FARMER STRESS IN GEORGIA

Results of a survey

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With thanks to the Georgia Farm Bureau for allowing us to gather data at their 2019 Annual Convention

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FARMER STRESS IN GEORGIA: A SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

Farmer stress and farmer suicide are well-documented phenomena nationally and in Georgia (CDC, 2018; Lavender et al, 2016). To develop effective prevention programs it is essential to understand farmer stress and to identify effective ways to provide information to farmers and farming communities on stress reduction and suicide prevention. This study sought to gather such data from attendees at the 2019 Georgia Farm Bureau Convention.

Data were collected over a two-day period at the exhibit hall of the convention. The researcher asked adult passers-by if they might be interested in participating in a survey, explained the purpose of the survey, and stated that the survey was anonymous and they could skip any questions they did not wish to answer. Upon completion, participants were given a packet of health and stress-related information tailored to farmers, as well as a small UGA souvenir, as a thank you gift. During the two days, 118 surveys were completed. Descriptive statistics and bivariate analyses were used to summarize and analyze the survey data. The survey instrument can be found at the end of this report.

RESULTS

Participants

Participant demographics are summarized in Table 1. Despite the fact that farmers are predominantly male (Garnham & Bryant, 2014), the majority of survey respondents were female (67.8%). The researcher noted that during data gathering, when a man and woman were together and invited to complete the survey the man frequently asked the woman to complete the survey for both of them. This may explain the disproportionate number of female respondents. Participants were almost all white (90.7%); half of participants chose not to identify their ethnicity, but of those who did, all were non-Hispanic (50.0%).

Table 1: Demographics (N=118)

Gender	**N**	**%**
Male	35	29.66%
Female	80	67.80%
Prefer not to answer/Missing	3	2.54%
Race		
White	107	90.68%
Black	2	1.69%
Other	1	0.85%
Prefer not to answer/Missing	8	6.78%
Ethnicity		
Non-Hispanic	59	50.00%
Hispanic	0	0.00%
Prefer not to answer/Missing	59	50.00%

Participants were asked to identify their employment, and could identify more than one employing entity (explaining why a participant could be counted in more than one category and thus have numbers that do not add up in the table). Nine participants chose not to reply to this question. Of those who responded, the sample included both farmers (70.6%) and those with employment related to farming but who did not farm 29.4%). Nearly half of those who farmed reported secondary involvement with another organization, most frequently the Farm Bureau (12.8% of total and 18.2% of all farmers). Of the non-farmers, the majority worked for the Farm Bureau (16.2% of total, 59.4% of non-farmers).

Table 2: Employment (N=109)

	N	% of total
Total Farming	77	70.64%
Farming only	41	37.61%
Farming plus other (participant could be in more than 1 category)	36	33.03%
Farming plus Farm Bureau	14	12.84%
Farming plus Commodities Commission	10	9.17%
Farming plus Other*	9	8.26%
Farming plus USDA	5	4.59%
Farming plus Ag sales/business	3	2.75%
Farming plus Extension	2	1.83%
** Other =not specified (4), education (3), retired (1), student (1)*		
Total Non-farming (participant could be in more than 1 category)	32	29.36%
Farm Bureau	19	16.24%
Extension	1	0.85%
Agricultural sales or business	3	2.56%
Commodities Commission	3	2.56%
USDA	0	0.00%
Other*	12	10.26%
**Other=retired (4), education (3), not specified (2), research (1), state (1), social work (1)*		

Stress Levels

Participants rated stress levels of Georgia farmers as high, with an average response score of 4.13 on a five-point scale. They also saw farmer stress as higher than one year ago, with an average score of 3.81.

Table 3: Assessment of Stress Levels in Georgia Farmers (N=118)

	Mean	StD
I think that the stress levels in Georgia Farmers are:	4.13	0.66
(1=very low, 3=average, 5=very high)		
Compared to one year ago, I think that stress levels in Georgia farmers are:	3.81	0.79
(1=much lower, 3=the same, 5=much higher)		

Confidence in Ability to Help Someone with High Stress

Rural stress and suicide prevention programs help community members learn how to better support each other and "take care of our own." To gauge farmers' current sense of capacity to help someone under great stress, the survey asked *"If you knew someone who had a lot of stress, to the point that they might even be thinking about suicide, how confident are you that you would know what to do to help them?*" While limited, since it does not measure participants' knowledge of the warning signs of suicide or accuracy of their knowledge regarding stress and suicide, this question does captures how well participants think they could help someone under great stress. On average participants reported feeling somewhat confident (Mean=3.07, STD 1.21, N=111) that they would know how to help. However, the range of responses was wide, as can be seen in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Subgroup Differences

To explore potential differences in responses by subgroups, data were examined broken out by male/female and by farmer/non-farmer. Interestingly, female respondents reported significantly higher stress and increased stress levels over the past year than did the men (see Table 4.) Though men's responses were somewhat lower, there was no statistically significant difference in their responses to the question regarding confidence in knowing how to help someone under stress. No statistically significant differences were seen between famers and non-farmers in any of the responses and are thus not presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Comparison of Response Means by Gender

	Male	Female	t (2-tailed)	df	p-value
Stress Levels in GA Farmers	3.89	4.21	2.5021	113	0.0138*
Stress Levels are Higher than 1 year Ago	3.51	3.94	2.6641	113	0.0088*
Confident Would Know How to Help	2.80	3.18	1.5388	111	0.1267

*p-value of <0.05 indicates statistical significance

Stressors Identified

Participants were asked to identify the three biggest stressors for farmers in Georgia. Responses fell into a number of categories, as shown in Table 5, with weather (71.9%), finances (33.3%), commodity prices (29.0%), farm operating costs (27.2%), and government regulations (19.3%) identified most frequently.

