Agriculture Wellness Ontario

Stress and Anxiety in Agriculture

What is Stress?

- A natural response that can be:
  - Acute: a temporary event
  - Chronic: persists over a period of time
- Can create strong physical and emotional reactions
- Often regulates over time by addressing the stressor

What is Anxiety?

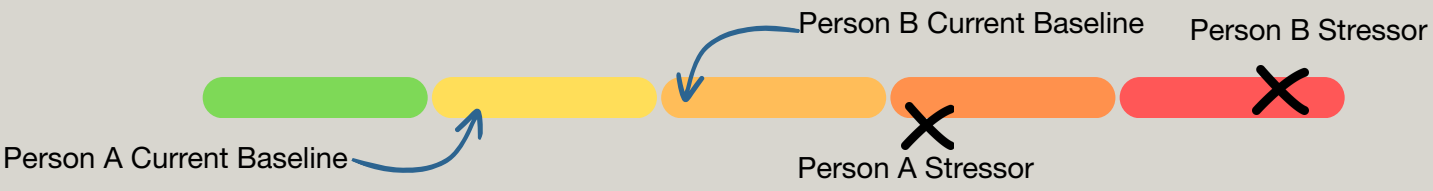
- A common response to life stressors
- A feeling of dread or being overwhelmed in situations that are not actually threatening
- A normal part of life that can become a challenge when it begins to disrupt our ability to respond effectively in daily situations

Positive Stress and Resilience

- Resilience is the ability to adapt in the face of hard times and unexpected stress. It is not something that we inherently have, but it is something we can cultivate and practice.
- Sometimes a person's initial reaction to stress is resilience, but this can depend on their current stress baseline.

Current Stress Baseline

Everyone has a baseline level of stress. It's normal for it to vary each day and from person to person. People can also react differently to the same stressor depending on where their baseline is at that time, for example: two farmers caring for sick livestock on their farm may have varying levels of a stress response based on where their baseline started.



Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership
Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario
Ontario
Canada

Tips for managing stress

Building a social support system

- Connection with others is a strong protective factor
- Discussing challenges with someone you trust and who may be experiencing the same difficulty, especially with farming, is helpful

Encouraging predictability in your routine

- Often the root of stress is lack of control
- Having a daily routine, or routine activities throughout the day, allows control during times of uncertainty e.g., morning routine of hygiene, breakfast, getting dressed, etc.

Circle of control

- While stress can be influenced by factors outside of our control, we have the ability to focus on and control:
  - How we react and respond
    - With our words, emotions and actions
  - Our relationships
    - Who we interact with, influence, and our relationship with ourselves

Tips for managing anxiety

Mental rehearsal

- Process the steps of the task by writing them out or visualizing in your head
- Normalize and make room for mistakes
- Shift perspective and recognize that the completion of the task is often easier than the feelings of anxiety that come before it

Focus on your breathing

- Deep belly breathing (breathing from your diaphragm) tells your brain to relax, which can lower your blood pressure and heart rate and help to regulate the physical signs of stress

Positive self-talk

- Engage in an internal dialogue that supports you in reaching your goal. For example, if you are anxious about updating records, you may regulate worry by saying "I'm capable and smart, and I can complete this on time with the skills I have."
- Practice speaking to yourself the same way you would speak to/encourage a loved one

FREE

Seeking Support

Farmer Wellness Initiative 1-866-267-6255 - Offers Ontario farmers, farm workers and their families unlimited mental health counselling in English, French, Spanish and Tagalog. Find help addressing the unique challenges of agriculture. Intake and urgent support are available 24/7/365. www.farmerwellnessinitiative.ca

ConnexOntario - Mental Health & Addiction Treatment Services 1-866-531-2600 - A database of Ontario mental health, addictions and problem gambling services to access support local to you. Whether for yourself, a loved one, or a client, their confidential services are available 24/7. www.connexontario.ca

9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline - Call or Text 988 - When you reach out, a trained responder will listen without judgement, provide support and understanding, and can tell you about resources that will help. www.988.ca

The information in this handout was developed with support and information from the Centre for Innovation Campus Mental Health. For more information visit campusmentalhealth.ca