

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exploring the Connection between Mental Health and Farm Business Management

New report reveals 88% of farmers say following a written business plan has contributed to their peace of mind.

Tuesday, May 19, 2020 – Ottawa, ON Over the past year, Farm Management Canada has been working with Wilton Consulting Group on ground-breaking research that seeks to explore the connection between Mental Health and Farm Business Management. The findings from this research reveal a positive correlation between mental health and farm business management and inform recommendations to support farm business management activities that positively influence farmer mental health as well as mental health supports that positively influence farm business management activities.

Stress is the personal, emotional response to external factors, or stressors. When stressed, farmers reported several changes in behaviour to try and cope with stress. Most farmers reported undesirable coping mechanisms that may contribute to poor mental health including working more hours and losing sleep, attending social or family gatherings less, and feeling less in control of their emotions. However, some farmers reported more frequent management behaviours like focusing more on financial numbers and assessing or planning for alternative outcomes when stressed.

Employing business management practices can help farmers get through tough times such as market crashes or crop failures. Among farmers who use written business plans, 88% claim that it has contributed to peace of mind. Outcomes of the project reaffirm findings of other recent research and add new insights into the ways that farm business management can be supported in ways that contribute to farmer mental health.

There is an opportunity to enhance education around the benefits of business planning with a focus on mitigating risk. Further, building support teams to help provide advice can alleviate some of the burdens of decision-making. When difficulties arise, it helps to know that a team of peers, family members and/or advisors has thought through different challenges and weighed in on a course of action. Further education and re-positioning the concept of the farm business plan and farm business team can help farmers see business management and planning as both a way to prepare for uncertain times and a source of guidance when facing difficult circumstances.

The report concludes with four themes that capture how Farm Management Canada and the agricultural industry at large can better support farmer mental health in Canada:

1. Continue raising awareness around stresses and the impact of mental health for farmers
2. Support mental health literacy for farmers and those supporting farmers
3. Deliver business management advice, tools and training that focuses on risk management and preparedness as a means of facing uncertainty.
4. Advocate for farmer-specific mental health support services.

24 distinct recommendations are explained further within the Full Report. These research findings are critical for informing government policy, resource allocation, and business management and mental health service providers in supporting healthy farmers and healthy farm businesses for a prosperous and sustainable agricultural sector.

Research Methodology

The project commenced in spring 2019 with an environmental scan that included a literature review and scoping of existing programs and resources that support farmer mental health. An Advisory Committee made up of diverse agricultural and mental health industry professionals was formed to guide the direction of the research. This report is based on a comprehensive, national study that includes a survey of 1,735 farmers, 14 focus groups and 72 one-on-one interviews with farmers and industry representatives. The survey made use of Farm Credit Canada's (FCC) Vision Panel through a unique partnership between the research team, Farm Management Canada, and FCC. Primary research took place between October 2019 and March 2020.

To read the Full Report, visit our website at <http://www.fmc-gac.com/healthymindshealthyfarms>.

Quotes:

“Our research has found that farm business management practices offer a significant opportunity for managing the stresses of farming in a way that contributes to positive mental health. While management practices cannot eliminate stress entirely, they can play a significant role in reducing stress and promoting positive coping mechanisms. Our research supports a need to improve the support and promotion of farm business management practices on Canada’s farms.” - Heather Watson, Executive Director of Farm Management Canada

“Agriculture is more than just a business – it’s human experience filled with passion, dedication and a sense of satisfaction. However, there are also times when the pressure and anxiety of running a farm operation or agriculture-related business can be isolating and overwhelming. We are here to support one another through difficult times – that’s the rural way of life. Together, we can advance our understanding of mental health challenges in the agriculture and agri-food industry, so that no one has to struggle on their own.” - Marty Seymour, Director of Industry Relations, Farm Credit Canada

About Farm Management Canada

A national umbrella for Canadian farm business management activity, Farm Management Canada is the only organization devoted exclusively to the development and delivery of advanced business management information, tools and resources to position Canada’s farmers for success. Our programs and activities are made possible through support from generous sponsors and supporters including Government, private industry, the non-profit sector and academia.

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Farm Management Canada would like to thank the project partners:



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