

# Farm Stress Management Meeting Kit

## DEFINITION

Stress can be defined as energy in a blocked or chaotic state. Individuals should seek to develop calm, free-flowing energy that promotes harmony and balance in a person's body, psyche and soul. To relax and manage stresses well during peak farm stress seasons – planting and harvesting – takes discipline and daily practice at controlling events, attitudes and responses.

## Stressors

Stressors are the things that may cause stress. Things like weather, pests, disease, off-farm work, major life changes, relationships, fears and uncertainty are all things that can be stressors.

## Types of Stress

Acute stress is also known as the fight-or flight response. Acute stress is your body's immediate reaction to a perceived threat, challenge or scare. Chronic stress is more subtle than acute stress, but the effects may be longer and more problematic.

## Some symptoms of chronic stress can include:

- Stomach distress
- Unexplained headaches
- Muscle tension
- Chronic fatigue
- Insomnia or disrupted sleep
- Change in appetite
- Relationship problems
- Depression/withdrawal
- Substance abuse

Farming ranks as one of the most dangerous industries in the U.S. Stress, long hours, and fatigue contribute to injury risk. When several stressors are confronted at once, distraction may occur, and this distraction can cause errors that lead to serious or fatal incidents, such as tractor rollovers or entanglement in a fast-moving machine. Proper safety precautions are essential for preventing such incidents.

## STRESS FACTORS

Many factors that influence a farm's viability are out of a farmer's control and can cause stress.

- The weather
- Increased input costs
- Large debt loads
- Livestock health
- Erratic markets
- Government regulations
- Long working hours
- Uncertain crop yields
- Handling dangerous goods e.g. farm chemicals
- Machinery breakdowns

## HOW TO CONTROL STRESS

- Plan ahead. Don't procrastinate. Replace worn machinery parts during the off season.
- Before the harvest discuss who can be available to run for parts, care for livestock, etc.
- Set priorities about what has to be done today and what can wait until tomorrow. Plan your time.
- Say no to extra commitments that you do not have time to do.
- Simplify your life. If possible, reduce your financial dependence on others.
- Schedule stressful events within your control, such as elective surgery.

**Control attitudes**

- See the big picture: “I’m glad that tire blew out here rather than on that next hill.”
- List all the stresses you now have. Identify those you can change; accept the ones you cannot change.
- Shift your focus from worrying to problem solving.
- Think about how to turn your challenges into opportunity.
- Recognize what you have accomplished rather than what you failed to do.
- Set realistic goals and expectations daily. Give up trying to be perfect.

## **Stress Management Techniques**

- Focus on relaxing your body and mind. Whether you are walking, driving or phoning, do it slowly and relax. Keep only that muscle tension necessary to accomplish the task.
- Take care of your body. Exercise regularly and eat well-balanced meals. Limit your intake of stimulants such as coffee, sodas and tea.
- Avoid smoking cigarettes, using alcohol or other drugs, or using tranquilizers or sleeping pills.
- If your health allows, tense and then relax each part of your body from toes to head, one part at a time.
- Shake away tension as you work by vigorously shaking each of your limbs.
- Take a break. Climb down from your tractor and do a favorite exercise.
- Take three deep breaths – slowly, easily. Let go of unnecessary stress.
- Stop to reflect or daydream for 10 minutes. Close your eyes and take a short mental vacation to a place you really enjoy. See the sights; hear the sounds; smell the smells.
- Think positive thoughts: “I can and will succeed.”
- Balance your work and your play. Do both well.
- Find someone with whom you can talk about your worries and frustrations.
- Seek help when you need it. There are times when all of us can benefit from professional help or support.
- Unwind before bedtime. Do stretching exercises, listen to

soothing music, practice rewinding deeply.

## **FINAL WORD**

Stress that goes unrecognized and is not managed well can cause you to make risky choices and can result in a farm incident. Unrelieved stress can take an emotional as well as a physical toll, in the form of anxiety or depression, or high blood pressure and heart disease. If unattended, stress can seriously damage physical health; psychological well-being; and relationships with friends, family, and coworkers.