



A special issue of the Winter 1999 Party-Line

Editor's Note

By Peter G. Beeson

This issue of the Party-Line is focused on the "Farm Crisis and Mental Health". We tend to think of crisis as episodic, something that has a beginning and an end. However, this "farm crisis" is in essence symptomatic of a chronic condition. For some time rural America has been characterized by massive restructuring and realignment in the agricultural economy as well as a social and political restructuring of rural life. The rural economy is more and more subject to the forces of international markets and the decisions made in remote corporate boardrooms. Urban interests more and more supersede rural America's interests and rural resources are more and more exploited for urban needs. Periodically, economic conditions such as we have seen this year with dramatic reductions in grain and livestock prices or weather related disasters such as droughts and floods draw media attention to what is in reality a chronic, on-going problem for many farmers and rural residents. When the prices rise or the "relief" efforts are complete, the public will be left with the impression that the "crisis" is over. The truth of the matter, however, is that for many in rural America the only difference will be the lack of media coverage. They will still be faced with a struggle to hold on to their farm, a struggle to meet the needs of their family, a struggle to survive. For many farmers, the "farm crisis" never ends as long as they're in farming. Rural Americans and their way of life are under siege. The trends of depopulation, consolidation and regionalization of markets and services, and the disenfranchisement of rural people are likely to continue. It is important that we recognize that for many farmers and rural residents the ups and downs of the agricultural economy either hasten their demise or provide a brief respite, but do not fundamentally change the chronic conditions they face, the threats to their way of life, or their struggle to survive. The information contained in this issue of the Party-Line is as timeless as the conditions facing farmers and rural residents. We hope this will be a useful reference for rural mental health practitioners and others long after the media has turned its attention to the next 30-second sound bite. It is important for us in the mental health field to recognize what farmers have known for a long time: improvements in the agricultural economy do not always mean improvements for farmers and an improved economy doesn't make things better for everybody in rural America.

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President's Message

On behalf of the National Association for Rural Mental Health, I am pleased to introduce this special edition of The Party-Line, dedicated to the growing economic and mental health problems faced by farmers and others dependent on the agricultural economy. This past December, NARMH joined with the State of Nebraska and the Center for Mental Health Services to convene a national summit on the "Farm Crisis and Mental Health: Then and Now". A summary report with recommendations from the Summit is incorporated in this special edition of the Party-Line.

For those of you who were NARMH members during the 1980s, you will recall that we linked with other organizations during the farm crisis to advocate for programs to assist individuals in rural America. By participating in the Rural Family Issues Coalition, and providing key information to organizations such as the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors' Special Task Force on Mental Health Response to Farm and Rural Stress, and the National Mental Health Association's National Action Commission on the Mental Health of Rural Americans, NARMH was effective in pursuing its mission of "Linking voices to promote rural mental health". It was gratifying to see so many NARMH members at the summit, including at least half a dozen Victor I. Howery Award winners, whose lifetime achievements in the field of rural mental health have been recognized, and who continue to give tirelessly of their time and energy to advocate for the availability and accessibility of appropriate mental health services for all rural Americans.

Without the efforts of many individuals and organizations, this summit would not have been possible. Nebraska Governor E. Benjamin Nelson was a driving force in bringing together the sponsors and participants for this summit. Peter Beeson and Dennis Mohatt with the Nebraska Health and Human Services System were instrumental in planning the summit, securing sponsors and tending to the numerous logistical details. At the federal level, supporters included HHS Secretary Donna Shalala, Nelba Chavez of SAMHSA, and Bernie Arons of CMHS. Special thanks also go to Ron Manderscheid of the Center for Mental Health Services, whose commitment to including rural mental health issues in the national dialogue about mental health has been longstanding and greatly appreciated. Funding for layout and partial production of this special edition of the Party-Line, and a commitment to include future opportunities to conduct meetings regarding funding for mental health programs important to rural Americans has been provided by the Center for Mental Health Services. I am also thankful for the participation of the summit attendees, who well represented the depth and breadth of experiences in rural America. The panelists who presented, and the Nebraska farm families, made the summit particularly meaningful. Having filmmakers David and Nancy Sutherland, who discussed their film, "The Farmer's Wife" and the subjects of the film, Darrel and Juanita Bushkoetter participate, reminded us all that we have much in common, regardless of our vocation or place of residence.

I hope you enjoy this special edition of the Party-Line. As President of NARMH, I promise that the recommendations made by the summit participants will be incorporated into our ongoing advocacy work. You can look for a follow-up meeting to the summit at our annual conference, August 8-10, 1999 in Bloomington, Minnesota. I look forward to seeing you there!

So It Goes

By Peter G. Beeson

A dusting of snow highlights deep green winter wheat and a bow of bright yellow leaves frames a fading blue sky. Tall white sentinels, stuffed with unwanted grain, stand guard over rusty ribbons of steel that run westward, leaving town like so many others have over the years.

Bare trees cast afternoon shadows over faded seed and feed signs while grain dust and road dirt share the air with the silence of boarded school house windows and the creaking of no-longer-used swings that move lazily in the breeze drifting in from the empty fields.

Streets, vacant, cracked and worn, turn to gravel, then dirt, run away into a setting sun; marking off unplowed fields, assets of a bank gone under. Homes, gray and worn, mostly empty, recede; shrinking from bright red “For Sale” signs.

A tattered gray cat, a left-behind mouser, wanders from porch to porch, crossing the church steeple’s long black shadow that creeps down mainstreet running back to peeling white paint, dust laden pews, and empty collection plates.

Like cattle at a feed trough, a few mud splattered pick-ups line the curb, staring into dark storefronts, whose windows reflect less and less comings and more and more goings and stare back as empty reminders of days gone by.

The only sounds are the rustling of leaves on old brick streets and the faint talk of the weather drifting from the tavern, where gray stubbled faces with farmer tans and sad, weather worn eyes, blankly search the Hamm’s beer sign.

Rolled up coveralls hover over old scuffed boots that shift with discomfort at the mention of foreclosure. In each other’s faces they see the loss of friends and family, survivors or hangers on, not sure which, or if it matters; together, they share the passing of a way of life.

The View From Here

by Tammy Zimmerman, Zimmerman Hog Farms, Beatrice, NE

Our family border collie and I saw my three children off on the school bus this morning. It was crisp and fresh outside as we watched the bus travel down the road for many miles until it turned the bend. I always thought that I would watch that bus take that bend until my last child would graduate from our rural high school. But as I begin another day on the farm, soaking in the solitude and the crystal winter beauty, I weep inside at the thought that our life could change. That we, too, as a farm family might find an unexpected 'bend' in our road. As we read about the family farm crisis, as we hear about it, as we live it, I think about the number of times I took for granted all the wonderful aspects of living on the farm. My dog running free, my children running to the bus down a crunchy snow-laden lane, the peacefulness that turns one instantly to prayer, and the view all the way down the mile road with no obstacles - just the glow of a beautiful crimson sunrise. The rural gifts God has shared goes on and on.

After both having lived the 'city life', my husband and I moved to his rural hometown to join his dad on the family farm and assist with the hog operation. My hope was to support his dream and to fulfill my dream of raising our children in the best environment possible. There was no question in my mind when the plans unfolded to move on to a farm, even though I had grown up in a larger town. I went blindly, but felt certain that many of my husband's most endearing traits were those he acquired where he grew up. I wanted those for my children - good moral character, unstoppable work ethics, resourcefulness, resilience and adaptability, business savvy, commitment, dedication and most importantly warmth and compassion for even the smallest of creatures.

As I slip on my "gear" to go out and do chores, I chuckle to myself, "If someone had written a book for city girls about to move to the farm, it wouldn't have done rural living justice, and probably wouldn't have told the 'whole' truth either!" For ten years now we have worked like I have never known the use of the word. It is most certainly true that a farmer's labor is never done. It's a matter of prioritizing because a person can literally work themselves to death. I used to interpret the work load as job security. It used to bother me that we would go to bed at night knowing there was more to be done and that we would start all over again first thing in the morning. But I have come to accept the challenge and learned that each new day brings new work, or complications, but new lessons nonetheless. The minute we walk out our back door, our work lays before us. We cannot dodge those pigs, ignore their hungry squealing, or put them off for another day. The minute our work boots hit the dirt, we are off and running.

I head toward our large two story barn and the realization that I might not be walking out to feed pigs much longer begins to set in. As we continue to get phone calls from friends who are being forced out by banks, having received the banker's call ourselves, I am reminded that there are larger forces pulling us out while we are pushing ourselves to our limits to stay in. And the feeling is one of powerlessness and exhaustion. Today the walk to the barn seems like an eternity.

