

Farming and mental health



By Andrew Benjamin

Farming can be physically and mentally demanding. If weather, a harvest, equipment, or a yield don't go as planned, it can have a significant negative mental health effect on farmers.

"Farming is a ton of a risk. Sometimes its little reward," said Luke Bendecit, field operations manager for Farm Rescue.

Farm Rescue is an organization that helps farmers due to illness, natural disaster, and other reasons. Benedict said they've helped over 1,200 farm families in nine states including Montana, Minnesota, and North Dakota.

"I grew up on a farm and watched my parents constantly struggle," Benedict said. "There are so many things you can't control. It could be debilitating like a deer in the headlights type of deal."

Those stress factors can be several factors, said Sean Brotherson, professor & extension family science specialist and human Development and Family Science.

"I think the common stress factors tend to remain similar: weather, commodity prices, uncertainties in the market, costs of inputs and a variety of other pres-

ures," he said.

Brotherson has been studying mental health in farmers since 1998.

"The common mental health challenges for ag populations focus on higher levels of depression, increased rates of anxiety, higher levels of substance misuse, and higher rates of suicidal-ity," Brotherson said.

He adds that the physical toll is that there is often a higher rate of heart disease and high blood pressure among farmers.

"Typically we are seeing that the rate of mild to moderate depression is 2-and-a-half to 3 times higher for farmers than the typical American population," he said.

There are ways to keep yourself healthy.

"It doesn't cost a lot of money to walk every day, engage in uplifting conversations with family members," Brotherson recommends. He also recommends checking out the organization the North Central Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Center at farmstress.org. The organization "is a 12-state, 15-partner collaborative to create and expand stress management and mental health resources and services for agricultural producers and stakeholders in the North Central region."

If you are a farmer who needs help, you can reach out to Farm Rescue at their website farmrescue.org.

If you or anyone is suffering from depression, anxiety, or potentially suicidal thoughts, dial the Suicide and Crisis Healthline at 988.

Odessa Township
Annual Meeting

Tuesday,
March 25th 7pm

at the
Lee Calderwood
Residence

PROPOSAL(S) WANTED

Ramsey County is requesting proposals for GRAVEL PROJECTS, CHIP SEAL PROJECT, ROAD OIL & HOT MIX.

Sealed proposals for upcoming Projects & Supplies will be received by the County Auditor for the Board of County Commissioners, Ramsey County, North Dakota until 11:00 A.M., Friday March 28, 2025 and will be publicly opened and read in the County Commissioner's Room in the Courthouse at Devils Lake, N.D. Each proposal must be sealed and addressed to the Ramsey County Auditor, 524 4th Ave NE Unit 6, Devils Lake, ND 58301-2487 and marked on the outside what the proposal is for.

If you have any further questions or want further details contact the Ramsey County Highway Department, 919 5th St SE, Devils Lake, ND 58301-3834 at 701-662-7015 for further information.

Liquor Locker in Devils Lake, ND adds new technology

Liquor Locker in Devils Lake, ND, has recently received a Forensic ID scanner which can detect fake IDs from underage individuals, in partnership with Lake Region District Health Unit (LRDHU) and North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services. We were able to provide training to the owner and staff when we delivered the ID scanner.

"We are pleased with the relationship we are building with our alcohol establishments and their willingness to support our local effort toward a safer community," says Taylor Hart, Prevention Specialist from LRDHU.

Underage drinking has been identified as a problem across the country. Locally, 25% of high school students report underage drinking in the last 30 days and 15% reported binge drinking, defined by 5 or more drinks in a sitting, in the last 30 days. Alcohol can have a devastating effect on the developing brain.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reports that "the earlier people start drinking alcohol, the more likely they are to experience impact on cognitive functions, memory, and school performance



over time, perhaps even into adulthood."

In our recent local community Substance Use Survey, 26% of people answered fake IDS as the way youth are obtaining alcohol. Together let's prevent underage drinking.

LRDHU has two handheld scanners that can be checked out for special events, where alcohol is being served, by calling Taylor at 701-662-7094.

Trade

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from production and another \$16 billion in transport, processing, manufacturing and commodity handling. It also contributes \$10 billion in labor income and supports over 123,000 jobs.

According to the USDA's Economic Research Service, the state exported \$5.4 billion in agricultural products in 2023, making it the ninth-largest agriculture-exporting state in the country. "Farmers will lose money, so this is an extremely negative thing for us, even when it is just a threat or even if it is short term," Watne said of tariffs and tariff threats.

Watne remarked that tariffs and threats lead longtime trade partners like China, Canada and Mexico to adjust their own trade away from U.S. farm products, making them less reliant and reducing markets for North Dakota farmers.

Greg Lardy, vice president for agriculture affairs at NDSU, and who was raised on a farm and ranch in southwestern North Dakota, said it is hard to generalize about the impacts since there's so much uncertainty with some of the potential tariffs taking effect.

