

Continued from “Mike Beilke’s Take on the WI Farm Crisis”...

For example, a list of grief and loss issues can include loss of income, vocation, tradition (family farm), relationship with spouse and/or children, and self-esteem. For those selling cattle (especially smaller farms), they are literally selling their “pets” that often have names like “Sweet Pea”, “Sunshine”, etc. While words like “bankruptcy” and “auction” are used, it might be more appropriate to think of the family experiencing a series of “funerals” all at the same time.

Not surprisingly, family members have the normal responses to grief, ie, anger, sadness, denial, frustration, and, unfortunately, sometimes suicide. Professionals often use words like “depression” or “major depression” and assess for suicidality. While helpful, they do not convey the complexity, depth, and overall impact on the functioning of a person and/or family.

“RENOVATE”: Using the strengths of the family as a foundation, the family can adapt to life after farming. Farmers are known for their work ethic, problem-solving, flexibility, commitment to family, and multiplicity of skills. Many of those attributes are valued in work places, communities, etc. As for the skills, farmers often undervalue themselves as they have seen themselves as “farmers forever”. For example, most farmers can drive a skid loader. Businesses, including distribution centers, often hire skilled persons to operate forklifts, etc. in their warehouses. Working in construction could be another opportunity.

Another “renovating” will likely occur in relationships. The focus can be on improving communication and interactions versus being “stuck” putting all of the energy into making/keeping the farm business viable in an uncertain economic environment.

RESOURCES: The greatest resource is the farm family itself with its values and extensive skill set. Additional support can come from other family members, friends, a faith community, etc. Some situations may require working with a lender, attorney, tax accountant, or financial advisor. For those impacted by the recent flooding and weather, accessing local, county, state, and even federal agencies will likely be a high priority to address the immediate safety and basic needs of families.

I suggest a mental health provider as someone who can be a valuable member of the family’s support “team”. Farmers are known for their independence and wanting to solve problems “within the family”. Sometimes those strengths can be barriers to asking for assistance and support.

DATCP (Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection) has a multitude of resources available to assist farm families, including limited funding to aid farmers in getting financial assistance for mental health services. They can be accessed on-line or by calling 1.800.942.2474.

Affirm the REALITY. RENOVATE by adjusting attitudes, goals, etc. Utilize RESOURCES to reach goals. I suggest using this “recipe” as a way to transition into a meaningful and successful future. There is life after farming!

If I can be of assistance, please contact me at Family Service Madison (608-252-1320).