

Stress Assistance for Agricultural Workers

Reducing stigma around mental health in AgFF communities through social media messaging

Shelbie Lambert, MPH, Amanda Wickman, MBA, Vanessa Casanova, PhD | Southwest Center for Agricultural Health, Injury Prevention, and Education | The University of Texas Health Science Center at Tyler

Significance

Agricultural workers experience challenges brought on by weather, finances, and most recently, a pandemic. According to the CDC, **agriculture, forestry, and fishing (AgFF) industries experience higher suicide rates than the general public.**¹ There has been progress in providing agricultural and rural communities with stress management services yet, **stigma remains a roadblock for this persistent issue.** In a 2020 Rural Stress Poll by Farm Bureau, cost, embarrassment, and stigma were considered obstacles to seeking assistance for a mental health condition. The poll also reported that of farmers/farmworkers surveyed, **87% say mental health is an important issue to them and/or their family.**²

Purpose

The Southwest Center for Agricultural Health, Injury Prevention, and Education (SW Ag Center) is working alongside the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) to address mental health stigma and provide training/resources to the AgFF community. As reported by the Farm Bureau 2020 Poll **"farmers/farmworkers are not confident that they would be able to spot the warning signs of [stress or] a mental health condition."**² The SW Ag Center designed a social media campaign, *Seasons Change | You Remain*SM, to shed light on mental health and educate the AgFF community on the signs and symptoms of stress.

Methods

TDA representatives and AgriSafe leaders were engaged to create a project plan. Social media messages were drafted to address seasonal stressors, mental health, and suicide prevention. TX Farm Bureau leaders and local community members served as champions to recruit producers for dinner meetings. Two dinner meetings were convened where farmers and ranchers were introduced to social media messaging drafts. They provided candid feedback on the messages, stress and mental health resources, and discussed where they currently seek information on these topics. This feedback was also considered during the development of a 30-minute training that can be delivered online or in-person. This training is available to TDA, Farm Bureau, and Extension agents and the producers they serve.

Findings

Dinner meeting participants reported that they did not access stress assistance over the last year but agreed it would be useful. Additionally, 100% (n=30) of the attendees agreed the meeting was helpful and that they would recommend it to others. Participants offered specific recommendations for message refinement and information dissemination outlets, agreeing that **social media campaigns can be used to provide messaging in a more confidential setting. Relaying stigmatized information, like mental health, through this platform, may be an effective route of communication for the AgFF community.**

Transfer/Translation

Final campaign messaging is currently shared through social media platforms and posted to the SW Ag Center website. Campaign resources can be used independently or in conjunction with other mental health interventions to reduce stigma and increase knowledge. The social media campaign and training information can be accessed by scanning the QR code below.

Scan here to
access resources.




The most
important asset
on your farm
or ranch is
You.



You are
worth more
here.



Resources

1. https://www.fb.org/files/Impacts_of_COVID-19_on_Rural_Mental_Health_1.6.21.pdf
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/pdfs/mm6903a1-H.pdf>

Acknowledgments

Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Farm Bureau, Texas AgriLife Extension, The Dineen Family & The Reed Family