

# Wisconsin Women in Conservation: Announces mental health support trainings to begin Jan. 20

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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. For many, the holiday season takes an extra toll on mental health, as do the winter months. Starting in January, Wisconsin Women in Conservation (WiWiC) will partner with Farm Well Wisconsin to provide two-hour virtual regional trainings to help women learn to recognize someone in need and respond intentionally and effectively, without putting their own mental health at risk.

“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.

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.

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.”

Wisconsin Women in Conservation is a state-wide collaborative effort led by the Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in partnership with Wisconsin Farmers Union, Renewing the Countryside and the Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service (MOSES). A three-year multi-faceted project funded by the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (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.

“As a farmer myself, isolated in the country with my houseful of kids, chores and day to day challenges, I have really enjoyed the WiWiC events with other women, sitting in our Learning Circles openly sharing our triumphs and our struggles,” said WiWiC West Central Region Coordinator Sara George. “But listening to women sharing their challenges so openly made me realize that this space opens vulnerabilities that we should be prepared to watch for and address in some way. And therefore, we at WiWiC are doing the best thing possible by providing support

to women around mental health. We are training our team and our participants on what to look for and what to say. We are providing a safe place for conversations that may be very difficult. We are here to support other women, to listen and allow them to be heard.”

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](http://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