Now - from my city friends and family, the message here would be, "For pete's sake - go find another job. The stress isn't worth it" (Yes, I have heard this from my family.) And herein lies one of those life altering revelations that would go in the book for "city girls gone country". I have witnessed it myself since my move to the farm. It's not new, you've heard it all before, but as God as my witness, it is true: Farming is not just a job. It truly is a lifestyle; it is a culture rich in heritage, tradition and rules all its own. And unless you have lived it, or were born in it, you will never fully understand the depth of its roots - they bore very deep. It is the commitment farmers make to care so much about what they do, that makes them successful. They do not ever 'leave' their place of employment - they live in it and around it, they breathe it and they live for it. They believe in what they do, and are continuing, sometimes hundreds of years of heritage and family history. A wise minister recently shared with an audience that the land, the farm, and the farming way of life is the farmer's 'Spirit.' As they walk through their fields and amongst their livestock, they are experiencing the God they have come to know. And as I stand in my pen of hogs this morning surrounded by corn fields and dependent livestock, I couldn't feel that 'pull' any stronger, for I can't even justify my presence amongst the hogs any other way. The hogs certainly aren't making us wealthy, in fact they're not even covering our bills anymore.

I cannot profess to have appreciated this transition of city girl to farm wife overnight. Wallowing in pigs, checking sows in the middle of the night, rising before the sun even thinks of doing it, looking for the 'red' pen to balance the checkbook, running out of gas miles from home, digging out livestock waterers frozen in the winter's cold, growing biceps I didn't

even know I had , and the list goes on, were all very real opportunities for me to re-think our decision to farm. In addition, there were plenty of moments in which I was just sure we were mentally unstable. There were times when I swore we crammed 30 hours of work into a 24 hour day, moments when I conquered the movement of a critter that outweighed me by more than 200 pounds, knowing it could take me any time it felt so inclined, and the year the electric transformer blew, suffocating hundreds of hogs, forcing us to absorb the loss and literally start our genetics all over again. The unsteadiness seems even more so today. I listen to my husband's breathing at night when we retire the day, and the tension of relinquishing the farm has made his chest so tight I swear it's got to hurt when he breathes. Yet, he does not deem himself unstable - but rather bruised and beaten, and to me the sound of his tense breaths is the sound of his dream fading away like vapors.

Looking at our weathered home, I am selfishly reminded of the need for siding, and how we had hoped, hog prices permitting, we would get that project completed. But as I reflect on that more, I remember what the banker did to my father-in-law this Christmas season when he put him on 'warning' and then proceeded to de-value his farmstead to half of its real value in an effort to force him out. My siding complaint cannot compare with the loss he is feeling right now. He stands to lose a farm that within the next two years would have been in the family for a century. He stands to forfeit over 40 years of labor and success in the blink of a banker's eye. And he's not the same man anymore. The twinkle in his blue eyes has disappeared, the warm smile he once sported has gone vertical, and his soul is lost. His family reminds him daily to "fight" and to know that he is entitled to more. And he responds best when he says "I shouldn't HAVE to fight for something I rightfully own and earned because someone else decides my life should change. This wasn't given to me, I sacrificed and bled for this." My siding issue can't compare to that pain.

My son, at the evening supper table announced this week that it was probably time for him to get a job. He is nine years old. As I see his basketball hoop on the place, I am reminded of how fast this crisis is making him "grow up." Kids are like sponges, and even though our family, including extended family, has tried to sift through the information we felt the kids needed to know, most times, kids "just know" as witnessed by my son's offer. We realize he doesn't really want to get a job, he already has more chores than the average child, but it is a warning sign to us that he is being profoundly affected. My oldest daughter has offered to forfeit over her hog show money for extra needed cash, and my youngest wants to know what town we'll move to. And they share their stories with a sense of loss.

Like my children, our friends and other family members are mentally traveling down a journey of personal pain. For some who have known only farming, it is a journey into uncharted territory, and it's terrifying. They will need assistance, like we have sought out, from professionals and veterans who have experienced this journey. I have finally been bold enough to suggest to family, friends, and neighbors that there are people to turn to "out there" off the farm who will listen, who will understand and can sometimes even advise. I recall the times as the realities would set in where I swear all my senses went dead, and I wasn't seeing, hearing, understanding and more importantly cognitively rationalizing. I can only imagine what my husband and his parents feel, having dedicated and invested their whole lives and now feeling so out of control. Numbness is a defense mechanism - but a person does not have good judgement in that state, especially when the stakes are so high. It's hard to suggest to a stubborn, independent farmer to seek help, and what worked for me was to call help "in" and ask them to come to us. Many of our friends who are floundering the most have not succumbed to the notion of outside help, and so on top of the economic stress, they are struggling - and my heart aches for them.

As I trek across our farm, I try to find the words that one could use to express what it means to "live off the land." And although my heart yearns for it and knows it is "home," I cannot fully describe it. There isn't a day that goes by where I don't witness deer, coyote, possum, raccoon, rabbit, pheasant, quail, fox, hawks or even the pair of bald eagles that nest at the river just outside my backyard. Farmers have co-existed in harmony with all of them for centuries and it is, in my estimation, one of the perks. I would be the first to admit that this life is not for everyone, nor do I expect everyone to want it. All I ask is that it is a lifestyle that is respected and supported by this nation's city dwellers, policy makers and corporate sector. I think about the number of times my children and I have donated time and food and clothing to the needy in the urban areas, supporting food pantries and toy drives. I think about how our outrageous taxes are supporting the city school system and the city parks. We paid our taxes knowing they were supporting the next generation of city kids coming down the timeline, and agreed it is the right thing to do. The disappointment I sense that the rest of society does not feel a responsibility for what is happening to us on the farm most days leads to anger. Shouldn't they care about my kids as much as I care about theirs? Both generations are unique continuations of this nation's heritage. And we want the same for our kids - a future bright with options for fulfillment and happiness.

In defense, we have had friends ask what they can do to help, late night calls, - those who are close enough to us to see the urgency. When I realistically ponder what it is I actually want my urban neighbors to do, I would have to admit the answer is basic, yet complicated. I want them to simply “care,” one human being to another, one member of this nation to another. As Leo Buscaglia has written, “We need to go beyond just ‘being’, and start caring.” Be there to listen and more importantly respect and support farming as a culture. Above and beyond that it gets tangled. I want them to care to the point of being vocal. Their rural countrysides are about to transform into corporate landscapes, and I want my city friends to rally with the farmer, be heard, be physically present in support of their rural neighbors. The balance of urban and rural seems almost crucial to the American way of life. As I look across our fields of corn and our pens of hogs today, it pains me to know that my husband, and his father, and his grandfather, and the generation before that, raised food for all in need for centuries and now may cease to exist in the name of ‘technology’? My nine year old son doesn’t understand that to be progress.

Tonight as I finish my thoughts for the day I can see one of our resident owl’s silhouette against the moon. I listen as he sends messages back and forth to a friend. The family members have done all their chores, the children are tucked safely in their beds, and I sit on my back porch watching the stars shine like beacons in the winter night sky. I’d like to promise my son that one of those stars bears the hope of a farming future for him as he has come to know it, and assure him that although the power of the daylight may deem that star invisible, it is nonetheless there. He needs to know that even though the dream seems faint and distant, that star, bearing his wish, will continue to shine, because years ago this nation made a pact that it would support and respect the contribution of the American farmer. My kids and your kids dreams today are riding upon stars that are about to change paths. Together, we have got to help charter their course.

The Research: Potential Mental Health Consequences of the Farm Crisis

By Peter G. Beeson

If the “Farm Crisis” of the 1980s is any guide to what we can anticipate from the current problems in the farm economy, then we can expect the following:

IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS

Farm financial stress will lead to personal psychological distress (Schulman, M.D. and Armstrong, P.S. “The farm crisis: An analysis of social psychological distress among North Carolina farm operators.” *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 17(4): 423-442, 1989).*

Loss or threat of loss of the family farm will produce multiple stress-related symptoms (Heffernan, W.D. and Heffernan, J.B. “Impact of the Farm Crisis on Rural Families and Communities.” *The Rural Sociologist*, 6(3): 160-170, 1988).

Farmers and rural residents will be at increased risk for suicide (Gunderson, P., Donner, D., Nashold, R., Salkowicz, L., Sperry, S., and Wittman, B. “The Epidemiology of Suicide Among Farm Residents or Workers in Five North-Central States, 1980-1988.” *Farm Injuries: A Public Health Approach. American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 9:26-32, May/June, 1993).

Farmers and rural residents will be at increased risk for mental disorders, especially depression, but their mental health will improve with improvements in the agricultural economy (Ortega, S.T., Johnson, D.R., Beeson, P.G., & Craft, B.J. “The Farm Crisis and Mental Health: A Longitudinal Study of the 1980s.” *Rural Sociology*, 59(4): 598-619, 1994).

