

## **The Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing: A Hub for Mental Health in Canadian Farming**

Farming is a difficult and unpredictable lifestyle, that inherently comes with a variety of factors that have negative impacts on mental health.

A lack of control from erratic weather, isolation due to the rural nature of the work, an inability to take time off sick from your crops and animals. Farming is a 24/7 lifestyle that can be extremely stressful, and research from the University of Guelph has found that farmer mental health is worse than that of the general population in almost every way.

Stress, anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion and cynicism (two components of burnout), suicide ideation and lowered resilience were all higher among farmers than the national average.

The research team found that 76 per cent of farmers said they were currently experiencing moderate or high perceived stress.

Adding onto this, farmers also have a lack of mental health supports available. Mental health professionals that understand a farming lifestyle and can work within their hours are few and far-between.

That's why it's so important that the newly announced Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing (CCAW) is being developed. The CCAW is a national hub for research, program development, policy, extension, and engagement around mental health in Canadian farming.



Working with provincial and national partners, CCAW will advance farmer mental health research, clinical programming, education, and advocacy efforts helping to address long-standing critical needs facing Canadian agriculture.

Founding board and staff members include Dr. Briana Hagen, Chief Executive Officer and Lead Scientist, Deborah Vanberkel, Chief Program Officer, Registered Psychotherapist, founder of the Farmer Wellness Program and dairy farmer, and Marnie Wood, Chief Operating Officer, Registered Psychotherapist and dairy farmer.

The CCAW Board is comprised of leading researchers and farmer-focused mental health practitioners from different provinces including Dr. Andria Jones-

Bitton University of Guelph researcher and OVC's Director of Wellness, Dr. Rebecca Purc-Stephenson, University of Alberta, Kim Moffat co-founder of the Manitoba Farmer Wellness and Mental Health counsellor and Janine Lunn Ontario farmer and advocate for Canadian agricultural wellbeing. The CCAW has partnered with several organizations across the country, including the Government of Canada, Canadian Federation of Agriculture, Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, and Farm Management Canada, and all are working together to support the wellbeing of the farming community.