers.

	General population	Agricultural community		
depression	7.3%	8.7-58%		7-8x higher
anxiety	15.6%	27-71%		4.5x higher
suicide rate – men (per 100k)	27.4 (all occupations)	36.1		1.3x higher

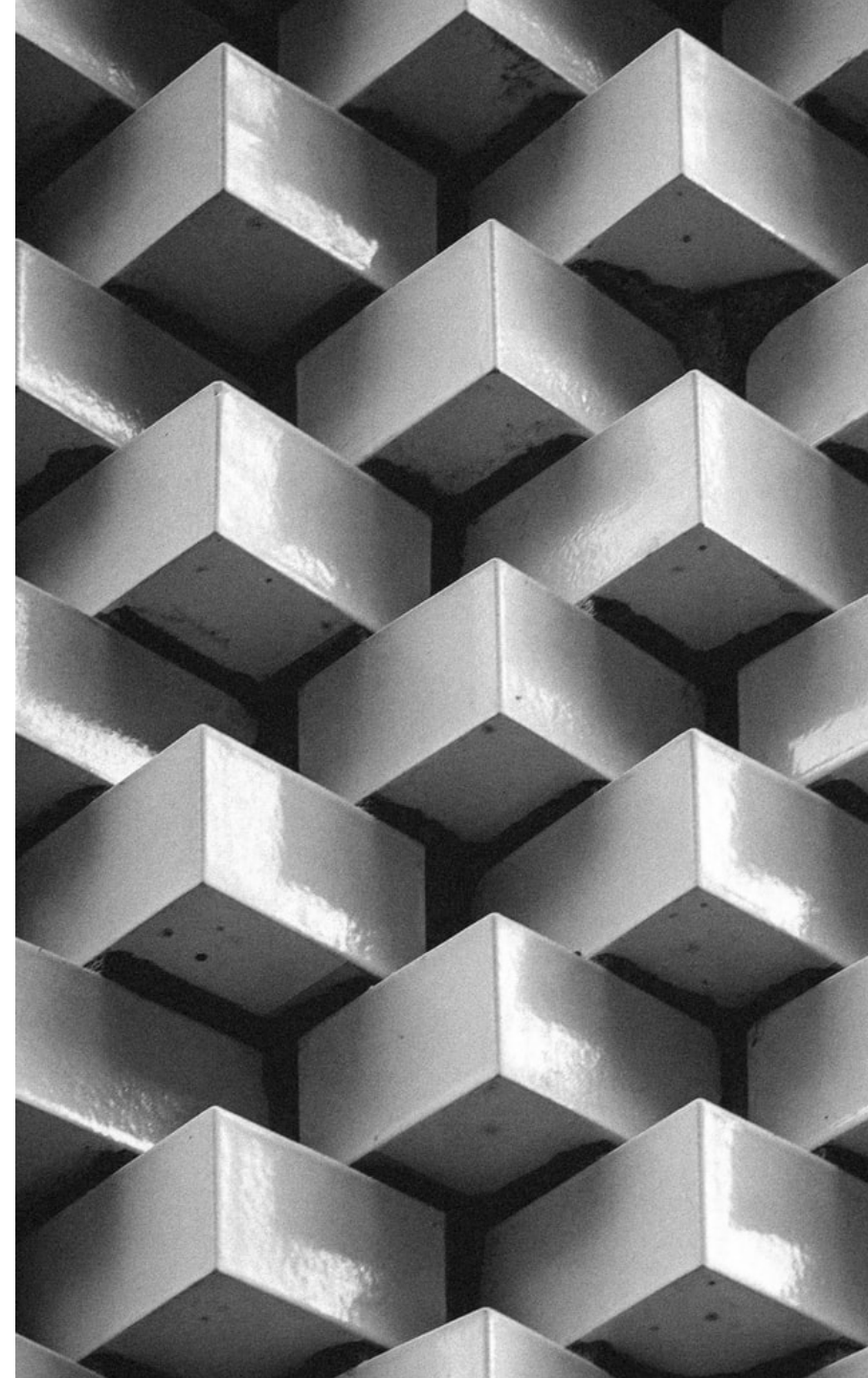
What about substance use?



What explains this?

- **Increased stress**
- **Poor physical health and experiencing injury**
- **Poor sleep quality**
- **Recent negative life events**
- **Financial concerns**

Note: Higher suicide risk and rates have not been explained by higher rates of mental health problems.