Farmers and rural residents will be at increased risk for substance abuse problems (Hsieh, H.H., Khan, M.H., Cheng, S., and Curran, J.J. “Increased Drinking and the Farm Crisis: A Preliminary Report” *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, 39(3): 315-316, 1988).

Farmers will be at increased risk for farm accidents and injury (Geller, J.M., Ludtke, R.L., & Stratton, T. “Nonfatal Farm Injuries in North Dakota: A Sociological Analysis.” *The Journal of Rural Health* 6(2): 185-196, 1990).

The effects of rural stress will last long after the farmer has left the farm (Heffernan, J. & Heffernan, W. “When farmers have to give up farming.” *Rural Development Perspectives*, 2(3): 10-14, 1986).

Small town residents, compared to farmers, will be at equal or greater risk for depression and other mental disorders (Hoyt, D.R., O’Donnell, D. & Mack, K.Y. “Psychological Distress and Size of Place: The Epidemiology of Rural Economic Stress.” *Rural Sociology*, 60(4): 707-720, 1995).

Similar problems are likely to be seen in Canada (Walker, J.L. & Walker, L.J.S. “Self-reported stress symptoms in farmers.” *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 44(1): 10-16, 1988).

IMPACT ON FAMILIES

Even under the most severe economic stress and hardship, farm families will make every effort to stay involved with farming and their land (Rosenblatt, D.C. *Farming Is In Our Blood*, Iowa State University Press, 1990).

Farm and farm families will experience increased inter-generational conflict (Anderson, R.M. and Rosenblatt, P.C. “Intergenerational transfer of farm land.” *Journal of Rural Community Psychology*, 16(1): 19-25, 1985).

Farm and rural families will be at increased risk for marital discord and disruption (Norem, R.H. & Blundell, J. "Farm Families and Marital Disruption During a Time of Crisis." *Families in Rural America: Stress, Adaptation & Revitalization*, 1988).

The quality of farm marriages will be affected with an increase in thoughts of divorce. This, however, will be driven more by depression of family members rather than a direct result of farm stress (Johnson, D.R. and Booth, A. "Rural economic decline and marital quality: A panel study of farm marriages." *Family Relations* 39:159-165, 1990)

Farm and rural families will be at increased risk for domestic violence (see National Mental Health Association National Action Commission Report on the Mental Health of Rural Americans, 1988)

Some farm and rural families will be displaced and have difficulty adjusting to new urban settings (Jurich, A.P., Collins, O.P., & Griffin, C. "Coping With the Displaced Farm Family: The New Rural Migration." *Marriage and Family Review*, 19(1-2): 77-98, 1993).

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

The farm crisis will take a subtle toll on children (Wall, W.L. "Farm crisis is taking subtle toll on children in distressed families." *Wall Street Journal*, CCVI (92), November 7: 1, 22, 1985).

Farm and rural children will evidence a number of adjustment problems and be at increased risk for mental disorder and antisocial behavior (Conger, R.D. and Elder, H.E. *Families in Troubled Times*, Aldine De Gruyter, 1994).

The stress of the farm crisis will result in poor parenting practices which will have negative developmental outcomes for children in areas such as school achievement, peer relations, antisocial behaviors, and self-confidence (Conger, R., Patterson, G. & Ge, X. "It takes two to replicate: A mediational model for the impact of parents' stress on adolescent adjustment." *Child Development*, 66:80-97).

Some rural youth will manifest their distress through more responsible behavior as they try to help their families (Van Hook, M. "The Iowa Farm Crisis: Perceptions, interpretations, and family patterns." Pp. 71-86 in McLoyd, V. and Flanagan, C. (Eds.) *Economic Stress: Effects on Family Life and Child Development* San Francisco: Jossey Bass. *New Directions for Child Development*. 46, Winter, 1990).

Parents suffering from depression related to the farm crisis will not only have relationship difficulties with their spouses, but also have poorer parent-child relations (Ge, X. Conger, R., Lorenz, F., Elder, G., Montague, R. & Simons, R. "Linking family economic hardship to adolescent distress." *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 2: 3351-378, 1992).

Depression and stress related to the farm crisis will result in poor parenting practices and in turn produce increased risk for adolescents internalizing disorders such as depression (Ge, X. Conger, R., Lorenz, F. & Simons, R. "Parents' stressful life events and adolescent depressed mood." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 35: 28-44, 1994).

The economic pressures of the farm crisis will increase the risk of harsh and inconsistent parenting and contribute to rural adolescent substance abuse and antisocial behavior (Conger, R., Lorenz, F., Elder, G., Melby, J., Simons, R. & Conger, K. "A process model of family economic pressure and early adolescent alcohol use." *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 11: 430-449, 1991).

IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES

In some cases, depression will be contagious (collective) affecting entire communities (O'Brien, D.J., Edward, W. H., & Dershem, L. "Community attachment and depression among residents in two rural mid-western communities." *Rural Sociology*, 59:255-65, 1994).

Rural communities will experience social disintegration (Davidson, Osha Gray Broken Heartland: The Rise of America's Rural Ghetto. University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, Iowa, 1996).

Rural communities will be at risk of collapse (Fitchen, J.M. "When communities collapse: Implications for rural america." Human Services in the Rural Environment, 10-11 (4-1): 48-57, 1987).

There will be some potential for violence directed against others (Brown, Bruce Lone Tree: A True Story of Murder in America's Heartland, Crown Publishers, 1989).

There will be increased community disorganization which will result in increased levels of conduct problems among adolescents (Simons, R., Johnson, C., Beaman, J., Conger, R. & Whitbeck, L. "Parents and peer groups as mediators of the effect of community structure on adolescent problem behavior." American Journal of Community Psychology, 24:145-171, 1996).

REACTIONS

Farmers and farm families who lose their farm will go through stages of adjustment similar to the stages of grief related to death of a loved one (Rosmann, M. and Delworth, U. "Clinical and Community Perspectives on the Farm Crisis." The Clinical Psychologist, 10(1): 10-16, 1990).

Farmers will increasingly believe that outside forces, rather than their own actions, will determine their fate (Kettner, K.A., Geller, J.M., Ludtke, R., and Kelley, J. "Economic hardship and stress among farm operators in North Dakota: The buffering effect of social support." Great Plains Sociologist, 1(1): 69-88, 1988).

Farmers and farm families will experience increased social isolation (Wright, S.E. and Rosenblatt, P.C. "Isolation and farm loss: Why neighbors may not be supportive." Family Relations, 36(4):391-95, 1987).

Farmers and rural residents will be more vulnerable to the messages of antigovernment and hate groups (Dyer, J. Harvest of Rage, Westview Press, 1997).

The general public will not care what's happening to farmers and rural residents (Lyson, T.A. "Who cares about the farmer? Apathy and the current farm crisis." Rural Sociology, 51(4): 490-502, 1986).

COPING

Personal coping strategies and systems of social support will mediate the effects of economic adversity and result in fewer depressive symptoms (Belyea, M.J. and Lobao, L.M. "Psychosocial consequences of agricultural transformation: The farm crisis and depression." Rural Sociology, 55(1): 58-75, 1990).

Persons in farm households will not use the social support networks available to them as effectively as the people in towns to lessen the psychological consequences of economic distress (Ortega, S.T. & Johnson, D.R. "Urban/rural differences in the structure and consequences of social support." Paper presented at the International Sociological Association meetings, Madrid, Spain, July, 9, 1990).

Persons in rural areas-particularly farmers-will be somewhat less likely than persons in larger communities to seek help for depression (Larson, S. "Help-seeking for depression and alcohol disorders in Nebraska." Report of the Center for Rural Health, Department of Preventive Medicine, University of Nebraska Medical Center, forthcoming).

Rural men will be less likely than rural women to use mental health services and this "gender gap" will be greater than for their urban counterparts (Larson, S. "Help-seeking for depression and alcohol disorders in Nebraska." Report of the Center for Rural Health, Department of Preventive Medicine, University of Nebraska Medical Center, forthcoming).

RESPONSE

There will be an increase in the number of ad-hoc self-help and support groups, and hot lines as the crisis deepens (Wagendfeld, M.O., Murray, J.D., Mohatt, D.F. & DeBruyn, J.C. *Mental Health and Rural America: 1980-1993*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Service, NIH Publication No. 94-3500, 1994).

There will be increased demand on rural mental health programs (Mermelstein, J. and Sundet, P. "Rural community mental health centers' response to the farm crisis." *Human Services in the Rural Environment*, 10: 21-26, 1986).

Effective mental health response to farm and rural stress will be hampered by organizational constraints on community mental health centers (Coulam, R.F., Hargrove, D.S., & Lentner, T.H. "NIMH-funded rural mental health demonstration project: Technical assistance report." *Rural Community Mental Health*, 17(2): 1-16, 1991).