"Because of our dependence on export markets, I think there's a general concern about what the tariffs might mean for the long term," Lardy said.

"Especially as you think about relationships that have been built with trading partners. Those relationships have been built over years and years and years of work to get products into certain markets," Lardy said.

Agriculture commissioner Doug Goehring, who also farms near Menoken, said it is hard to tell what the impacts will be since there's

so much uncertainty right now, but added that the North Dakota agriculture economy is very integrated with both Canada and Mexico.

Besides the tracked \$5 billion in export sales the USDA numbers show, Goehring said there's another \$7 billion in agricultural trade that doesn't always get accounted for in the trade statistics.

"Almost \$4 billion is Canada alone," Goehring said of the cross-border trade. Some of that is manufacturing, services, parts and supplies, and a lot is integrated between companies on both sides of the U.S.-Canada dividing line, he said.

"Sometimes I think what's lost on the consuming public, is trade is not a short-term type of issue. It's a long-term goal. It's all about relationships, and it takes time to establish those relationships," Goehring said.

"You can't just replace the market, you can't just go someplace else," he said.

Domestic fallback not an option

One suggestion President Donald Trump made recently was for American farmers to focus on selling products domestically if the full tariffs go into effect.

"You know, that sounds fine and dandy, except if you realize that we are a country with a surplus. So that's really not an option," Goehring said. "Yeah, we'll sell all we can to whoever will buy it. But when you got a surplus, you got an issue, and that's going to be a big problem."

Daryl Lies, president of the North Dakota Farm Bureau, who also farms and raises hogs, sheep and goats, said trade negotiations and tariff threats aim to address trade inequality and the trade deficit, and he said most farmers understand this.

"Obviously, farmers want a price. They want the trade. They know that leveling that trade playing field is important to the price, long-term," Lies said.

"I think for the most part, many of them are willing to take a little short-term pain in the marketplace if we can get to that point that there's a negotiation at the end of the day to level the trade playing field," he said.

Trade corrections needed

Lies said trade barriers, restrictions, quotas and non-tariff trade barriers from trading partners like China and others seriously need to be addressed and corrected.

Trump tariffs in 2018 targeting China also impacted North Dakota's ag sector, but Watne said the situation is different now.

The U.S. made a commitment to farmers to offset those losses at the time, he said, but because the tariffs were implemented, China was able to diversify its trade arrangements and reduce reliance on U.S. agriculture.

Those 2018 tariffs cost U.S. ag over \$27 billion, with large annualized losses for the soybean industry. At the time a lot of North Dakota soybeans were going to Asia.

Lardy said one positive development that will reduce the impact on soybean growers in North Dakota this time is the adding of two soybean crushing plants in the years since those 2018 tariffs.

"We're not as dependent on that market now," Lardy said.

Goehring said he hoped trade threats and negotiations could lead to China adhering to its trade agreements with the U.S. and for Canada and Mexico to address non-tariff trade barriers in its agreements, but that tariffs eventually aren't good for consumers in any of these countries.

"Countries don't pay tar-

iffs. Consumers pay tariffs. It's a tax," Goehring said.

Lies also said that the decline of China's population should lead U.S. farmers to look for other markets so they are less reliant and impacted by decisions from Beijing.

China's population decreased in each of the past three years, with a 1.39 million decline just in the past year. Plummeting birth rates in China, as well as South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong, also point to a gradual reduction in agricultural trade volume with East Asia over time.

Don't go it alone

With the uncertainty over tariffs, markets and potential higher costs, Lardy recommended farmers should be in close contact with their marketing professionals at this time and monitor closely whether markets open up.

Lardy also mentioned that because of the added stress, farmers should be closely managing their own well-being.

"From a mental health standpoint, if they're feeling financial pressures here, in addition to working with their lenders they really need to be in tune with mental health professionals and the services that are available," Lardy said.

"Whenever you have the financial stress that's involved in these things, if you internalize that too long, it's never good," he said.

The North Dakota News Cooperative is a non-profit news organization providing reliable and independent reporting on issues and events that impact the lives of North Dakotans. The organization increases the public's access to quality journalism and advances news literacy across the state. For more information about NDNC or to make a charitable contribution, please visit newscoopnd.org.

Prayer to the Blessed Virgin

Oh, most beautiful flower of Mount Carmel, fruitful vine, splendour of Heaven. Blessed Mother of the Son of God; Immaculate Virgin, assist me in my necessity. Oh, Star of the Sea, help me and show me. Oh, Holy Mary, Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and Earth, I humbly beseech you from the bottom of my heart to succour me in my necessity (Make request). There are none that can withstand your power.

Oh, Mary, conceived without sin,
pray for us who have recourse to thee. (3 times)
Holy Mary, I place this prayer in your hands. (3 times)
Say this prayer for three consecutive days and then you must publish and it will be granted to you in full. Thanks

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