What stressors impact mental health for farmers?

- **Financial concerns**
- **Work environment**
- **Navigating potential problems**
- **Managing farm wellbeing/survival**
- **For migrant farmworkers: distance from family, working conditions, language barriers, fear of deportation, acculturation**

Impacts on agriculture

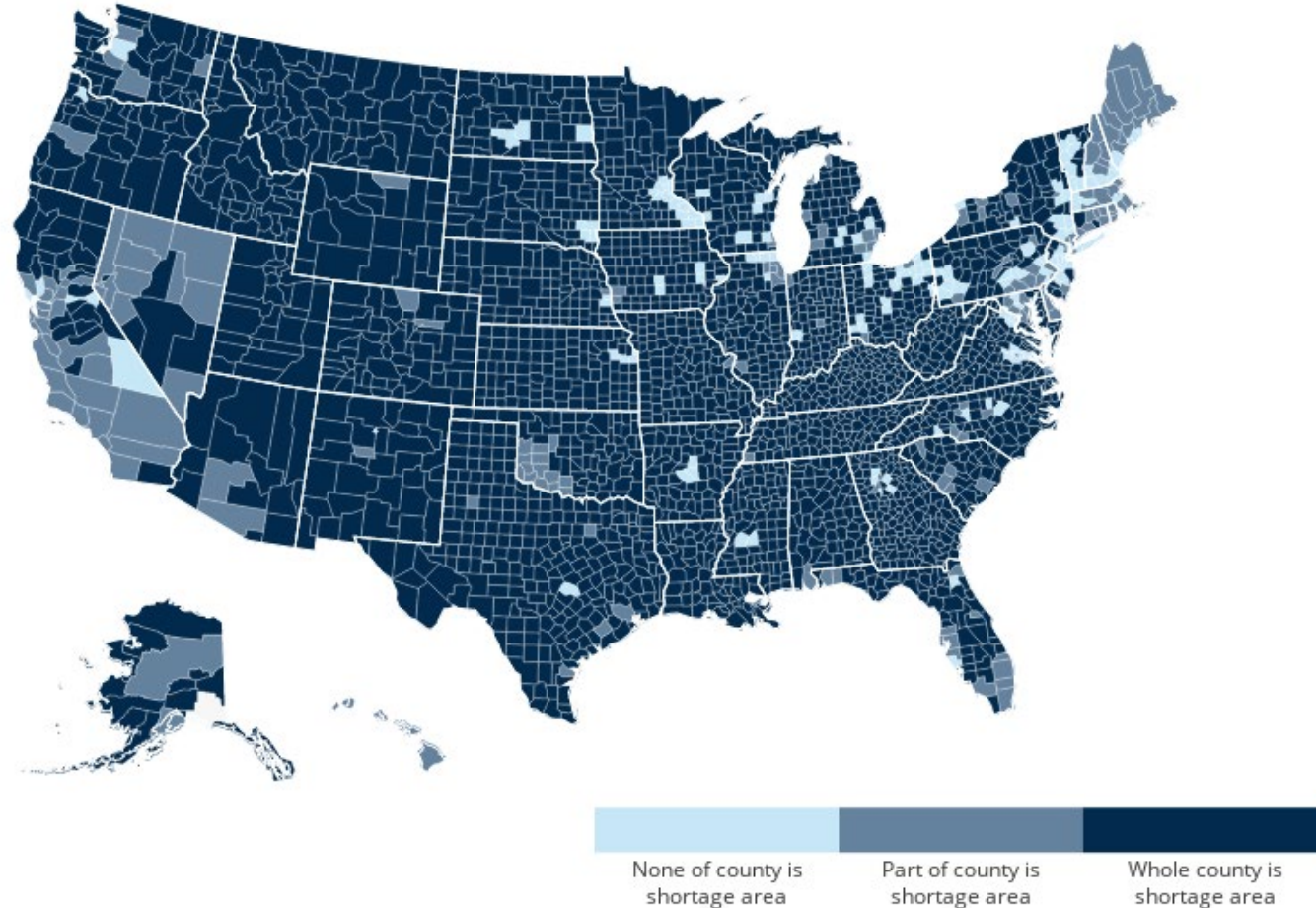
- **Higher risk of injury**
- **Impacts on farm efficiency**
- **Ripple effects on family**

(Stoneman and Jinnah 2015; Xiao et al. 2013; Hounsome 2006.)