Use of mediation services will have a positive effect on the mental health of farmers and rural residents (Rettig, K.D., Bauer, J.W. & Danes, S.M. "Adjustment of farm families to economic stress: A two year study." [Minnesota Report 220-1990-Item No. AD-MR-3994]. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station, 1990).

Frontline workers supporting farmers and farm families will experience stress and burnout (Hughes, R. "Burnout among county extension staff involved in the rural crisis." *Human Services in the Rural Environment*, 12(1): 23-28, 1988).

*While cited in regard to only one "finding", most of the research referenced here contains multiple findings and conclusions about the farm crisis and mental health. More references can be found in the bibliographies of the references cited here. For a recent compilation of the rural mental health literature in general, see Wagendfeld, M.O., Murray, J.D., Mohatt, D.F. & DeBruyn, J.C. *Mental Health and Rural America: 1980-1993*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Service, NIH Publication No. 94-3500, 1994.

How Long Will This Farm Crisis Last?

William D. Heffernan, Ph. D., Professor of Rural Sociology, University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri

A question often heard in farm communities today is: how long will this farm crisis last and how many farm families will lose their farms this time? The answer is difficult because it involves both problems of definition and problems of predictions.

An agricultural operation qualifies as a farm if it has produced \$1,000 worth of sales per year. Of the two million farms in the country, almost one half have sales of less than \$10,000. Those farms seldom contribute much to the families income. Only about one fourth of the farms produce sales of over \$50,000, but some of the big farms in this category include names like Cargill, Koch Industries the largest and second largest privately held firms in the country. Other names include Tyson, Perdue, ConAgra and Farmland Industries. Averages are meaningless when the incomes and sales of these large firms are averaged with other farms in the over \$50,000 or \$100,000 sales categories. Some of the major structural changes that are beginning to impact agriculture will probably have their greatest impact on the approximately 500,000 farms and their farm families that have gross farm sales of over \$50,000.

Like many other sectors of the economy, merger mania is alive and well in the food sector. The recent proposed purchase of the global grain division of Continental by Cargill means that Cargill will handle 50 percent of the grain that is exchanged between countries. ADM (Archer Daniels Midland) handles about another 30 percent. Measured on a dried weight equivalent, about two-thirds of the food consumed by humans in the world is grain. That suggests that two firms handle about one half of the food that moves on the global market. The processing stages of all the major food commodities are becoming controlled by a few firms. For example, three firms slaughter 81 percent of the beef in this country, and four firms slaughter about one half of the broilers and over one half of the hogs.

The major change today is the combining of the various stages of the food chain by four or five “constellations” of firms into long chains that control the food production, processing and distribution system. They begin with the creation of new genetic stock through the use of biotechnology and go on to the production of the seed. The same four or five global constellations of firms will also produce the pesticides and fertilizer, and will soon begin to make the major decisions with regard to crop production by developing production contracts with farmers. This suggests that the growing crop -- like broilers, turkeys and now hogs, are the property of what is called “integrating firms.” These few firms will also control the processing of the crop. If the processing is for animal feed, the firms will own the feed and animals and hire the growers to provide the labor and some of the capital. The same firms will then process the animals and deliver meat to the supermarkets. Four or five constellations of firms will control the food system from gene to shelf.

One of these constellations of firms emerged this past year when Monsanto and Cargill formed a joint merger. They now control about 85 percent of seed for cotton, and also market grain and oil crop seeds under such brands as Asgrow, Calgene, Dekalb, Holden, and Delta and Pine Land. With the purchase of Delta and Pine Land this past year, the Monsanto-Cargill constellation obtained the terminator gene. This technology enables the company to insert a gene into the seed so that all of the seeds (crop) the farmer raises are sterile. This means the farmer must purchase the seed for next year’s crop from one of these constellations instead of saving some of this year’s seed for next year’s crop. In addition, by combining the gene and seed stages with the processing stages, these constellations control the farmers’ markets. They can specify what criteria the products they purchase must meet and then control who gets that seed and other inputs needed to produce a crop that meets their specifications. The issue becomes market access. Farmers might preserve some of their old seed stock, but the question then is whether they can then find a buyer for the product they produce.

Another constellation emerged when a Swiss firm, Novartis, purchased the seed firm Northrup King. In the past year, Novartis has developed a joint venture with some of the major farmer cooperatives like Land O’Lakes, Countrymark, and GrowMark. These cooperatives also have joint ventures with ADM. ADM owns 13.3% of IBP’s stock. (Iowa Beef Processors is the largest slaughterer of beef and the second largest slaughterer of pork in the US.)

Other constellations are still being formed. Names like Pioneer Hybrid International and Mycogen have access to the biotechnology, and firms like DuPont and Dow have access to pesticides and fertilizers, while firms like ConAgra and Farmland Industries have access to grain and meat processing.

Private discussions in corporate board rooms, USDA buildings and academic halls increasingly suggests that only 20,000 to 30,000 farms are needed in the United States to provide for the global, industrialized food system. If public policy does not intervene to halt this scenario, the only question to be asked is whether this reduction of farmers will be achieved in five or in ten years. The time factor seems to be where the lively discussions occur, not the trend.

Since the 1930s, the number of farms in this country has been in decline. From a mental health concern, the issue is how quickly this decline in numbers will be occurring. Much of the loss in farm numbers has occurred at the retirement of the family farm couple. The parents discouraged their children from returning to the farm. When mom and dad retired, the home farm was combined with a larger farm through ownership or rental arrangements. At times, such as the 1980's and currently in hog production, structural and economic conditions occur so rapidly that "the rug is pulled out from under" the family's farming operation and the farm is lost midway through a couple's career. This is when the family's dreams are shattered and their hopes and self-esteem are lost. This is when they need mental health assistance.

Back to the original question: how long will it last and how many farmers will be lost? What do you consider a farmer? Is Tyson a farmer? Is your neighbor with a large garden a farmer? Is a farmer producing under a production contract a farmer or a hired worker paid on the basis of pieces produced rather than on time spent? Do you think direct marketing and other evolving alternative food systems can save some of the smaller farms? The average age of farmers is in the upper fifties, but that leaves a lot of farm families on those 500,000 farms facing a faster exit than they would plan.

But maybe the price of petroleum will suddenly increase dramatically. (We import one-third of our fruits and vegetables and are a net importer of beef.) Or perhaps the economics of the so-called Asian flu will spread and spread and spread --- then those one and one half million families on small farms may become very popular folks.

The Literature

While the literature is full of studies on the impact the 1980's farm crisis had on the mental health of farmers and rural residents, there is less information available about the many programs developed to respond to these mental health needs. Here is a sampling of the literature that deals with mental health response to the farm crisis.

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Mental Health Response to the Current Rural Economic Crisis

by Joan Blundall, Associate Director, Seasons Center for Community Mental Health, Spencer, Iowa

There are major differences between the farm crisis of the 80's and the current rural duress faced within our communities. This crisis will bring with it waves of predictable challenges for both individuals and institutions. The internal and external dilemmas to be faced are different and many of the "warhorses and experts from the 80's" find themselves 15 years older administering systems which have had to reduce their flexibility rather than increase their caregiving capacity. The current system is woefully underfinanced. In order to respond appropriately and effectively, much needs to be assessed and understood.

Rural people are equipped with an enormous amount of resiliency. Initially, denial is an effective coping strategy which helps rural residents carry on in short-term crisis. This only becomes destructive in chronic conditions and conditions of long duration. When helpers and the systems they represent understand the cultural issues about giving help and the acceptability of receiving help, they are able to unleash efforts which provide effective, low cost, interventions to families in need. Because of the complexity of the conditions faced by rural families, and lack of access to specialized services, a single point of entry such as a hotline does much to assist a person in accessing a multi-disciplinary range of services. Outreach efforts are essential since rural people are used to providing help rather than seeking out and receiving help.

Whenever there is an economic downturn, it is a mistake to define the problem as a farm problem, for this negates the reality of the contagion factor on other sectors of the ag industry, the retail community, and unrelated, legitimate industrial turndowns. In rural America, problems are resolved when they are perceived as a community issue where help from a variety of sectors, whether it be the school, the extension service, the mediation service, the mental health system, the churches, the business community, can be pulled together to create supports and alternatives in tough times.

Those states that instituted a voucher system to provide payment for mental health services in the 80's have been able to provide immediate and sensitive access to rural mental health services. Because the cost of assistance was free, non threatening, confidential and non traditional families have been able to utilize services that were needed in a timely fashion. The voucher system has reduced the stigma of needing to go through formal, bureaucratic systems to meet very personal human needs. Mental health workers who were co-located with extension service, primary care providers, and in church facilities created "friendly access" needed services.

