

# impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

## Farm stress management skills for Idaho agriculture producers

### AT A GLANCE

Being a farmer is a stressful occupation, and producers need to recognize the signs and impact of unhealthy stress and learn positive ways to manage these challenges.

### The Situation

Nationwide there has been an uptick in agriculture related stress among farmers due to a myriad of factors, and within certain commodity groups an increase in the percentage of suicide. According to the Idaho Suicide Prevention Research Project, farmers are at an increased risk of suicide. While Idaho agriculture producers have faced and overcome challenges in the past, there is a growing trend at a national level of farmers not having the resources and coping skills to manage the stresses of farming. Some examples of the challenge's agriculture producers face include weather issues, large debt loads, burdensome government regulations, crop harvesting, disease problems, equipment breakdowns, labor challenges, low crop prices and family disagreements regarding operation management. Additionally, for the year 2020, major disruptions in the food supply chain occurred due to the Covid-19 pandemic, creating challenges that had a ripple effect throughout the entire agriculture industry.

### Our Response

University of Idaho Extension began approaching and working to address the mental health challenges faced by Idaho producers by training and certifying two Extension educators in Farm Stress Management and



Stress is an inherent part of the agriculture industry. Positive coping strategies are critical for maintaining mental health.

Mental Health First Aid. This training program prepared University of Idaho Extension to reach agriculture producers with credible and research-based information they could use in understanding the root causes of farm stress and provide ways to better manage these sources of stress through healthy coping strategies. This training is interactive with the audience and allows them the opportunity to discuss challenges they are facing and how they are currently handling these sources of stress. Additionally, this program addresses some of the signs and signals of people who are at risk of suicide, how those around them can help, and what resources are available to assist in preventing death by suicide. To share this information with the agriculture community, University of Idaho Extension began offering farm stress trainings in

conjunction with other existing Extension programs. At the annual University of Idaho Potato Conference held in Pocatello, 120 people attended the first farm stress management class. Class attendees learned and discussed sources of stress that come from production agriculture, healthy ways to cope with these stresses, and ways to help others who are not handling stress in healthy ways and are exhibiting behaviors indicative of a risk of suicide.

The farm stress management presentation was given at the Eastern Idaho Cereal Schools which are held every February in five locations. Presenters and audience members discussed sources of stress that grain producers face, how these stresses manifest themselves in a person and in the day to day management of a farm, as well as warning signs of the risk of suicide.

## Program Outcomes

In total, over 300 people attended the trainings offered in 2019 at the various locations. After each training, participants were asked to indicate their level of understanding before and after attending the presentation. Participants indicated that before the training they had a 2.57 level of understanding (on a scale of one to five) about farm stress management. They indicated that after the training they had an understanding level of 4.16.

On the evaluation, participants shared feedback on the practices they were going to change based on what they learned in the training. They included practices of using better stress management, working on stress tactics, managing stress better, watching and understanding stress better in their employees and themselves, picking three helpful words to use to reduce stress levels, changing the way they think about sources of stress, breathing to handle stress, being aware and watching for signs of stress, and how to approach and help those who are spiraling down into depression due to stress.

## The Future

University of Idaho Extension is now offering farm stress management classes and seminars at UI Extension events as well as through classes taught to private businesses. Future work includes offering these trainings in cooperation with the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation across the state.

Additionally, University of Idaho Extension has trained 16 Extension educators who received certification to be Mental Health First Aid Trainers. They are now able to offer the eight-hour Mental Health First Aid training across the state of Idaho and to certify attendees.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Lance T. Ellis**, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Fremont County • 208-624-3102 • [ellis@uidaho.edu](mailto:ellis@uidaho.edu)

**Lance Hansen**, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Madison County • 208-356-3191 • [lancehansen@uidaho.edu](mailto:lancehansen@uidaho.edu)

**Jonathan Hogge**, Extension Educator • University of Idaho Extension, Madison County • 208-356-3191 • [jhogge@uidaho.edu](mailto:jhogge@uidaho.edu)

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