

Suicide Prevention and the Agricultural Community

Farming is stressful. It is even more stressful now due to ongoing financial stress, uncertain grain prices, pandemic social isolation, and derecho storm damage. There have been predictions that suicide deaths may spike due to the pandemic. Unfortunately, suicide already occurs at much higher rates in rural areas of the country. Therefore, we may be experiencing a perfect storm of risk factors for suicide in the rural parts of Iowa.

To address this need, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach offered two distinct programs focusing on suicide prevention through the past year - *Question.Persuade.Refer. (QPR)* and *Stress on the Farm: Strategies to Help Each Other*.

Question.Persuade.Refer. (QPR)

- One-hour, nationally recognized, evidence-based program on suicide prevention
- Offered virtually from April 2020 to present
- Includes information on suicide clues or risk factors and a 3-step process to engage those who are at risk
- Funded by USDA/NIFA
- To register go to: www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/QPR

Stress on the Farm: Strategies to Help Each Other

- Forty-minute program on suicide prevention
- Includes information on the warning signs of suicide, and risk and protective factors
- Scenario-based
- Funded by Great Plains Center for Agriculture Safety and Health
- For more information go to: <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/farm-ranch-wellbeing>

Here are some **risk factors** that are often linked with someone being suicidal.

- Men are more likely to kill themselves than women. Older adults and adolescents are also more at risk for suicide.
- People who are depressed are more prone to suicide. Individuals with great worry or anxiety are also at higher risk to die by suicide, but to a lesser extent.
- Persons using alcohol and drugs can have impaired judgment and are more likely to make impulsive decisions. Heavy alcohol users are 5 times more likely to die by suicide. Alcohol has been found in the blood of 29 percent of Americans who died by suicide.
- Reluctance to seek help and having a hard time finding help are risk factors.
- Losses, such as relationship break-ups, deaths, money losses, or farm losses, put producers at higher risk.
- Many physical illnesses are linked with an increased risk for suicide. These include back pain, sleep disorders, heart disease, stroke, brain injury, chronic lung disease, and others.
- The two factors believed to pose the highest risk are having an organized plan and making a previous suicide attempt.

Individuals often express **warning signs** before attempting suicide.

- One warning sign could be a person's comments, messages, profile, or something posted on social media about suicide or death.
- The person may voice getting even with another family member or a banker.
- You might notice a person drinking a lot more and talking about other drug use.
- The individual may report feeling that he or she has no other options.
- There could be a sudden change in mood, including a positive change, "I'm feeling so much better." This might not be a good sign if the person has resolved to take their life and now has a sense of peace.

One way to intervene with an individual who is in distress or a risk for suicide is by using the **CORN** suicide prevention model:

Choose to engage.

Offer support, listen, and respectfully ask, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"

Refer person to helplines, lifelines or local resources.

Never leave the person alone or without a plan, and never leave the person without **hope**.

Resources

- **Iowa Concern** at www.extension.iastate.edu/iowaconcern or **1-800-447-1985**, offers 24/7 free assistance and referral for stress counseling, legal education, and financial concerns. The program began in 1985 as a toll-free number serving the agricultural community. Today, the Iowa Concern hotline serves urban as well as rural Iowa.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at suicidepreventionlifeline.org or **1-800-273-8255 (TALK)**, provides 24/7 free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.
 - Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 and press 1
 - Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- **Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health** at <https://icash.public-health.uiowa.edu/> works to improve the health and safety of the agricultural population by developing statewide prevention and educational initiatives.
- **Farm and Ranch Wellbeing**. Eight north central states collaborated to offer a clearinghouse of resources for the farm and ranch community. The current site can be accessed online at <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/farm-ranch-wellbeing>. This site offers information on programs, hotlines, websites, publications and more that can benefit farmers and ranchers in these challenging times. This site also can be used to access the farm stress related websites for each university extension service in the North Central Region.
- **COVID Recovery Iowa** offers a variety of services to anyone affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. Virtual counselors provide counseling, activities and referral information, and help find resources for any Iowan seeking personal support. Iowans of all ages may join groups online for activities and learn creative strategies for coping with the effects of the pandemic. COVID Recovery Iowa will announce upcoming programs on the website and via all social media to help Iowans build coping skills, resilience and emotional support. To request support, go to <https://www.COVIDrecoveryiowa.org>.