

You are NOT Alone

The economic farming crisis is no accident: it's the result of policies created to pad the pockets of corporate farming while family farmers suffer. Since 2017, farming production expenses have increased 18.5% due to increasing costs of labor, feed, and fuel and interest costs. USDA estimates that more than half of farmers currently have negative farm income with South Dakota seeing the highest decade-levels of bankruptcy filings. Farm Aid states America is facing the extinction of the family farm resulting in the destruction of the social and economic vitality of rural communities.

As a result of the farming crisis, farmers are experiencing high level of stress which has led to an outbreak of suicide and depression. While managing the farm is important, managing farming stress is just as important. Farming in rural South Dakota is isolating and farmers (especially males) rarely talk about what is brother them as they have a sense of duty to their family and farm legacy.

An overwhelming majority (91%) of rural farmers say financial issues and fear of losing their farms impact farmers' mental health well-being according to 2019 American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBR) Rural Stress Survey. Anxiety, depression, and overall mental health is often confused with mental illnesses. Two out of three (66%) of farmers said it's important to reduce the stigma of mental health in farming communities.

According to the AFBR study, 55% of rural farmers said there were confident in recognizing the warning signs of a mental health conditions in a family member or friend. Some early warning signs of a problem: eating or sleeping too much or too little, feeling helpless or hopeless, feeling like nothing matters, unable to accept help from others, and/or loss of interest or pleasure in doing things. More dangerous signs include any of the following: decline in personal appearance, deterioration in the appearance the farm/ranch, livestock, and pastures overstocked, dramatic statements of wanting to harm others, talking about wanting to die or kill themselves.

Blair Sedlacek a social worker and therapist in Gregory County knows this all too well. Her and her family back to help run the family farm. She states "farming and ranching is a fulfilling way of life. When you're unable to do the work you love due to situations out of your control, you can feel alone and backed into a corner." She reminds fellow farmers and ranchers that talking does help and they are not alone.

You can help by expressing your concerns and support, offer to help them with chores or tasks, ask questions, listen, and be responsive, remind them help is available, and provide resources. At the end of the day, everyone just wants to be heard and validated. It is crucial that South Dakotans advocate for family farms so they can make a living to support their families and communities.

Visit Spink County Coalition & Spink Area Support Network at <http://www.spinkcountycoalition.com/> for additional information, local resources, and how you can help support our rural farmers and communities.

Local Resources

- Avera Farm: Farmers, ranchers and people who live in rural communities
 - You can 1-800-691-4336 24 hours a day.
 - The call is free and confidential. The hotline is staffed by trained assessment counselors who put callers in touch with local mental health resources.
- 3 Wise Women Counseling: (605)450-6031, Redfield
- Billie Jo McCool, MS, LPC, QMHP, Northeast Mental Health, Aberdeen, (605)229-1000
- Community Mental Health Centers in South Dakota
 - Individuals who meet programmatic and financial eligibility guidelines or who have considerable personal circumstances, may qualify for state funded services.
 - Northeastern Mental Health Center (Spink, Faulk, Brown, Edmunds)
Aberdeen: 605.225.1010
 - Community Counseling Services (Hand, Beadle, Kingsberry)
Huron: 605.352.8596
- NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness
 - NAMI South Dakota
 - <https://namisouthdakota.org/>
 - NAMI Aberdeen
 - Amy Sanderson at NE Mental Health @ 605-225-1010
- Helpline Center South Dakota
 - South Dakota's leader in suicide prevention and response. If you or someone you know is having suicidal thoughts please call 1-800-273-8255 anytime, day or night. All South Dakotans have access to the crisis line all day, every day. The service is free and confidential.
 - Call 211 or Text your zip code to 898211
 - You are not alone. Every day people turn to 211 for information and support – whether financial, family, health, or disaster-related. The call or text is free and confidential.
 - Students from high schools across South Dakota can text to talk with caring staff. Help is available 24/7.
 - Text4Hope serves all high schools in South Dakota. Teens can text icare to 898211 to talk with a caring staff from the Helpline Center. Help is available 24/7.
- Veteran Services
 - Veterans Crisis Line
 - <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/> or call 1-800-273-8255
 - Veterans & Substance Abuse
 - <https://www.drugrehab.org/veterans-and-substance-abuse/>