

## Do More Agriculture Foundation: Raising Awareness About Producers' Mental Health

By Noelle Chorney

In 2021 researchers at the University of Guelph found that in the last 12 months, one in four Canadian farmers had felt their life was not worth living, wished they were dead, or thought of taking their own life. That statistic is startling and heart-wrenching, and it is a primary reason that Saskatchewan Pulse Growers (SPG) has been partnering with The Do More Agriculture Foundation (Do More Ag) to address producers' mental health challenges from multiple angles.

Do More Ag is the national voice and champion for mental health in Canadian agriculture and is changing the culture to one where all are encouraged, supported, and empowered to take care of their mental well-being. Executive Director Megz Reynolds says, "Producers are among the most vulnerable when it comes to mental health issues. Stress, anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, and burnout are all high among producers. Weather, disease, and commodity prices all influence a farmer's ability to be successful and yet they are all out of the farmer's control. Farmers also work with family and live where they work, making it very hard to create distance from the never-ending to-do list or work stresses. Agriculture is also an industry with a foundation of deep rural roots, hard work, resilience, strength, and community. In order to uphold that image, those traits can also be the industry's weakness as they become barriers to speaking up and seeking help. By collaborating with the entire industry and those working to address the state of mental health in agriculture, we can and will make a substantial impact."

Do More Ag operates on three pillars: awareness, community, and resources. They take a combined approach to expanding the agriculture industry's willingness to discuss mental health issues more openly. Programs and workshops are geared not only toward producers and their families but also toward professionals in the health and mental health fields who may not understand the unique circumstances and pressures those working in agriculture, particularly producers, experience.

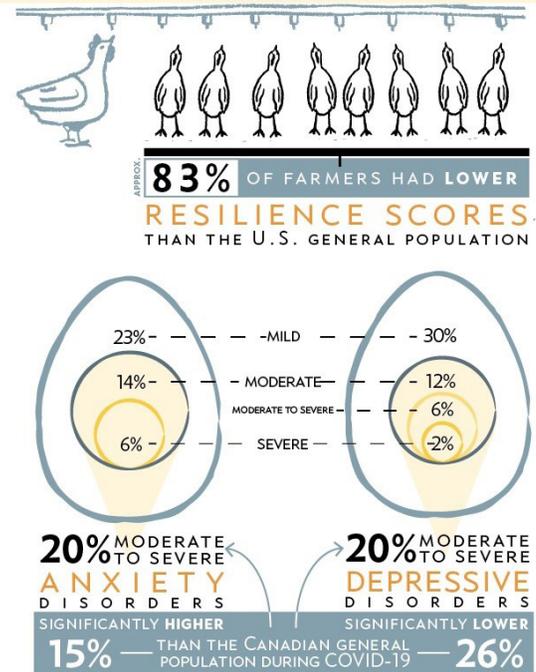
Talk, Ask, Listen workshops were created for farmers by farmers to develop a greater awareness and understanding of mental health that is available from anywhere, from in-person to the cab of your tractor. It also helps break down barriers and dispel the stigma of mental health by encouraging people to talk about it, ask about it, and listen.

AgCulture is a mental health in agriculture program developed for doctors, nurses and nurse practitioners, social workers, and psychologists who may not have direct experience with farming but advise and interact with this community. "Farming can be all-consuming. You cannot go home at the end of the day and leave your stresses behind, you are living where you work and often working with family. The workshop helps health practitioners create an understanding of the unique challenges and stressors in agriculture. That helps mental health clinicians connect with farmers and form more effective therapeutic relationships," says Reynolds.

SPG expanded its support to Do More Ag last year, and in 2023 the partnership will include providing Talk, Ask, Listen workshops for their members. Reynolds says, "SPG has taken a holistic approach to their partnership with us, bringing awareness of mental health to the members in their network, but also by offering both Talk, Ask, Listen and AgCulture workshops. In the case of AgCulture, making sure the professionals working with producers understand their industry."

"We cannot have a healthy or vibrant industry if our producers are suffering. We are grateful for partnerships like this where a commodity organization is championing this conversation on behalf of its members."

### RESULTS FROM THE 2021 SURVEY OF FARMER MENTAL HEALTH IN CANADA



ROCHELLE THOMPSON, BRIANA HAGEN, ANDRIA JONES-BITTON, 2022

The  
Do More  
Agriculture  
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