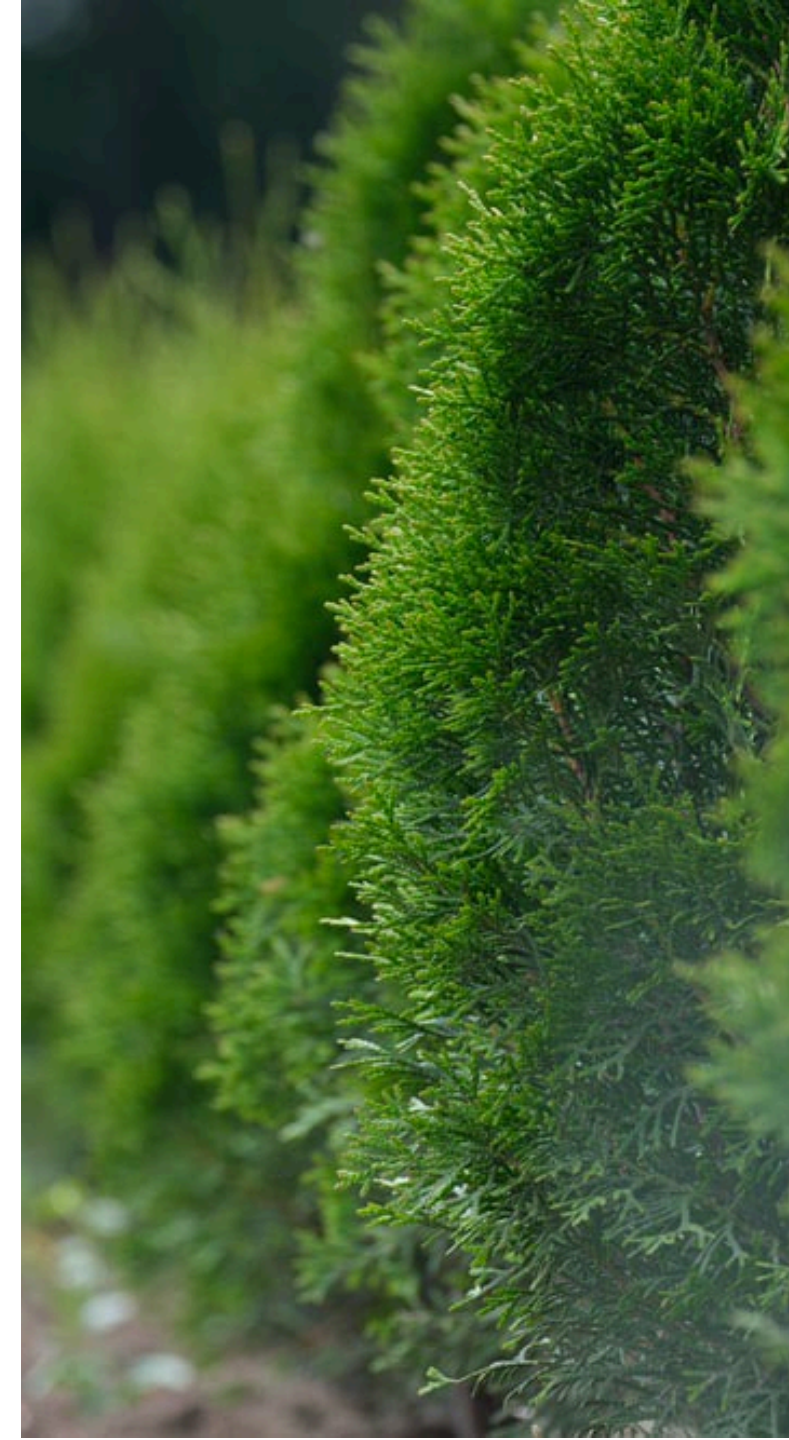
So producers should seek help, right?

