

Supporting Farmers' Mental Health: Understanding Farm Culture and Farm Family Dynamics

Farming ranks among the top three occupations for suicide and, according to the National Farm Medicine Center, 29% of farmers suffer from depression and 35% suffer from anxiety. Of the more than 2,100 calls to the Wisconsin Farm Center in 2019, staff reported that 39% of these calls involved farmers and/or farm family members that were experiencing some level of distress. These statistics have been and continue to increase due to the current farm economy and stressors experienced on the farm.

With farmers facing increasing amounts of stress, they need mental health services more than ever from providers that understand the unique stressors they face and agriculture industry. From the impact of uncontrollable farm stressors (weather, markets, prices, and more) to best practices when serving farmers, this training contains a collection of presentations from agricultural field experts that offer cultural insight for serving farmers as a provider.

This online course has been made available to behavioral health providers through grant funding from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, and was created via a collaboration between the Behavioral Health Training Partnership at the University of Wisconsin – Green Bay and the Wisconsin Farm Center. By participating in this dynamic, self-paced course, the learner will be asked to test their knowledge through a series of quizzes, ultimately earning 6.0 continuing education hours, and satisfying the following learning objectives.

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the culture of farming and farm family dynamics.
2. Understand the financial structure of a farm and the stress that produces.
3. Learn the best approaches to supporting farmers and their families with mental health, substance use, and crisis challenges.
4. Identify available resources to support farmers and their families.

Module 1: The Culture of Farming (34:01)

Instructor: Monica Kramer McConkey



Monica Kramer McConkey has 25 years of experience in the behavioral health field as a counselor, program supervisor and administrator. Her focus throughout her career has been to increase access to, and remove the stigma often attached to mental health services. Monica grew up on a farm in northwestern Minnesota and has intimate understanding of the dynamics leading to farm stress and its impact on farm families. She currently works as one of two Rural Mental Health Specialists in Minnesota providing support to farmers and their families through a contract with the MN Ag Centers of Excellence and Farm Business Management. Monica also travels throughout the country speaking on the impact of Emotional Stress on the Farm through her consulting business Eyes on the Horizon Consulting, LLC.

Module 2: Farm Family Dynamics (53:26)

Instructor: Elaine Froese



Elaine Froese (pronounced phrase) is a professional speaker, writer, and coach who specializes in helping farm families work through issues surrounding succession, business or that family favorite – communication.

Elaine is known as "Canada's Farm Whisperer," and she's been a columnist in *Grainews* for 20 years. Elaine is a member of the Canadian Association of Farm Advisors and the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers with the CSP, certified speaking professional designation. Many folks tell Elaine that they "wish they had met her ten years ago."

Module 3: Farm Financial Structure and Stress (47:01)

Instructor: Kevin Bernhardt, Ph.D.



Dr. Kevin Bernhardt is a Farm Management Specialist for the Center for Dairy Profitability and UW-Extension and a Professor of Agribusiness at UW-Platteville School of Agriculture. Dr. Bernhardt is a recipient of the Underkofler Excellence in Teaching award, UW-Extension second mile award, National Extension Award of Excellence, Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi Excellence in Teaching Award, National Society of Leadership and Success Excellence in Service to Students and an Honorary State FFA honoree.

An Iowa native, Kevin received his B.S. degree from Iowa State University, M.S. from North Carolina State University, and his Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics from the University of Nebraska. He joined the UW-Platteville faculty in August 1996 after work experiences with the USDA-Foreign Agriculture Service, Senator Chuck Grassley's Senate office, and as a lender for Hills Bank and Trust Company in Iowa City.

Kevin is actively involved in several community and state organizations including Dairy Task Force 2.0, use value assessment committee, Platteville High School Scholarship Board of Directors, parish council, UW-Platteville Faculty Senate and other School of Agriculture and University committees. Kevin, wife Daneen, and four children reside in Platteville, WI

Module 4: Best Practices when Working With Farmers (19:44)

Instructor: Kelly North



Kelly received her Bachelor of Social Worker degree from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater in 2002 and her Masters in School Work from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2006. During her tenure in the field, she has worked extensively with children, families, as well as adults in various areas of direct practice. She provided Emergency Mental Health Services to consumer for 5 years, during this time she completed suicide assessments and assisted consumers during times of crisis. She currently works as child and adolescent psychotherapist at Jefferson County Human Service Department outpatient mental health clinic. She is also a trained TF-CBT and Functional Family Therapy who is passionate about trauma informed care for consumers and helping systems become trauma informed. Kelly has trained on trauma throughout the state of Wisconsin. Aside from her practice she also is an Adjunct Professor in the Social Work Department University of Wisconsin Whitewater.

Module 5: Supporting Farm Children (22:32)
by Monica McConkey (see biography above)

Module 6: Farmers and Substance Abuse (32:34)
Instructor: Jessica Beauchamp



Jessica Beauchamp has 10+ years of experience in the human services field. She earned her graduate degree from Michigan State University. Areas of knowledge includes case management, administration, management, counseling, and program development. Jes worked for county agencies for many years and in 2016 opened her own private mental health practice in Marinette, WI. At the county agencies she provided crisis intervention services and worked closely with the court system and Chapters 51 and 55. She also managed Comprehensive Community Support (CCS), Community Support Teams (CST), and Children’s Long Term Services (CLTS) programs.

In private practice Jes specializes in farmer mental health, substance abuse/addiction, sex offender treatment, couples counseling, and mood disorders. Jes offers unique services in that a majority of the treatment takes place in the community, nature, or the client home. She also contracts and consults with local practitioners and several agencies around the state of Wisconsin. Jes has presented to a variety of audiences on topics including: assessing and managing suicide risk, crisis planning, Wisconsin State codes, AODA, and documentation/note writing.

Module 7: Serving Farmers From a Crisis Perspective (39:53)
Instructor: Kelly North (see biography above)

Module 8: Farmer Resources to Help Reduce Stress (14:22)
Instructor: Tracy Brandel



In her role at the Wisconsin Department of Ag, Trade, and Consumer Protection, Tracy Brandel serves as a Senior Ag Program Specialist, providing financial viability, mental health services support, and farm transition services. Prior to working for the state, Tracy assisted agricultural clients during her time at Compeer Financial and Jefferson County Farm Service Agency. Outside of her DATCP duties, Tracy is active on her family’s dairy farm, and enjoys volunteering her time with youth organizations.

Module Total: 4:23:33, plus an additional 96 minutes (12 minutes per module) for review, quizzes, and to complete the course evaluation.

Course Total: 6.0 Continuing Education Hours