



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **The Family Counseling Center Focuses on Farmers' Health**

**[Gloversville, NY]** June is a busy month in upstate New York, especially for those who make a living in agriculture. The warm weather and long days mean that spring and summer are the busiest and most stressful time of the year for farmers – hay can only be done on sunny days and warm weather, and crops need to be planted and nurtured in order to grow and produce food either for market or for livestock. Weather and livestock are not the only stressors farmers face. Unique worries include fluctuating feed and input costs, volatile markets for the products they produce, heavy debt loads, physical isolation, and exhaustion from demanding workloads that often leave little time for personal care or relationships.

The idyllic landscape of a rural community, green fields, and hills dotted with livestock is both a reality and a myth. Across the country, approximately one-fifth of the population deals with mental health issues. Mental health includes social, emotional, and psychological well-being and affects nearly all aspects of daily life including physical health. While statistically, the occurrence of mental illness is consistent regardless of location, incidents of depression and suicide are twice as high in rural communities as in more urban settings. **Studies, including those from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), have shown a higher rate of anxiety and depression in farmers and farmworkers than in the general population. In addition, farming and ranching have one of the highest suicide rates of all occupations, with farmers being 3.5 times more likely to die by suicide than the general population.** Among farmer suicides, men 65 years old and older make up 45% of the cases. This may be connected to farm succession, with older farmers reducing their daily participation in the farm and therefore feeling a loss of identity and purpose.

**Experts have identified three major barriers to mental health care in rural settings: availability, access, and acceptability. These factors, coupled with the cultural norms of farming which include self-reliance, independent spirit, and the stigma of depression or anxiety as weakness, can keep farmers from seeking help from family, friends, or professionals.**

### **Availability & Access**

There is a national mental health care provider shortage and rural areas are especially hit hard. More than 90% of psychologists and psychiatrists work exclusively in metropolitan areas, creating a severe lack of mental health professionals in rural communities. In addition, the nature of rural communities means that individuals need to travel longer distances for services. Limited broadband access and cell phone dead zones also impact access to telehealth options.

For farmers, their schedules are dependent on the weather, animal health, and machinery – greatly reducing their availability for appointments and overall care.

### **Acceptability & Stigma**

The American identity is based upon the image of a farmer: resilient, independent, and tough. When things don't work out, farmers are supposed to take it on the chin, weather the storm, and find a way through. Many farmers come from a tradition of not sharing their challenges, instead placing their own health and well-being below the work that needs to be done. Privacy is a point of pride and often a key barrier in seeking help. The small communities in which farmers live can mean a lack of anonymity when accessing mental health care, making individuals reluctant to seek treatment.

### **Treatment that is culturally aware**

There are avenues that farmers can use to seek help for the stress they feel. Local, state, and national resources including hotlines, crisis assistance, and more are available to anyone.

#### *The Family Counseling Center*

[The Family Counseling Center](#) has over 47 years of experience in the treatment of clients from rural and semi-rural communities. The agency's Fort Plain office is located in a facility that includes a dentist and podiatrist – allowing for co-located services and a level of anonymity for clients who are seeking care. Access to crisis counselors is available weekdays Monday to Thursday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Fridays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the agency's Gloversville office.

Many farm families are working with limited access to health insurance. Rural residents are more often uninsured or underinsured and more likely to receive Medicaid, adding complexity to the reimbursement of services. The Family Counseling Center is a designated National Health Services Corps site, meaning that it serves all patients – regardless of their ability to pay. This designation, the agency's ability to accept Medicaid, Medicare, and other managed care coverage, and a sliding fee scale for patients who pay out-of-pocket means that the financial stress of paying for care is reduced.

#### *State-wide Services*

[NY FarmNet](#) is a statewide program that works with farmers to deal with stress – both financial and emotional. A treatment team of financial advisors and mental health workers come directly to a farm to discuss the causes of strain and create a plan of action. In addition, the organization provides a crisis hotline at 800.547.3276.

### *National Services*

[FarmAid](#) provides resources for farmers in crisis or someone who is worried about a farmer. Their national hotline speaks from a place of understanding: farmers talking to farmers about the stressors, concerns, and anxiety associated with the profession. The hotline (800.327.6243) is manned Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

[AgriStress](#) Helpline provides free and confidential crisis support by phone or text 24/7. Callers speak to individuals who understand agriculture's unique stressors, culture, values, and lived experiences. The hotline can be reached via phone or text at 833.897.2474.

If you or someone you know is struggling or having thoughts of suicide, call or text the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988 or chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).

The Family Counseling Center of Fulton County has been serving the community since 1976. The mission of The Family Counseling Center is to offer the skills, support, and guidance needed to assist all individuals and families in its service area with living their healthiest lives. The Center is licensed by the New York State Office of Mental Health, providing services to children as young as five years old. For more information about the Family Counseling Center, its services, or how you can become a volunteer, please go to [www.thefamilycounselingcenter.org](http://www.thefamilycounselingcenter.org).

### **Resources:**

- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)
- [NY FarmNet: 800.547.3276](#)
- [FarmAid: 800.327.6243](#)
- [AgriStress: 833.897.8474](#)
- [Mental Health America: Mental Health for Men](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Center](#)

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