

Agricultural Mental Health

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Not only is farming dangerous in terms of occupation-related physical injuries, illnesses and fatalities, but farming also is associated with high risk for serious mental health disorders. The suicide rate of farmers and farm workers is well above average during normal economic conditions, and rises to between two and three times the national average during economically stressful times. Yet the mental health of farmers, farm workers and their families is one of the most neglected areas of scientific endeavor and service provision. There is a paucity of mental health professionals in rural areas and even fewer who are culturally competent to serve farmers and ranchers.

To address these knowledge and service gaps, research and service programs are needed to reduce barriers to effective mental health and substance abuse treatment for farmers and ranchers. Specifically, Sharing Help Awareness United Network, in collaboration with the National Association for Rural Mental Health, has begun assimilating scientific knowledge into a textbook and curriculum to train mental health professionals to serve the agricultural population. Outreach workers, who are farm men and women, and telehealth are being utilized. Agricultural mental health concepts also are being integrated into the training of nurses and physicians at the University of Iowa's Agricultural Occupational Health Training program.

This paper summarizes progress in agricultural mental health and proposes a nationwide mental health support program for all persons engaged in agricultural production.