



May 2020 Enhance Webinar: A Better You for a Better Farm Presented by Emily Krekelberg, University of Minnesota

Dairy Girl Network's second webinar for their #StrongerTogetHER campaign in combination with May Mental Health Awareness Month was entitled, "A Better You for A Better Farm" and focused on how to take care of yourself if you are dealing with mental health. The webinar was presented by Emily Krekelberg, an Extension Educator from the University of Minnesota. Emily has spent seven years with the Minnesota Extension and is very aware of the stressful demands farmers have to meet.

Emily began her presentation by discussing the differences between well-being, mental health and mental illness. To explain this concept, Emily used the example of a 3-legged milking stool. Every stool has two major components: the seat and the legs. The seat is the part that holds the load, but this is where you put our time and energy. The three legs on the stool represent each area of wellness: physical health, mental health and emotional health. Physical health is how your body functions. Mental health is how you take in and process information. Emotional health is how you respond to information you have learned. If you are under a lot of stress, this may invoke negative feelings or actions for your emotional health. In addition, Emily explained these areas are all intertwined with one another. If you kick one leg out from under the milking stool, it falls over. A similar scenario happens with you if you only get three hours of sleep one night, you can't fully support your load on the stool. You depend on these different areas to fully support your overall health and wellness.

Emily continued her presentation by discussing mental health versus mental illness. The old narrative was these two were on the opposite end of the spectrum, however, as scientists have learned more about the brain over recent years, they've learned mental health and illness are actually on two different planes. Emily walked through a chart explaining the different quadrants of mental health and illness.

She then covered the nature of farm stress and different factors that can impact it including high interest rates, large debt loads, commodity prices, weather/disaster, government regulations, long work hours and livestock illness, just to name a few. Due to all these stressors, Emily explained a well-known farmer psychologist in Iowa, Dr. Rosmann, created The Agrarian Imperative. The Imperative implies "farmers hang onto their land at all costs, instills farmers to work incredibly hard to endure unusual pain and hardship and to take uncommon risks." She

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encouraged everyone to be mindful of this when working either on or off of the farm.

After that, there was a discussion on the different types of stress. There are five types of stress we are affected by; they are physical, emotional, behavioral, cognitive and self-worth. Physical stress is headaches, stomach aches, back aches, frequent sickness or poor hygiene. Emotional stress is feeling sad, depressed or losing your sense of humor. Behavioral stress is irritability, anger, drinking, passive aggressive behavior and isolation. Cognitive stress is memory loss, lack of concentration and feeling easily overwhelmed. Self-worth is how you talk to yourself when no one is around. Emily then explained sometimes stress can be prolonged. This means the previously identified signs have not improved or have multiplied, there has been a change in routine, a decline in appearance, an increase in illness, an increase in accidents or other family members, including children, showing signs of stress.

If there are people in your life suffering from mental illness, reach out. It can be uncomfortable, but it is critical. Individuals experiencing stress typically feel isolated, so it is important to reach out and connect with them during this time. In addition to that, acknowledgement of someone's suffering can offer them relief. For example, a good conversation starter with someone who is suffering may be, "I am someone who cares and wants to listen. What do you want me to know about how you are feeling?"

To conclude the presentation, Emily walked through strategies to promote a good mental well-being. This included deep breathing exercises. She walked attendees through both a box and 'I am here' breathing exercise. She also discussed doing things like meditation, positive self-talk, physical activity, hobbies, connecting with people in your social network and speaking with a mental health professional. She also emphasized it is okay to not be okay, bad days happen, but you are not alone and not to be afraid to ask for help.

If you or someone you know is contemplating suicide, please call the suicide hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) or their web prevention chat.

Also if you or someone you know is suffering from mental illness, please view the resources Dairy Girl Network has curated here.

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