Health Professional Shortage Areas: Mental Health, by County, 2022

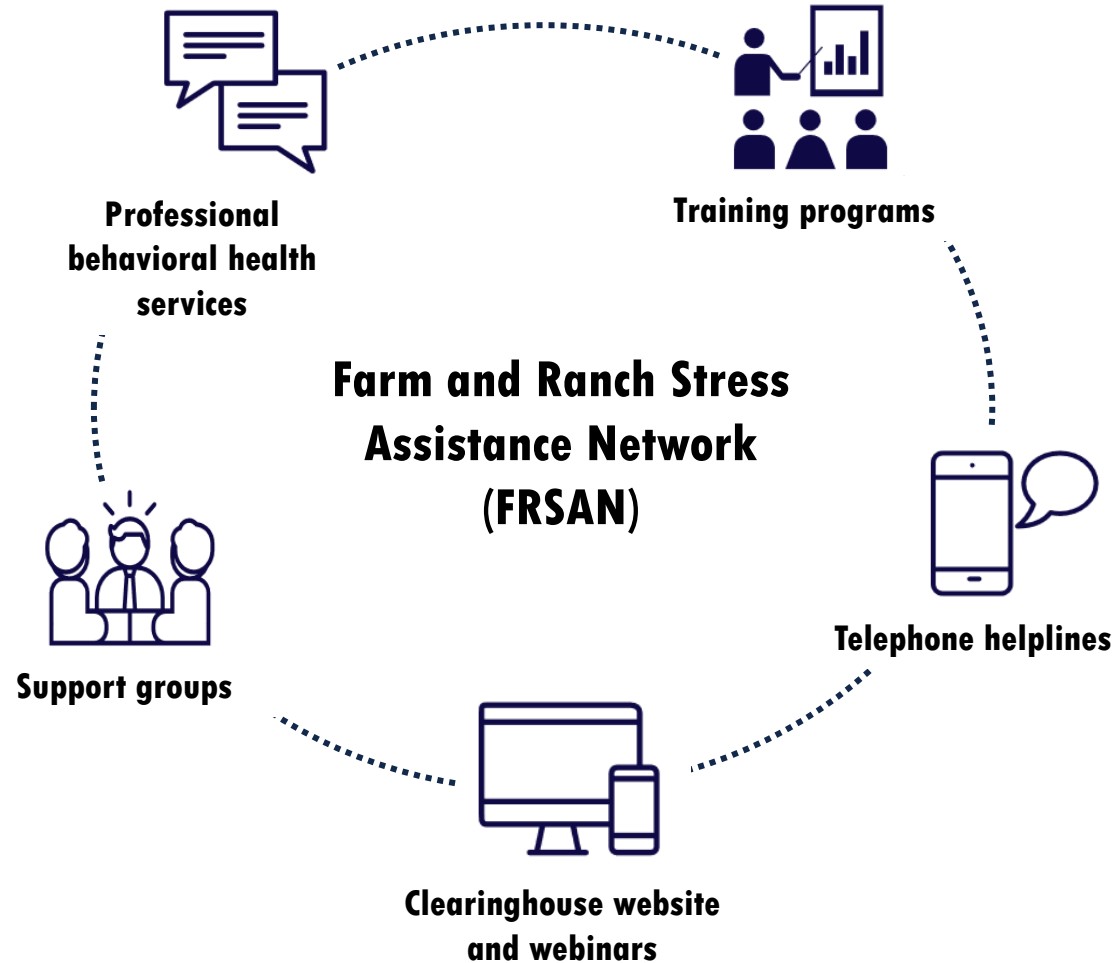


Stigma is another barrier to care.

- **Negative beliefs about mental health, illness, people**
- **Lead to isolation, negative self-perceptions**
- **Contributes to less help-seeking**
- **Values of stoicism, independence, aspects of masculinity decrease help-seeking in producers**



Outreach programs help producers.



**North Central
Farm and Ranch
Stress Assistance Center**

USDA-NIFA 2020-70028-32728

Example: Mental health literacy training

- **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)**
- **Question. Persuade. Refer. (QPR)**
- **Communicating with Farmers under Stress**
- **Weathering the Storm**



Remaining questions

- **What are effective ways to deal with stigma?**
- **How can we go upstream?**
- **How can we create resources inclusive of diversity in agriculture?**



What else should I know?

- **Everyone always has mental health.**
- **Asking for help is a sign of strength.**
- **You don't have to be in crisis to ask for help.**
- **There are people who care and want to help.**
- **Finding the right mental health provider can take time.**



What can I do?

- **Connect with and listen to producers.**
- **Start conversations about mental health in your community.**
- **Visit www.farmstress.org for a listing of useful resources.**
 - **Iowa Concern Hotline: 1-800-447-1985**
- **Contact Cooperative Extension in your state and ask about farm stress programs and resources.**
- **Learn more about mental health.**
- **Help host a training.**
- **Share resources with others.**
- **Advocate for more resources, programs, and funding to support producer mental health.**





Thank you.

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