

Wisconsin Women in Conservation: Announces January 20 mental health support training

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Chippewa Falls, WI – Women farmers and landowners wear multiple hats and juggle various responsibilities, often providing key emotional support to family and community members. Winter can be a particularly difficult time in farm country, especially combined with the stress of a prolonged pandemic. Wisconsin Women in Conservation (WiWiC) will partner with Farm Well Wisconsin to provide a two-hour virtual training on Thursday, January 20, to help women learn to recognize someone in need and respond intentionally and effectively without putting their own mental health at risk. The training, which will be held on Zoom from 10am until noon, is open to all women farmers, landowners and conservationists in Marathon, Portage, Shawano, Waupaca, Outagamie and Brown Counties.

“Mental health is a topic that impacts everyone. For better or worse, women often take on the role of providing emotional support for their families and extended networks – acting as counselors, confidants, and mediators,” says Chris Frakes, director of Farm Well Wisconsin. “It is vital to learn the skills needed to carry out those roles more effectively and to learn how to set boundaries that protect your own wellbeing.”

A recently-released [poll from American Farm Bureau Federation](#) suggests that a majority of rural adults (52%) and farmers/farm workers (61%) are experiencing more stress and mental health challenges than they were a year ago. Younger rural adults are more likely than older rural adults to say they are experiencing more

stress and mental health challenges than a year ago, and they are more likely to say they have personally sought care from a mental health professional.

“I think mental health is a concern in many communities, but especially rural areas. In the past few decades, a lot of things have changed for us – from the vitality of our Main Street businesses to the opportunities we have to make a living close to home. A lot of people are struggling and that isn’t a comfortable thing to talk about,” said Lauren Langworthy, of Blue Ox Farm in Wheeler. Langworthy is a WiWiC Conservation Coach, mentoring other women in the region, and she’s also Director of Special Projects for Wisconsin Farmers Union. “Farm prices, access to health care, corporate consolidation, even opportunities to learn and socialize – there are many bigger trends that are changing rural life. Farmers can be especially independent and self-driven people and it is easy to feel powerless when you find yourself struggling – even if none of it is your fault.”

[Farm Well Wisconsin](#) works in Southwestern Wisconsin to develop and offer resources that support the health and wellbeing of farmers, farmworkers, and their families. The group believes that farming well depends on taking care of our bodies, minds, emotions, and relationships. Rural communities lack enough mental health professionals to meet the need, especially during times like the pandemic and tough economic downturns. “Ordinary people can help fill the gap,” says Frakes.

[Wisconsin Women in Conservation](#) (WiWiC) is a state-wide collaborative effort led by the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in partnership with Wisconsin Farmers Union, Renewing the Countryside, the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES), and NRCS. WiWiC brings together Wisconsin women landowners to connect and learn about conservation practices, resources, and funding opportunities.

WiWiC team members reached out to Farm Well Wisconsin to lead the workshops after becoming aware of the need for mental health resources while facilitating their

own conservation education events in 2021.

“WIWiC is a partnership project between several organizations that work with farmers. These groups have deep roots in farming communities and extensive networks in rural areas. It’s important that we offer our community the tools needed to have healthy conversations and support our neighbors, or ourselves, in times of crisis,” said Langworthy. “Without some guidance and a few tools, it can be so hard to have difficult conversations about people’s struggles without feeling like you might “‘make things worse.’ We aren’t used to talking with each other about our deep personal struggles. However, if we can be there for our community – armed with a few good tools – we can make a world of difference for a neighbor in need.”

Participants in the trainings will explore the “COMET” method, which stands for Changing Our Mental and Emotional Trajectory. This program aims to change the trajectory of someone in a vulnerable space, and headed towards crisis, back towards a place of wellness. The workshops, led jointly by FarmWell and WiWiC facilitators, will be in a “Learning Circle” format, encouraging peer-to-peer interaction among participants. They will practice being a person who says or does something to offer support, care, or a referral and causes a positive change.

“Neighbors helping neighbors is a deep-seated rural value. We do not hesitate to assist our neighbors when they are impacted by a house fire, but when we notice that a neighbor is struggling with stress or depression, sometimes we are unsure,” says Frakes. “COMET believes in the power of everyday interactions. By learning a simple, effective strategy for engaging with people who are stressed, we can make a difference.”

COMET training attendees will come away from the workshop with a concrete, actionable set of skills that will increase their confidence in reaching out to friends, family members, and acquaintances who are in a vulnerable space. Through robust discussion, and one-on-one roleplay, attendees learn how to hold space for

someone who is struggling, and to set aside their concern that they must know all the answers or how to “fix” the other person’s problem.

The trainings are organized by region to facilitate community among neighbors, but are welcome to all women farmers, landowners, and conservationists. Space is limited and events are not recorded to encourage story-sharing among participants. Registration is FREE but necessary to obtain the Zoom link. More information and registration is at WiWiC.org.

Northeast COMET Training, Jan. 20, 10am-noon
Marathon, Portage, Shawano, Waupaca, Outagamie and Brown Counties

West Central COMET Training, Feb. 3, 10am-noon
Pierce, Pepin and Buffalo Counties

Northwest COMET Training, Feb. 17, 10am-noon
Polk, Barron, and Dunn Counties

Southwest COMET Training, Mar. 3, 10am-noon
Vernon, Crawford and Grant Counties

Southeast COMET Training, Mar. 17, 10am-noon
Walworth, Racine and Milwaukee Counties