Paraprofessionals, when adequately trained, have been used to dealing with economic crisis, mental health issues and disaster efforts. Their efforts do much to stretch the helping resource base but remain effective only when there is a strong link to professional services which are culturally sensitive. Volunteers without adequate support from professionals find themselves at risk in dealing with potentially severe mental health dilemmas when they become isolated and overburdened by the excessive needs placed upon them. Consultation and education services, as well as formalized links to triage services, are necessary to protect both the helper and the family in jeopardy.

Simultaneous macro level and micro level responses are essential in order to assure that current systems and infrastructures become flexible to respond to human needs. Such efforts must occur across disciplines as well as between institutions. Those who intervene do well to work closely with those who can have an immediate, flexible response, understanding that others will come and assist when their awareness and understanding of the economic crisis and the human condition deepens. The denial of a problem by the government, farm and commodity organizations, agribusinesses, and service institutions only deepens the gap between resource and needs. The blaming of "victims" further mitigates effective response.

Informing and networking with professionals, training a variety of gatekeepers such as hairdressers, bartenders, veterinarians, accountants, clergy, and school teachers opens up the possibility for creating safe places where families can access help. The formal development of anonymous "listening posts", such as hotlines, increases individuals' abilities to deal with that which they think is overwhelming. Making available qualified specialists at minimum or no cost to work with those in need and advocate for assistance is a necessary element of care provision. The development and sharing of

helpful user friendly materials on technical topics such as bankruptcy, appealing to FMHA, job search, resume writing, community resources, and mediation services provide a road map to people who are unused to accessing services.

Helping systems must create new attitudes and new assumptions about service delivery. In order to do so, it is essential that necessary conversations occur. We must, first and foremost, listen to the people whom we serve, whether they be farm families, the makers of swine vaccine, manufacturers of tractors, or cutting edge, yet vulnerable, manufacturers of robotic manipulators. We dare not separate the farmer from community. We dare not separate the community workers from each other. Only by listening to the stories and experiences of our people will we be able to have the necessary components of reflection which will allow us to have critical conversations with ourselves, with our staff and with our community. We must be diligent in recognizing what we know and what we do not know

We must assess our current resource base and use current data to define the ability of our systems to respond. This can only be done by recognizing the limitations which have become part of our systems through fee for service arrangements, state, county and insurance managed care plans, and internal system vulnerability. Only then can we create real alternatives for the people we serve.

What was possible in the 80's is not, at this moment, a current financial reality. The financial margins have atrophied to the point that the mission of helping services has recognizably diminished. With no margins, there is no mission.

Dr. Joanne Mermelstein, University of Missouri-Columbia, School of Social Work, has provided important understandings based upon her research regarding dangers associated with system development and rural economic crisis. Dr. Mermelstein has indicated that "ad hoc" efforts for developing service systems never become integrated into routine operations and frequently any efforts gained are lost when sponsorship ends. Sustaining efforts beyond political terms was difficult in Missouri because new leadership often was unaware of the dilemmas faced by rural helping systems. She points out that without vertical leadership across all service systems, individual members of local communities did not continue their efforts, even though they were needed. Indigenous leadership was not prevalent, but rather professional service coordination was a necessary component of developing stable and flexible services that remained ready to respond to new waves of crisis. She also noted that as rural communities became complex because of the massive influx of newcomer populations, workers became fragmented and isolated and efforts were minimized. The most important lesson of her work, however, is that workers themselves suffered many stress related illnesses, divorce and job losses. In order to survive the demands of necessary outreach work, desertions from programs mounted and remaining providers voiced feelings of abandonment and hopelessness. Within mental health little has been done for systems to take care of their own passionate soldiers.

The Northwest Iowa experience, with use of paraprofessional assistance, has indicated that volunteer workers as well as professional workers are taxed on both personal and professional levels. Volunteers dropped out from the helping system because of the lack of supportive assistance provided to helpers. When supervision was inadequate, paraprofessionals tended to provide supportive services beyond the necessary and helpful effort. This reduced their ability to reach out to new families who were in jeopardy thus minimizing a resource base rather than extending one.

The only credible helping response which will withstand both internal and external stresses is one that has wide and committed community support on both the local and state levels. In order for this to occur, it means that our systems on the micro and macro level have to shift their paradigms regarding necessary relationships and mission. Ongoing, committed mental health consultation support services is a necessary variable to maintain stable systems and stable workers for our citizenry.

How to Reach Farmers With Mental Health Services

By Roger Hannan, Farm Resource Center, Mound City, Illinois

Recently, a friend of mine asked me what I would suggest to a community mental health center administrator who wanted his agency to be more effective in providing service to farm families. I share these thoughts based upon my experience as a community mental health provider, my role as Executive Director of the Farm Resource Center (FRC), and as a person who grew up on the farm.

Statistics generated by FRC over the past two years would imply that there is a need for improvement in the approach to farm families by CMHCs. We found that seventy percent of consumers assessed had no prior experience with counseling and less than half who had prior experience had received it from CMHCs. Additionally, only one third receiving prior counseling from CMHCs indicated satisfaction with that service. What we have determined from these facts is that FRC is reaching individuals who are not being reached by other mental health providers.

First, let me say that it is okay to not understand the farm family culture. Farm families often have trouble understanding why they are the way they are. How do you explain the attachment to the land? How do you make sense out of refusing to give up a career racked with stress, debt, hard work and uncertainty? Does it make sense that Bill and Judy Heffernan in their research would find that individuals were still suffering depression related to leaving the farm up to ten years later? This was especially puzzling since the Heffernans found that many of the individuals they surveyed had a higher standard of living than they had on the farm (Heffernan and Heffernan, 1985). The important thing to note is that cultural sensitivity is very important when working with any group of people.

After we acknowledge the farm family culture then service delivery can be developed taking into account facets of this way of life. Pride and independence often dictate to the farm family a reluctance to seek services, especially mental health services. Outreach which delivers the service on the farm families own turf gains much greater acceptance. This is particularly true if the worker has a true understanding of the farmer's way of life. Outreach has to be more than a storefront office in a smaller town. Outreach should deliver the service in the farm home. This sends a powerful message to the consumer that family is important. Strong family traditions are almost always part of the scenario for farmers. Generally this is a strength.

Farm families respond favorably to services that are very professional and dependable. They expect paperwork to be part of the package. They expect to fill out the same type of forms as they would in an office. They want to participate in developing a plan of action. Time allotted for assessment must be flexible when dealing with farmers. Fifty minute hours don't work. As part of the trust building process the worker must be able to comfortably spend two hours for an assessment if necessary. Scheduling flexibility for follow-up sessions is very important to most farm families. Sessions may occasionally run long.

Although workers must be very professional in the performance of their jobs, they should be able to tolerate walking out to the barn or shop as part of the "get acquainted" ritual during which the farmer evaluates his or her readiness to deal with personal emotional issues.

Mental health centers wishing to connect with the farming community should work at developing a relationship with the Farm Bureau, Cooperative Extension, and other farm groups. Credibility is the name of the game in reaching farmers. Farm groups can open or close their community to service providers. Another tip to gaining credibility is to recruit volunteers, not for direct service but to help spread the word about the service. One third of the referrals resulting in open cases for the Farm Resource Center come from volunteers.

Everything I have suggested are bullet points in the FRC model of service delivery. FRC is accredited by the National Association on Accreditation of Programs for Families and Children, Inc., and offers outreach mental health crisis intervention services currently in three states. Outreach is carried out by workers who are selected in part because of their

understanding of the culture of the target population. Our workers do not have offices and are expected to link closely with the CMHCs. This is accomplished by recruiting “clinical buddies” from within the CMHC staff. This approach helps avoid any appearance of competition between FRC and the CMHCs.

Workers are required to recruit at least one “network council volunteer” for each county they are responsible for. These volunteers become an indigenous support system for the outreach worker and lend their credibility to them. The volunteer becomes an invaluable source for referrals, although they are never involved in the service delivery itself.

Because services are generally delivered in the home the program maintains a family focus. FRC is reluctant to work with individuals in isolation from their natural support system. Situations like domestic violence are obvious exceptions. FRC believes that consumer empowerment occurs when we are invited into the home to help them with a crisis. As part of the empowerment process the consumer is engaged in developing the “action plan” that will be followed during the intervention.

After 13 years of reaching out to farm families, FRC is still learning about delivering mental health services to farm families. We would, however, offer the following advise to CMHCs wanting to serve farm families; take into account the special cultural factors of the farm community and establish program approaches accordingly. It is really no different than approaching a community where the residents are living in low income housing in the part of town where jobs are scarce and low paying. Trust has to be established between the provider and the target group.

