LET'S TALK MENTAL HEALTH:  
A DISCUSSION WITH  
OREGON’S AGRICULTURAL STAKEHOLDERS  
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Prepared by Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources  
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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

We wanted to create a baseline of data specific to Oregon’s agricultural communities and their comfortability regarding talking about mental health.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Our project aimed to assess how different stakeholders in Oregon’s agricultural communities felt about discussing mental health and their perceptions of the resources available to them.

In August 2023, we conducted four focus groups and distributed a survey to gain feedback from stakeholder groups to see how comfortable they would be discussing mental health resources.

WHO PARTICIPATED

- Agribusiness Professionals
  - Ag Financial/Lending Employees
  - Crop Advisors
  - Ag Salespeople
- Commission Leaders
- Leaders in Ag Community
- Pre-Service Ag Educators
Within the focus group discussions, we also gave participants the option to participate in a concept map surrounding mental health. They provided words and examples of imagery they associated with mental health, which also served as data.

### Demographics of Survey

- **Gender**
  - 52% were male; 48% were female
- **Education**
  - 72% completed bachelor’s degrees
- **Age**
  - 48% were between 18-27 years old
- **Race/Ethnicity**
  - 100% White and non-Hispanic or Latino

- 29 participants in surveys
- 37 participants in focus groups
The barriers stakeholders talked about with using and sharing mental health resources:

- Lack of awareness of mental health resources
- The stigma surrounding mental health
- Isolation and distance to accessing resources

01. **Lack of Awareness of Resources**
- Felt there were not enough rural mental health resources
- 80% did not know what resources to give specifically to farmers and ranchers

02. **Isolation & Distance to Accessing Resources**
- If farmers and ranchers wanted to seek community to help deal with their mental health, they might be far away and miles from community members
- Farmers and ranchers working in isolation

03. **Stigma of Mental Health**
- Stigma around mental health was a reason why some farmers would not share personal information with others related to mental health
- Stigma was associated with male and old generational farmers, though participants thought stigma overall was lessening
- Participants felt they would be judged if they provided farmers and ranchers with mental health resources
Stakeholders were asked about various levels of comfortability discussing mental health resources

- 48% Would like more information on how to talk to someone who may be struggling with mental health
- 69% Would like to learn the mental health warning signs for farmers and ranchers
- 79% Knew someone who struggled with mental health

01. Agribusiness participants discussed balancing relationships (agribusiness participants include ag finance employees, crop advisors, & ag salespeople)

- Felt like mental health discussions were a “hard conversation” to have with customers and clients because of the dynamic of salesman/customer
- Cared for community members and customers
- However, did not want to overstep or make assumptions about farmer or rancher’s mental health

02. Uncertainty of 988-Phone Number

- Hesitant to share with customers and people they knew because they did not know what calling the number entailed
- Could create more stress on farmer or rancher if they gave the number to them

Participants felt:

- Somewhat comfortable talking to friends and family about dealing with stress or mental health condition
- Neutral about sharing resources with customers
- Somewhat comfortable in talking about mental health with others if they attended a training
SOLUTIONS

TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH GENERATED BY STAKEHOLDERS

How should messages be designed and who should be in charge of messaging?

- Use the term “farm stress” instead of “mental health” in messaging.
- Use faith-based messaging could work for some farmers and ranchers.
- Stakeholders discussed there was mixed feelings about Extension. Most agreed that under Extension, mental health messaging would be well-received.

01. Webinars, Workshops, & Media

- Using social media, banners, & tabling events to distribute resources or highlight events.
- Bring a subject matter expert to annual conventions and grower meetings to discuss mental health and resources.
- Creating a curriculum to embed in the ag financial institution’s lending program to receive 0.5% off lending rate.

02. Create a Space to Talk About Mental Health

- Add mental health resources and topics in existing workshops to help destigmatize it.
- Messaging that emphasizes “you are not alone” with your struggles of mental health.
- Keep talking about mental health in agricultural contexts to destigmatize it.

“But the more you talk about it in general, you kind of normalize it because I feel like asking for help or reaching out is such a taboo topic. And I feel like a lot of people wouldn’t want to admit that they’re down and need help. So, I think even in casual conversation… just talk about it positively.” - Ag Lending Focus Group Participant
WHAT IS A PASSIVE APPROACH?

A passive approach includes embedding mental health resources and subject matter experts at grower meetings, annual conventions, and existing curriculum.

Mental resources should need to be embedded in the issues that causes the stress. For example, when discussing succession planning at conventions or with agricultural financing, include the resources on how to deal with the stress caused by succession planning.

