Mental Health in Canadian Dairy Farmers

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Some of the Stresses our Dairy Farmers Face

- Threats to supply management
- Public scrutiny / animal activism
- Animal disease & outbreaks
  - BSE / TB
- Financial burdens
- Workload
- Social isolation
- Family run businesses
- Succession planning
What’s the Issue with Mental Health in Ag?

• High occupational stresses

• Limited access to resources

• Unique culture
  • Pride and stigma

• Stress and psychological distress

• High rates of suicide
Canadian Survey of Farmer Mental Health*

- September 2015 – February 2016
- >1100 farmers, all commodities, across Canada (36% dairy cattle)

- High Stress
- High Anxiety
- High Burnout
- Low Resilience

So, as has been observed in other parts of the world:

**Our farmers experience higher levels of mental stress and distress than other occupations**

*Jones-Bitton et al., University of Guelph*
So, we have a problem.

• The research out of the U of Guelph clearly indicates many farmers are struggling in terms of their mental health,

• High occupational stresses, most beyond their control

• And, they have low resilience,

• Which makes them more susceptible to the effects of chronic stress:
  • Physical illness, poor quality of life, depression, anxiety, suicide…
So what have we been doing?
1. Scoping Review & Environmental Scan

Agriculture-specific:

• Mental health research

• Mental health supports and services

• Anticipated release: Dec. 2018

Briana Hagen, PhD Candidate (Jones-Bitton Lab, University of Guelph)
2. Lived Experience

- Producers (incl. dairy), veterinarians, industry, government

- Their lived experience of mental health – during times of calm, and times of crisis

- Help-seeking

- Ideas for (good) mental health programming

- 75 interviews
3. Mental Health Literacy for Agriculture:
In the Know

• Issues with low mental health literacy in agriculture
• With stakeholders, we developed an agriculture-specific mental health literacy program
• 4-hour version being piloted & evaluated
• OABP in May 2019
• Expect release in early summer 2019
4. Advocating & Lobbying
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Extra Slides
Stress ≠ a Badge of Honour
What might be the fallout?

• We don’t know much about the specific impacts of poor mental health in farming...
  
  ... So the Jones-Bitton group @ the U of Guelph is currently formally investigating this

• Based on the research in other occupations, we can expect negative impacts on:
  • Farmers
  • Their families
  • Their animals
  • Production & profit
  • Retention in farming