Mediation as a Resource

By Mark Galvin, Nebraska Department of Agriculture

Agriculture is again in “crises”. Worldwide production, weather-related disasters, diminished exports, and a host of other factors have led to the lowest commodity prices in more than a decade. With this decline in prices comes the obvious reduction in farm income. This can threaten the financial viability and stability of the farming operation. In addition, reductions in farm income have a domino effect on the entire rural economy and can threaten small town business and agricultural manufacturing. For those of you who were able to watch “The Farmer’s Wife” recently on PBS, you know that these financial difficulties can lead to severe emotional distress for individuals and families.

As a rural mental health professional, you no doubt will have clients in need of counseling because of these difficulties. Without question, an ability to positively address some of the causes of the stress will assist you in helping the farmer deal with its effects. Mediation can do that. Mediation is an important resource for the rural mental health professional.

The agricultural mediation programs were designed to help farmers deal with these issues in a comprehensive manner. Mediation’s strength lies in its flexibility. It can help deal with the business concerns and emotions at the same time. You may be aware of mediation through family court. In many states, mediation is now used to handle divorces, property settlements, and child custody and visitation issues. It is successful in these areas because the issues themselves are not one-dimensional. Our legal process works best when it is resolving one issue - usually a financial one, and where there are black and white, right or wrong answers. With agricultural credit issues, the litigation process is designed to deal only with who owes whom what amount and how are they going to get paid. The mediation process helps people look at a wider range of issues and have them thoroughly discussed by the parties. It is better suited to deal with the financial problems facing farmers because it helps people look at the whole picture and not just one segment of it. It can offer an opportunity to deal with the “people” side of the dispute. In the process, the mediator does not decide the issues for the parties, but encourages them to reach their own mutually agreeable solutions by focusing the parties on their true interests.

Likewise, mental health professionals can be an enormous asset to the mediation process. For it to be successful, all parties must come to the session prepared; financially, legally, and emotionally. Emotional preparation means that the parties are aware of their current situation and the options available to them, know what they want to do, understand the impact of those decisions, and are willing to live with them. It also means they are able to communicate this to family and other interested parties. Mental health professionals can help tremendously in this area. It is not uncommon for a farmer who has not had any counseling to come to a mediation session either unwilling or unable to make a decision. Whether this is caused by a desire to maintain the status quo or by a paralysis brought on by the stress of the situation, the mental health professional can help the farmer sort out the information in front of them, and make a decision based on what’s in their best interest. Without your help, the farmer is often forced to sit back and let others make the life-changing decisions for them.

The value of collaboration between the two professions cannot be overstated in its ability to positively impact our clients. Understanding how they will support each other and further the goals of our clients, will make both of our jobs easier. The first step in this process is an awareness of the other. Mediators, while not in a position to make a diagnosis, must be aware of those situations where mental health issues are a concern and gently make the recommendation that services be requested. Likewise, mental health professionals need to be aware of the mediation programs as a way for their clients to deal with some of the sources of their stress.

Right now, there are agricultural mediation programs in 23 states. There is, however, no “uniform state mediation law”. As such, the program is a little different in each state and has been modified to meet the specific needs of individual states. Mediation can help you make a positive impact assisting farmers and others in resolving their disputed cases. To find out if you have an agricultural mediation program in your state, contact your State Department of Agriculture.

Farm Crisis in Film

There are several films where farm crisis themes are explored. The best and most comprehensive is the 6 hour documentary *The Farmer's Wife* produced by film maker David Sutherland. This film, compared by some to the *Grapes of Wrath*, chronicles the lives of Darrel and Juanita Buschkoetter as they struggle to hold on to their Lawrence, Nebraska farm and their marriage.

In a more scripted but still documentary format is the film *Troublesome Creek* where film maker Jeanne Jordan explores what happens to her parents and their farm in Iowa. There are, of course, the "Hollywood" films that incorporate "farm crisis themes". Films such as *Country*, *Miles From Home*, *Places in the Heart*, and *The River*.

Mental Health and Ministry: The Vital Connection

By Judith Bortner Heffernan, Executive Director, Heartland Network for Town and Rural Ministries, United Methodist Church

The cold, snow-filled wind blowing over me on the front porch of the farmhouse was almost as biting as the comment the farm wife made before inviting me in to the house that February day in 1985. "When I die," she said, "I won't have to go to hell. I've already been there. Do you know how I found out that the bank was foreclosing on our farm? My daughter called the school lunchroom where I work and read the notice of our foreclose sale from the page of the local newspaper!" "You have not yet asked me the right question," said the next-to-last farmer that I was to interview for our study of family farmers that were losing their farms in the crisis of the 1980's. "What question should I have asked you?" This fifty-something, well-educated, former farmer could not form a question. He could only form the answer he wanted me to be sure to record. "I feel God has abandoned me," he quietly said.

The poignant comments of these two individuals illustrate a profound truth that I came to understand as my husband and I researched the experiences of farm families forced from their land and their lives as farmers during the 1980's. The so-called "farm crisis" was originally defined only as an "economic crisis." Later it was clear that it was also a "sociological, psychological and emotional crisis" as well. What we learned from the families we interviewed and the families who told us their own stories after we presented our data in public meetings was this --- the farm crisis of the 1980's was at its core also a deep "spiritual crisis."

Loss of the family farm for some also meant losing the "sacred" place where they encountered God and losing their major way of relating to God with whom they felt they worked in partnership to preserve the land and feed the hungry people of the world. Feeling in one's soul that you have been abandoned by God or that the "last judgment" can hold nothing worse than what you have already endured are profoundly spiritual experiences, even though they may manifest themselves as mental health issues.

These and similar stories shared with us explain how seriously the ordeal of losing the farm can shake the foundations of the religious faith of individuals. The agony and public humiliation of such a loss also often undermines long-held beliefs about the essential fairness and goodness, "the spirit," of democracy and the American experience. In rural culture, deeply held religious beliefs are often intertwined with patriotic beliefs about the spiritual value, as well as the economic and social benefits of such things as hard work, of living a faith-filled, family and community-centered life, of being an independent, upstanding, God-fearing, patriotic American. This complex interplay of beliefs and values made it nearly impossible in the 1980's to respond to hurting rural folks simply as bearers of mental health problems that needed to be fixed, or bearers of spiritual problems in need of special ministry, or bearers of economic problems that financial management specialists could solve.

Surely this is true today also. For this reason, and for others I will note, I think it is essential that mental health professionals and clergy persons intentionally cooperate and even team up to provide a more integrated, and thus more helpful response to rural families struggling to make a life and a living in farming, ranching and rural businesses today.

So, for what other reasons am I arguing that the response of the mental health community and the faith community to the rural crisis of the late 1990's should be vitally connected?

The first reason clearly follows from the above discussion. The pastor is often the first caregiver to recognize or be informed that an individual or a family needs special help, especially with mental health. With the circumstances of most hurting farm families involving the interaction of such dimensions as economics, family relationships, forced career changes, loss of status and "place" in the community and self-esteem issues, as well as a host of other psycho-social-emotional AND spiritual issues, individuals and families affected rarely have any idea where to begin to unravel the mess and what kind of help to seek. Not surprisingly, neither do they have either the physical or the emotional energy needed to clearly assess their situation and determine who could help them develop strategies for coping with it. It is even more unlikely that they would know whom to contact to help them, IF they could overcome the stigma of asking for help. In such cases, it is quite likely that entrée to the helping system might be through the pastor of their church. I should note

that of course not every farm and rural family is affiliated with a congregation. However, farm families are usually so tied to “place” by family ties and the requirements of farming that they are often quite well-integrated into the community through the major social institutions that exist there, especially the church and the school. Even families not connected to a congregation might still enter the mental health system through a clergy referral made by the pastor of a friend or relative who seeks the pastor’s advice in how to help their friend or family member.

If mental health professionals were to see pastors as allies, even “colleagues,” as well as natural caregivers, and would initiate and develop relationships with them, I believe that in many cases significant benefit for the entire community would result. Most seminary-educated clergy that have been ordained in the last 20 years have likely had supervised training in CPE, clinical pastoral education. This training is not at all the equivalent of an MSW or any mental health degree, but it is terrific background on which mental health professionals could build additional sensitivities to the kinds of problems presented by a farm/rural crisis, if they were to initiate some training sessions with local ministers. In the most thinly populated, more isolated rural areas, pastors are often the ONLY professionals in the immediate area with ANY mental health expertise at all. Even bi-vocational, non-seminary trained pastors would most likely welcome improving their skills at spotting problems among their parishioners, enhancing their listening skills, learning how, when and to whom to make a referral when the mental health needs of parishioners get beyond the ability of the pastor to respond. Pastors with whom I have spoken have told me of the terror of knowing they are in “over their heads” in a situation, but knowing they are the only person within miles that has any training relevant to the situation. Remember, pastors have accepted the “call” of God to be in ministry with God’s people and most want to fulfill this calling to the maximum of their ability.

