



# Got Stress?

*Recognizing signs of stress and depression may help you manage it.*

by Kindra Gordon

Stress is a part of people's daily lives — and most of the time it is manageable. But sometimes, an unexpected event occurs like the sudden death of a loved one or a natural disaster that gravely impacts your livelihood. This type of stress is something you can't anticipate or prepare for, and often dealing with it takes some special steps.

Steve Saiz, a counseling and human development liaison who works with South Dakota State University (SDSU), shares that history has shown that ag communities can be particularly affected by stress. He reports that ag statistics from farm crisis events in the past indicate that the suicide rate can increase by four times in a rural



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community affected by a major event — like the Farm Crisis of the '80s or catastrophic weather disasters like drought.

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That said, Saiz explains that the traumatic, unexpected stress individuals experience after an unexpected crisis can make anyone susceptible to depression because stress causes a decrease in the production of serotonin — a chemical in the brain that usually makes people feel good.

If the cycle of stress and depression continues and is not treated, it can result in suicide, Saiz warns. He adds, "Depression is a treatable disease; suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem."

Thus, he encourages producers to take care of themselves and their neighbors by helping one another. He acknowledges that asking for help can be tough, saying, "Even soldiers coming back from war say the toughest thing they had to do was ask for help when they came home."

However, he points out that when you let someone help you, it increases that helper's serotonin levels, and when you help someone, it increases yours.

Symptoms of depression include irritability, pessimism, guilt, self-dislike and loss of energy or fatigue. Despite the challenges life presents, Saiz emphasizes, "We need to remember to take care of one another, and remember the saying 'Tough times never last; Tough people do.'"

### Talk it through

Likewise, Mark Britzman, a professor in counseling and human resources at SDSU, emphasizes that communication is integral to the recovery process after experiencing any hardship — including natural disasters such as snowstorms, tornadoes, floods or drought.

Britzman says, "Although these situations seem to be uncontrollable, it is important for families to recognize that they do have some control. To be able to handle these disasters, families need to work together to become a resilient family."

He explains that resilient families acknowledge that change

is a part of life and avoid seeing a crisis as impossible to overcome. "It is important for families to understand we cannot control everything in life, but we can learn to control how we react to challenges within our life," he says.

Britzman says coping mechanisms include:

- Recognizing it's normal to have negative emotions.
- Reminding yourself daily of the things you are grateful for.
- Allowing for adequate rest and healthy food choices.
- Recalling other hardships you've overcome.
- Remaining focused on the positive.
- Helping others.

Britzman emphasizes that nearly everyone bounces back from adversity. As well, he says, "You cannot outrun negative emotions by working harder. They will always catch up to you. But you can change and let go of anger, cynicism, anxiety and depression."

He advises the importance of taking an inventory of what is going well and having a strong social support system to bolster your hope and optimism. Lastly, Britzman says, "It's not a sign of strength or courage to deal with emotional problems alone. Seek support from a doctor, pastor or mental health professional." **HW**

**Editor's Note:** *The national Suicide Prevention hotline — 1-800-273-8255 — offers several counseling resources.*



## Social media's role

Social media are starting to play a more central role in mobilizing recovery efforts when a disaster hits. After the recent blizzard in South Dakota, Facebook pages were used to help identify missing — and found — animals that had drifted during the storm and to share the plight of affected ranchers through a variety of posts.

South Dakota State University's Adele Harty says social media were a very positive outlet, allowing ranchers to stay connected with one another and to realize they weren't alone in the storm's devastating effects. People posted personal stories, pictures, even poetry.

Many fundraising and relief efforts for affected ranchers are also being facilitated through social media, which can bolster the sense of support and help for those in need.

Harty notes that some Facebook posts by the public criticized ranchers for not doing more to save their livestock when this blizzard hit in South Dakota, but she says the open format allowed for ag advocates to respond to those criticisms and to provide information to the media and those who did not understand. **HW**