Table 5: Top Stressors for Georgia Farmers (N=114)

Stressors	N	%
Weather	82	71.93%
Finances	38	33.33%
Commodity prices and sales	33	28.95%
Farm operating costs	31	27.19%
Government: legislation, regulations, aid	22	19.30%
Prices (not specifically defined)	14	12.28%
Crop production and failure	11	9.65%
Trade, tariffs, and market competition	10	8.77%
Labor	9	7.89%
Time	8	7.02%
Debt and loans	7	6.14%
Family	5	4.39%
Taxes	5	4.39%
Lack of support	5	4.39%
The economy	4	3.51%
Pests	4	3.51%
Health and health insurance	4	3.51%
Aging	3	2.63%
Land	2	1.75%

Providing Information to Farmers

To inform future education initiatives, the survey asked participants to select what they thought were the best ways to provide information to farmers and farming communities about helping each other take care during times of high stress. The most commonly identified ways were through social media (66.3%), newsletters and magazines (58.5%), and classes, such as those that might be offered at an Extension Office (55.9%). Responses are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Best Ways to Provide Information to Farmers and Farming Communities on Taking Care During Times of High Stress (N=118)

	N	%
Social Media	77	65.25%
Newsletter/Magazine	69	58.47%
Classes	66	55.93%
Website	47	39.83%
Brochures	36	30.51%
Radio	30	25.42%
Podcasts	13	11.02%
Other	14	11.86%
Interpersonal contact	12	10.17%
Not specified	1	0.85%
Farm Service Agency	1	0.85%

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Study findings suggest that people perceive stress levels among Georgia farmers to be quite high, and that stress has increased since last year. Women identify higher stress than men, which may be linked to men's reluctance to admit to emotional distress and the stoicism often reported in rural men (Hayslip et al, 2010). Stressors are frequently things over which farmers have no control—weather, government regulations, operating costs, commodity prices. Research suggests that hopelessness, which may be engendered by things over which one has no control, can be a high risk factors for suicide (CDC, 2019); therefore, the impact of these stressors outside of farmers' control are of great concern.

While participants perceived high stress among farmers, they reported feeling somewhat confident in their ability to help someone who was under a great deal of stress or suicidal. However, close to a third of participants (32.8%) reported feeling only a little or not at all confident that they could help someone. This suggests that training in identification of people experiencing stress and how to intervene/help could be a worthwhile endeavor in farming areas.

Getting information on stress and suicide to farming communities is important, and ensuring that it is provided in ways that are acceptable and accessible is crucial. This survey indicated that social media would be an easy and effect form of outreach education. In addition, providing education through brief articles in newsletter and magazines, such as the newsletters of the various commodity commissions, could be a simple and effective form of information sharing. Finally, building on the trusted relationships farming communities have with their local Extension Offices and providing classes at these familiar locations could be an effective information dissemination strategy.

In conclusion, stress is high among farmers in Georgia, who face multiple challenges. However, farming communities are resilient, with a deep sense of mutual support and caring for their own. Intentional and strategic educational activities, leveraging existing information systems and relationships, can be used to support farmers and farming communities. In partnership with communities, local, state, federal, and university resources can work together to build sustainable systems of prevention, support, and education, decreasing risk of stress-related harm and increasing well-being in farmers, their families, and their communities.

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Survey on Farmer Stress and Wellbeing

The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension and School of Social Work want to promote well-being and help farming communities support each other during times of stress. We are asking you to take part in a study by Dr. Anna Scheyett, School of Social Work, amscheye@uga,edu, 706.542.5424. The purpose of the study is to help us better understand farmer stress in Georgia and to identify the most effective ways to provide information on wellbeing and stress to farming communities.

Because you are attending the GA Farm Bureau Annual Convention, we think you will have valuable knowledge about farmer stress. We are asking you to complete this survey, which will take no more than 5 minutes and is anonymous. The survey is totally voluntary and you can stop at any point. If any questions in the survey makes you uncomfortable, you can skip them if you like. Your responses will help us understand the levels of stress farmers are feeling in Georgia and the best ways to communicate information to farming communities on improving well-being and managing stress. This survey is confidential and responses will only be reported in the aggregate. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the IRB at 706-542-3199 or by email at IRB@uga.edu.

1. I think that *stress levels* in Georgia farmers are:

Very Low	Low	Average	High	Very High
1	2	3	4	5

2. *Compared to one year ago* I think that stress levels in Georgia farmers are:

Much Lower	Lower	The Same	Higher	Much Higher
1	2	3	4	5

3. The three biggest stressors for farmers in GA are:

1._____
2. _____
3. _____

4. If you knew someone who had a lot of stress, to the point that they might even be thinking about suicide, how *confident are you* that you would know what to do to help them?

Not at all Confident	A little Confident	Somewhat Confident	Confident	Very Confident
1	2	3	4	5

5. What are the best ways to provide information to farmers and farming communities on helping each other take care during times of high stress? (check all that apply)

_____ Brochures
_____ Classes (e.g. at Extension Office)
_____ Web site
_____ Social Media
_____ Podcasts
_____ Articles in newsletter/magazines
_____Other (Please specify)

6. A little about you.
   a. Gender: Male _____ Female_____ Prefer not to respond _____
   b. Race: White _____ Black _____ Other _____ Prefer not to respond _____
   c. Ethnicity: Non-Hispanic _____ Hispanic _____ Prefer not to respond _____
   d. Employment: Farming _____ Farm Bureau _____ Extension _____
      Ag Sales/Business ____ Commodities Commission _____Other _____ (please specify)