I can envision mental health providers initiating contact with the local ministerial alliance (or even with a few clergy that might be sympathetic) and asking to meet with them to discuss how mental health providers and the faith community together could cooperate to help folks through this difficult time in their lives. I would hope that the mental health agencies could offer to provide one or more training/sharing sessions for pastors that would, among other things 1) help to sharpen the skills noted above, 2) teach what services are available not just in the local area but also in the larger region (some people will gladly drive many miles to seek services where they are not recognized), and 3) identify which pastors would be willing to receive extra training (for example in suicide prevention or in domestic violence intervention) so that they could assist mental health providers in making urgently needed “housecalls” or in doing assessments of persons that may need immediate attention by more highly trained mental health professionals. I can easily envision pastors that have received such training and have begun to develop a respectful relationship with mental health providers being able to offer a “ministry of presence” and an ongoing “listening ear” to farm families that may not need more sophisticated mental health assistance most of the time. When such help is needed, however, the pastor would be able to move the individual or the family into the mental health system with ease.

Admittedly developing this kind of cooperation will require intentionality, patience and commitment, as well as the willingness to jump such structural barriers as payment policies, mission statements and job descriptions of mental health agencies. Pastors usually have more flexibility in defining their work and “ministry” than agency personnel may have. Assuming that it is possible to include education and outreach to hurting rural people in the agenda of an agency, the most important variable that will likely determine the effectiveness of a mental health-ministry connection lies in the quality of the personal relationships that already exist (or can be developed) between pastors and mental health providers. I would only reluctantly refer a hurting person or family to someone (or even to an agency) that I did not know either personally or by reputation to be especially sensitive to the kinds of issues with which farm families are dealing. I would hope that pastors would feel the same way. Given the general reluctance of rural people to seek mental health assistance and the stigma that some attach to it, I would be amazed if such folks would have the emotional energy to locate a second counselor, if the first one they were referred to did not immediately make them feel at ease. The likelihood of folks seeking such help would be greatly enhanced if a pastor could assure them that the person or agency to whom they are being referred is known to the pastor and the pastor can vouch for the integrity, compassion and quality of the assistance available.

The connection between mental health providers and ministers is vital for other reasons. The task before all of us that this ongoing disaster in rural America presents is far beyond the ability and resources of either the faith community or the mental health community to respond to alone. Both groups of caring professionals need each other, probably more than they realize. Each has unique and valuable expertise, resources, networks and access that can be greatly expanded

by teaching, learning and sharing with each other. Churches have facilities in nearly every rural community that could be used as outposts for mental health outreach. We learned in the 1980's that few rural folks will walk into mental health offices. They will seek out such services if they are set up in the University Extension office, the nearest hospital, a vacant classroom in the nearest school, or if "stress management workshops" are held in local church fellowship halls or basements.

It must be said that the mental health of many rural communities is being sorely tested by both long-standing conflicts in communities over such issues as school consolidation, land use, and economic development and more recent conflicts within communities between supporters of large confinement hog and poultry operations and local family farmers. Mainline Protestant denominations, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, have gone on record as being very concerned about the social and economic justice issues underlying the loss of family farms and the "colonization" of rural America. Most have written statements that strongly support rural communities and family farming and raise strong questions about "factory farms" and rural industries that take profits from communities while giving little back to support the infrastructure. These positions can be controversial and clergy are often caught in the middle between the stated policies of the denomination and the local beliefs.

Finally, at its best the church can be the "convener of the community." It can be the safe place where people of faith and professionals of deep commitment and caring can come together to encourage, support and sustain each other for the task at hand --- the exhausting, isolating, challenging, life-saving, and community-building tasks this crisis has laid at the feet of us all.

We're Selling the Farm, Not the Memories

By ART HOVEY Lincoln Journal Star

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I took down the homestead certificate that Teddy Roosevelt signed way back when. Enough of this, I kept saying to myself, as I stuffed it in an envelope and mailed it to the people who had sent me a check. We're going to sell this farm. And so we have, my schoolteacher brother and I. It has nothing to do with the latest round of ruination for agriculture. It has nothing to do with any desires to do Europe or to purchase BMWs.

It has everything to do with the fact that it's time. It's just time.

We're not going to brag about the price, because the truth is there's nothing to brag about. We're talking about a few acres of South Dakota sand and rocks, potholes and pocket gophers. We're talking about enough disappointment to fill up that sagging old silo that said "Hovey & Sons" on the side.

There's one thing my brother is hoping. Maybe signing his name on all those transaction papers will separate him from the ghosts, including the ghost of a father who died knowing that his would be the last generation to farm.

There's one thing I'm hoping. Maybe I can come away from this as the other son, the daydreamer never destined to farm, without losing my sense of place.

It took me 20 years, a bashful, befuddled farm-chore boy, to remember which way you turn the burr on the bolt to get it loose. I never could focus on keeping the tractor that was supposed to be going south from drifting southeast.

I always loved this farm, but farming -- as defined by green thumbs and greasy mechanical prowess -- never loved me. Yet somehow, in my earliest years, my mind starting taking these pictures of things that I could never forget.

I swear that I can remember the flickering reflections of flames on the inside walls of our house that night our first barn burned down when I was 1.

I remember hurrying away from the Christmas tree and into the kitchen and seeing our debt-laden father hunched over at the kitchen table with his head in his hands and his eyes streaming tears. I remember the fiercely protective look on our mother's

face as she hovered over him, and the way she silently shooed me out of the room.

I remember better times, too. Long, daydreaming trips to the far end of the pasture to retrieve that ponderous Holstein. With the setting sun at my back, I was Mickey Mantle gunning down runners with my rock/baseball. I was Zorro slashing at the heads of thistle assailants with my sword/stick. I was Dion wowing the ladies with my rendition of "Runaround Sue."

My brother, the dutiful and chosen son, drove the tractor at age 6 -- for business, not pleasure. As he approached adulthood, he could no longer shut out thoughts about what he didn't want to do with the rest of his life. Guilt often rode beside him on that tractor.

Let that go, bro.

He and I discuss sale details now and battle our mutual ambivalence over the phone. We marvel at the knots that still keep us tied to this obscure, preinterstate place where we tried our best to grow up.

We sold the fading white farmhouse and the barn and the outbuildings as an acreage years ago, reducing ourselves to owning dirt and grass. We thought that would be our final emotional step.

But Rick and Wanda, who bought the farmstead and now the farm, kept inviting us back to show us how they were resurrecting the place.

They brought us back to much more, to a soft, sweet kind of an ache, to a communion with things so close to lost but never quite lost, at the core of farm kids' beings.

Farm Crisis & Mental Health Summit: A Summary of Findings

By Peter G. Beeson, Nebraska Health & Human Services

In Omaha, Nebraska on December 10, 1998, E. Benjamin Nelson, Governor of the State of Nebraska, convened a national summit on the “Farm Crisis and Mental Health: Then & Now.”

Governor E. Benjamin Nelson

This summit was co-sponsored by the State of Nebraska, the Center for Mental Health Services, and the National Association for Rural Mental Health and organized by Peter Beeson and Dennis Mohatt. It was designed to review what was learned in the 1980s and make recommendations about how those learnings might be applied to the emerging farm crisis today. Nearly one hundred people from across the country who had been active in the 1980s and/or who are currently involved with farm and mental health issues attended. Among those in attendance were representatives from national organizations such as the National Mental Health Association, the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, and the Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network, as well as a variety of state and local agencies and organizations. Finally, the following Nebraska farm families, organized and hosted by Tammy and Brian Zimmerman, were active participants: Carlyn and Rory Hughbanks, Linda and Norm Husa, Joleen and Stewart Huneke, and Karen and Orlalee Zimmerman. Special thanks are due to Anne Hackbart, Connie Johnson, Maria Ramos, and Tammy Zimmerman for logistical and administrative support.

“...Listen, we’ve been there, done this before. Let’s not wait until it happens and then we try and react. Let’s try and get out front on this one this time and use the experiences and knowledge that we have.”

Jessie Rasmussen, Director NE Health and Human Services

This day and a half summit included two major panel presentations. The first panel focused on the impact of the farm crisis on the mental health of farmers and rural residents. This panel was moderated by Peter Beeson, Nebraska Health & Human Services, and included David Johnson, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Bill Heffernan, University of Missouri-Columbia; Dan Hoyt, Iowa State University; Rick Peterson, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; Michael Rosmann, University of Iowa; and Roger Williams, University of Wisconsin-Madison. The second panel focused on what did and didn’t work in responding to mental health needs of farmers and rural residents. That panel was moderated by Dennis Mohatt, Nebraska Health and Human Services, and included Mollie Anderson, Nebraska State Personnel; Joan Blundall, Seasons Center for Community Mental Health; Rev. Judith Dye, United Methodist Church; Roger Hannan, Farm Resource Center; Judy Heffernan, Heartland Network for Town & Rural Ministries; Jim Meek, Iowa State University Extension; and Joanne Mermelstein, University of Missouri-Columbia.

