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Rural Minds Creates Group

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Rural Minds, a local nonprofit organization focused on mental health in rural America, has recently launched a new program focused on connecting farmers to mental health resources.

The new program, known as the Farmer Mental Health Resilience Program, has been developed to provide farmers and their loved ones information on the importance of mental wellness. Carol Anderson with Rural Minds said other information includes what mental illness is, the types of mental illness and any resources for getting help, information and conversation starters.

“So if someone in the family or a friend is concerned about the farmer’s behavior or what’s been going on they can look at this and get suggestions on how to approach them in a respectful, caring manner without causing them to withdraw, for example,” Anderson said.

The founding sponsor for this program is VM Agritech, which Anderson said shares Rural Minds’ interest in helping support farmers, specifically because of surveys done by the American Farm Bureau Federation over the last few years that indicate that the stress levels of farmers have increased. Anderson added that some other national and economic factors are also increasing that stress.

“We just really had shared values around helping farmers find tools and information that can help them remain resilient in the face of whatever they face,” Anderson said. “Farming has a lot of uncertainties even in the best of times. My dad always used to say, you put a seed in the ground and you didn’t know what the weather was going to be, you didn’t know what the disease or insect pressures were going to be, what the price was going to be at harvest and there’s just lots of uncertainties.”

When any of those uncertainties get magnified, Anderson said that causes a lot of stress and anxiety for farmers, so the goal with this program is to give farmers the tools to recognize this increased stress and to use to bring themselves back to a normal state or get help from professionals to help them live a productive life.

For Rural Minds, the Farmer Mental Health Resilience Program is important because it continues their overall mission to end the silence, suffering and stigma around mental health for the 46 million people who live in rural America.

“We don’t believe anyone should have to suffer alone,” Anderson said. “So it’s important because farmers face unique pressures that can increase stress and anxiety and depression and substance abuse and suicide risk. In fact, farmers are something like three point five times more likely to die by suicide compared to the general population.”

Anderson said farmers are an audience in need of this type of program and access to these resources, and farmers are raised to be self-sufficient, but people also should realize that mental health is no different than physical health.

Anderson said mental health has also been seen to have a genetic link, and similar to physical illnesses if someone chooses not to do anything about it there can be disastrous consequences to one’s health.

“We want to encourage conversations around mental health,” Anderson said. “We want people to feel more comfortable talking about mental health and ultimately we want people to be more willing to pursue more health for it so they don’t have to suffer alone.”

The Farmer Mental Health Resilience Program is meant to provide another tool for farmers and their families to live productive lives and remain resilient in whatever they may face. Rural Minds’ ongoing goal is to improve the mental health outcomes in rural America, and the program is one more way that they can support that goal.

Most importantly, Anderson said the tools and information created through the program have been created with an understanding of the issues farmers face in their everyday lives.

“We recognize that farming is a challenging business at best with a lot of uncertainty,” Anderson said. “We also understand that farming is more than just a job, it’s a lifestyle, and there’s a lot of emotion tied up in the land and the love of the land and keeping the land productive. We want to provide services that help farmers continue to be resilient and productive so they can continue living the life and lifestyle that they love.”

The services provided through the Farmer Mental Health Resilience Program are confidential, free and easy to use online. If a person is looking for information this is a tool available at no charge that allows them to access a number of services and education about mental wellness and the importance of maintaining that mental wellness. The Farmer Mental Health Resilience Program is available at ruralminds.org/farmerresilience.