The resources need to be include applicable skills to help with stress, not only information of resources.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO STAKEHOLDERS THAT WORK WITH FARMERS AND RANCHERS

Our stakeholders are interested in more mental health resources. They need more assistance to address the needs of farmers and ranchers. This includes more trainings and resources tailored for farmers and ranchers.

Provide resources that can lend to a more passive approach to agribusiness stakeholders who might feel uncomfortable giving resources directly to customers.

USING “STRESS” INSTEAD OF “MENTAL HEALTH”

Use “farm stress” instead of rural “mental health” when discussing resources to reduce stigma.
MENTAL HEALTH IN THEIR AG COMMUNITIES

Stakeholders were asked about their agricultural community and who they felt dealt with mental health issues.

“My agricultural community has problems with mental health.”
- 69% somewhat agreed with this statement

“I feel that working in the agricultural industry can be stressful.”
- 100% strongly agreed with this statement

“Older farmers and ranchers deal with mental health issues.”
- 38% somewhat agreed with this statement and 48% strongly agreed with this statement

“Younger generations of agriculturalists have issues with mental health.”
- 55% somewhat agreed with this statement and 17% strongly agreed with this statement

“I don’t worry about mental health in my agricultural community.”
- 41% strongly disagreed with this statement and 20% somewhat disagreed with this statement

“Ag mental health workshops/trainings are hard to come by.”
- 41% somewhat agreed with this statement and 55% strongly agreed with this statement
Learning about mental health at grower meetings was also talked about in focus groups, as well as indicated in the survey where participants were allowed to fill in their own preferred way of learning. No one indicated they did NOT want to learn how to help those struggling with mental health, which was an option.

**Top 6 Preferred Ways of Learning:**

- In person workshops at place of employment (18)
- A workshop at a farm show, field day, or through Extension (17)
- A Podcast (13)
- Online Trainings or Workshop (11)
- A Written Guide (10)
- Online Videos (9)
WHAT WE RECOMMEND

USE FAITH LEADERS AND EXTENSION FOR MESSAGING

Use faith leaders and Extension to help with mental health resource messages.

Extension offices can serve as hubs for mental health resources.

EXTENSION & MENTAL HEALTH TRAININGS

Stakeholders wanted more training and were interested in learning the warning signs of mental health distress for farmers and ranchers. Extension can provide mental health trainings to the stakeholder groups.

MESSAGING THAT EMPHASIZES PEOPLE ARE NOT ALONE

Messaging that emphasizes that people are not alone in their mental health problems. This could be through showing statistics of mental health or sharing similar stories across farmers and ranchers.

MORE STUDIES ON MESSAGE TESTING

We need to test the messaging of mental health resources with farmers and ranchers. To do this, we need to find out values and challenges for specific populations. Additionally, preferred graphics and photos should be studied.
FUTURE WORK IS NEEDED

VARIETY OF MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Resources need to be developed across different mediums such as social media, in person workshops, & presentations, digital resources, and podcasts to benefit different learning styles and to reach more people.

REPLICATE STUDY FOR SPECIFIC INDUSTRIES

- aquaculture
- timber
- urban agriculture
- livestock
- fiber
- populations outside of Willamette Valley

MENTAL HEALTH MESSAGE TESTING

- Framing and/or phrasing of mental health topics
  - photos, videos, and graphics
  - testing messages on different farmer and rancher populations

DEVELOP STUDIES FOR FAMILIES

- Examine how generations of agricultural families are coping with mental health
- Stress of mental load of family members dealing with a rancher or farmer struggling with mental health

CREATING A CURRICULUM & COLLECTING STORIES

- We can develop media that focuses on collecting stories for social media, print magazines, and billboards to promote awareness that farmers and ranchers are not alone in getting help for mental health
- Additionally, we can help create parts of the curriculum through storytelling
What We Have Done & Where We Are Headed:

** Bringing QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Training to Campus **

Working with CAS to do a QPR training specific to ag students so they can know the warning signs in their homes and communities. We plan on holding two workshops in February 2024 with assistance from Cassie Bouska, Julie Leep, Dr. Ricardo Mata-Gonzalez, and Faith Vawter.

** Interest from Livestock Organizations **

Secured a professional development grant from the Association of Communication Excellence to do research on learning the impacts of Oregonian ranchers’ mental health struggles on families.

** Mental Health Safety Kits **

Provided participants with packs of safety kits that featured bandaids, gauze, wipes, etc. along with mental health resources cards specific to OR to help drive home that we should take care of our minds just as we take care of our bodies.

** Continuing Conversations about Resources that could Work **

We are going to work with interested stakeholders to explore opportunities to design purposeful resources that best fit their members/customers preferences such as online curriculum, social media campaign, and grower workshops.
The more we know, the more we can help

LET’S CONNECT!

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