



"The Path from Worry to Anxiety"

Written by Monica Kramer, rural mental health specialist

Life on the farm is abundantly full of blessings large and small. We have daily opportunities to connect with our animals, our land, and our families. Fresh air. Seeds sprouting. Generational legacy. Producing goods essential to the health and well-being of our nation. However, at times, even with all of those blessings before us, worry and anxiety can creep in.

Undoubtedly on some level we all have experienced worry. Those feelings of uneasiness, being overly concerned, and anticipating the worst-case scenario are not new to those in agriculture. The number of uncontrollables and uncertainties that farmers and ranchers deal with on daily basis leave no question as to why farming is ranked in the top 10 most stressful occupations. Add to that mix the current ag economy, political climate, throw in a pandemic and we've got the perfect recipe for worry, stress, and anxiety.

Worry and stress are not always negative. We can become stressed even when the situation is positive such as competing in a race or an expansion effort on the farm. Healthy stress can drive us forward and help us to accomplish goals. However, there is a time when stress and worry can become chronic, crossing the line to anxiety.

How do we know when that line has been crossed? Anxiety may look slightly different for everyone, but here is a list of common symptoms:

- Worrying that has no end or solution
- Alcohol or drug use to self-medicate
- Worry that interferes with daily activities
- Nausea
- Headaches
- Restlessness that interferes with sleep
- Thoughts that focus on worst case scenarios
- Heart palpitations
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty accomplishing daily tasks

If someone has experienced these symptoms for an extended period of time it may be more difficult to identify the problem as chronic stress or anxiety. Many individuals seek out medical

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attention for the physical symptoms they are experiencing and may even be treated for those symptoms without realizing the root or underlying cause is anxiety.

The good news is there are several strategies to control worry and manage anxiety! Here are a handful that have proven to be useful:

- Daily exercise
- Create and maintain a positive sleep routine also known as sleep hygiene
- Eat healthy, drink water, and watch caffeine intake
- Learn and implement relaxation strategies such as deep breathing
- Build and rely on your support system. Identify who your “go to” people are in times of stress.
- Focus thoughts and actions on what is within your control.
- Make daily to-do lists, plans, strategies, contingency plans (if weather doesn’t cooperate for example).
- Be intentional with your thinking. Become aware of negative thoughts. Question them. Stop them. Purposely focus on positive thoughts. This takes a lot of practice!

If you are noticing that your ability to accomplish daily tasks is being hampered by excessive worry, don’t hesitate to reach out to your primary care provider or a mental health professional. It is not uncommon to experience ongoing symptoms even when we do our best to implement the strategies above. That is an indicator we may require further assistance such as therapy or medication management.

Positive change doesn’t happen overnight but is worth working for! Remember, nothing in nature blooms all year. Be patient with yourself.

More [#StrongerTogetherHER](#) conversations can be found in our Facebook group, [Exchange by Dairy Girl Network](#). Women involved with any part of dairy are able to join, but please make sure you answer the entry questions to streamline approval.

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