

UW-Madison: WeCOPE announces pilot sessions for agricultural community

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We invite farm community members to participate in a new pilot of the WeCOPE (Connecting with Our Positive Emotions) program for agricultural audiences. The farm/agricultural adaptation is funded by a generous grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and is supported by a special funding in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). The program has been newly adapted to provide practical applications for men and women involved in farming and other agriculture-related activities.

The agricultural version of WeCOPE originated through a partnership with Dr. John Shutske, director of the UW Center for Agricultural Safety and Health and professor in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences who works in partnership with DATCP's Farm Center. The Farm Center's work has a major focus on farmer stress and impacts on financial and physical health and well-being. Research shows skills learned through WeCOPE reduce stress and depression, increase positive affect, and improve health even in high stress situations including chronic health issues or crisis situations and events.

"Often, programs focus on telling farmers they 'have' stress. Farmers already know that," Shutske said. "WeCOPE instead focuses on equipping attendees with proactive skills that can enhance one's sense of well-being while improving all aspects of health. A person with less stress and healthier emotions can operate more effectively and make better decisions when times are challenging."

The pilot sessions for WeCOPE are taught over seven weeks during which participants explore eleven emotional skills while practicing methods to improve emotional and physical well-being and reduce negative feelings connected to stress. These FREE sessions are scheduled for 11:30 am – 12:30 pm via live Zoom for the following Tuesdays: March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, April 5, and 12. For attendees preferring in-person sessions, those will take place on the following Thursdays: March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31, April 7, and 14 from 7:00 pm – 8:00 pm.

After participants attend the WeCOPE program, they'll be encouraged to provide feedback. Suggestions will be used to create programs that support Wisconsin farm communities by helping them navigate farmer mental health challenges and the associated volatility while also building personal and emotional resilience. To register and for additional information visit <https://forms.gle/5yjj4GVLPKVCKN7> or call the Sauk County Extension office at (608) 355-3250.