

Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Farm center part of a multi-state effort focusing on farmer mental wellness

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MADISON – The Farm Center at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) is part of a new 12-state effort aimed at providing education, resources and support to farmers, agriculture service professionals and mental health care providers to mitigate farm stress and reduce suicide risk in rural communities.

The multi-state initiative, led regionally by the University of Illinois and Illinois Extension, is supported by a Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network grant from the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Over several years, the \$7.2 million award will create and expand project-wide access to financial, stress management and mental health resources for farmers and stakeholders. Wisconsin will receive over \$400,000 to provide education and support to farmers, ag-related businesses and mental health and healthcare providers.

In partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension, the Farm Center will create farmer focus groups, develop mental health provider trainings, and support other activities focusing on farmer mental health.

“We are excited to join UW-Madison’s Division of Extension in this unique collaboration to help farmers and their families overcome mental health-related challenges,” said Jayne Krull, director of the DATCP’s Wisconsin Farm Center. “Although the Farm Center offers many services designed to help farmers resolve a variety of challenges, we’ve been getting more and more calls from farmers in

distress, and we continue to seek funding and resources to address this growing need.”

“As stress among farmers continues to run high, we are excited to work with the Wisconsin Farm Center to help farmers and their families overcome mental health-related challenges,” added Joy Kirkpatrick, an outreach specialist at the UW Center for Dairy Profitability. “Low prices and uncertainty for many primary farm and food products over the last five years have created hardship and stress for many in rural communities, and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has only compounded those stress levels.”

The grant plan also calls for the Farm Center to collaborate in the development of regional meetings bringing agriculture service and mental health professionals together to learn from each other, as well as develop a Counseling Voucher Best Practices document to share with other states.