“The other issue is that last year’s balanced budget amendment radically changed several mechanisms for Medicare reimbursement to rural hospitals and home health agencies. And we’ve seen across rural America more and more hospitals find themselves unable to sustain operations and are moving to either significantly downsize or go out of business. We’ve had several home health agencies in Nebraska and elsewhere across rural America go out of business. We talk here about the off-farm income, well oftentimes hospitals and other health care providers are major sources of off-farm income. And so that’s a corresponding economic hit that’s going on out there that a lot of folks are not aware of. That adds to the stress, because the two places that farm families most often turn to for help are their family physician or their minister. And if you begin to have hospitals close, there goes the family physician.”

Dennis Mohatt, Deputy Director , NE Health and Human Services

In addition to the panel presentations: (1) Roy Frederick, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, provided a brief overview of the current situation with the agricultural economy; (2) Joanne Komenda, Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska, and

Darrel and Juanita Buschkoetter of Lawrence, Nebraska (subjects of the film “The Farmer’s Wife”) presented a personal perspective on the value of making mental health services accessible to farmers and farm families; and (3) David and Nancy Sutherland, producers of the film “The Farmer’s Wife,” provided an “outsider’s perspective.” There was also a working lunch where participants heard from and visited with Nebraska farm families.

“And, of course, the worst falling out is in the hog sector, 65 percent less in terms of price now than a year ago at this time.”

Roy Frederick, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

The majority of summit time, however, was spent in small groups working on questions such as: What were the major Farm Crisis and Mental Health Learnings from the 1980s? How is the situation today different from and/or similar to the situation in the 1980s? What were the most effective responses to mental health needs in the 1980s and what were the key characteristics of those responses? What are the priority recommendations regarding the Farm Crisis and Mental Health today?

“What’s happening here is that things are becoming more unpredictable, not only in urban America, but also rural America. People can work the way they always worked and not have the consequences of that work. That’s true in rural areas, that’s true in health care, that’s true in the urban economy....”

Ronald Manderscheid, Center for Mental Health Services

What follows is a summary of the results of the Summit. A great deal of information was generated by Summit participants and this represents only the essence of the group’s findings. Any errors of omission or commission are the sole responsibility of the author.

“The National Association for Rural Mental Health has been intimately involved over the past 25 years in agriculture related issues and mental health. During the farm crisis of the 1980s, the association was privileged to be at the table with federal and state policy makers as the farm crisis issues were debated and resources allocated.”

Damian Kirwan, President, National Association for Rural Mental Health, Learnings from the 1980s

“And one of the dilemmas that I think we face today is that we have learned much from the ‘80s and we know what works, and we can be enormously proud. I know of the hundreds of families that I worked with in the ‘80s and I can think of only seven tragedies. To me that means endurance and stamina. It means things can happen. But our predictive ability is different now, and this crisis is going to hit us in ways that it did not hit us in the ‘80s.”

Joan Blundall, Seasons Center for Community Mental Health

The 1980s taught us a lot about the Farm Crisis and Mental Health. We learned that there was (is) a direct relationship between the rural economy and the mental health of farmers and rural residents. We saw study after study document the rise in rates of depression related to farm stress. Front-line workers and researchers documented a wide variety of other mental health related problems such as anxiety, substance abuse, marital conflict, domestic violence, divorce, youth conduct disorders, suicide, etc. Similarities have been drawn between the post-traumatic stress syndrome seen in Vietnam War Veterans and what happened to farmers in the 1980s.

These problems were not limited to farmers. Small town residents experienced similar mental health problems and there is some indication of “collective depression” affecting entire communities. While the mental health of farmers tended to improve with improvements in the farm economy, that was not necessarily the case for small town residents where blows to the local economy appeared more permanent. Such high levels of depression and anxiety often prevented farmers from effectively seeking or using financial counseling, career counseling, and job retraining programs.

“The mental health of farmers responds to changing economic conditions. Depression levels among farmers increased between 1981 and 1986 but went down again in 1989.”

David Johnson, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

“What I’d like to say is that farming not only is the most dangerous occupation physically in terms of injuries and deaths per 100,000, but I would suggest that it’s probably also the most dangerous psychologically speaking. The stress levels on the farm, as we’ve been hearing, are so high that we are now seeing an increase again in mental health symptoms. We did research in 1985 through ‘87 with 122 families who were what we would call victims of the farm economic crisis. We followed these families for several years to understand their presenting circumstances and how they adjusted to change over a number of years. We found that the primary stressors on these families were not just economic, but they were social. In 1950 for every farmer, there was one person in agribusiness. To put this in context, for every 400 users of medical services, there’s one physician or provider. For every 250 users of legal services, there’s an attorney. One farm operation feeds 800 mouths around the world. So what we have is a pool of highly motivated, extremely hard working people who are quite resilient, but the stress of the situation is so overwhelming that most persons find it difficult to continue on.”

Mike Rosmann, Psychologist and farmer - Harlan, Iowa

Mental health professionals and others learned that farming is not just an occupation or a job. Farming and being a farmer and owning a family farm is a very complex psychological, sociological, and, some would say, spiritual connection. Family farming is a way of life, a profession, a family heritage, a covenant with the land, and a commitment to future generations. Farmers and farm families will go to great lengths to hold on to the family farm and to farming as a way of life. Often farms are maintained through heroic efforts by holding multiple off-farm jobs and dramatic reductions in expenses on necessities such as food, doctor visits, health insurance, clothing, etc. Even those who give up farming as their primary source of income often still maintain some farming operations and some tie to the land. Loss of the family farm is akin to losing a family member, a loved one. Some describe it as losing part of one’s soul, one’s connection to God. Although it is a loss that proceeds through fairly predictable stages of grief, it is one that is rarely completely resolved. In a very real sense, “once a farmer, always a farmer.” The negative effects of farm loss on individuals and families can last for years. Rural families facing economic down turns tended to incur symptoms of mental disorder prior to the loss of their economic stability because of “the anticipatory demise” of impending losses. Farmers and farm families who leave the farm often have additional stress and difficulty adjusting to a new way of life.

“They’ll give their whole heart and soul to make it survive. For me, working in town doesn’t come from the heart like farming. Once you take that away, once people farm only for the business part, we’re going to be in trouble.”

Darrel Buschkoetter, Lawrence, Nebraska

“...I was walking on the land of a farm of a friend of mine with his dog, and all of a sudden I was struck in the pit of my stomach by the familiarity of walking on the land, and being out where I could see 180 degrees of sky. And it hit me, this is what farmers miss. This is a connection with the Almighty. This is the connection with our spirit. It isn’t just about land ownership. It isn’t just about way of life, although those are significant. It’s also about where do we find our God? Where do we find our God?”

Rev. Judith Dye, Pastor United Methodist Church, Blue Springs, NE

Too often the farm crisis broke up families and split communities. While there was strong evidence that social support mediated the effects of farm stress, farmers were less able than their small town counterparts to make use of their social support networks. All too frequently, our image of rural communities as tight knit and mutually supportive havens proved to be a myth. Many farm families in crisis were isolated; some withdrew out of shame or fear while others were simply abandoned by neighbors and local social institutions. Many of the community social institutions (e.g., churches and schools) were divided and, too often, failed to take positive action. The victims of the crisis were often blamed for their own plight. They were characterized as bad managers, as having made poor business decisions, or spending too much

on themselves. The crisis produced a wealth of family conflict; both within farm families (between husbands and wives, children and parents, and brothers and sisters) and between the farm family members and their extended family (parents, in-laws, uncles, cousins, etc.). The economic threat to farming was also a threat to social institutions. Banks failed, schools consolidated, churches closed, local and regional voluntary associations went under, local governments struggled, and families broke up. There were, however, many churches, schools, and other organizations that offered support and assistance to farmers and farm families even with very limited resources.

“Persons experiencing severe economic distress who had the strongest social support networks available to them were less likely to develop depressive symptoms. But an important thing is the effect of these social support networks appeared to be strongest in the moderate sized rural communities and relatively weak among farmers. That is, having strong social support did not have the same kind of effect among farmers as it did among other people. This suggests that persons in farm households do not use the social support networks available to them as effectively as people in towns to lessen the psychological consequences of economic distress...”

David Johnson, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Fortunately, many who needed help found it. On the economic front, mediation often proved to be a vehicle to resolve credit disputes and reduce farm stress. Mediation was also a useful tool in resolving family disputes and inter-generational conflict. People reached out to each other and formed support groups. Innovative programs were developed to make mental health and other services accessible and acceptable to farm families. Farm Crisis Hot Lines sprung up and were effective. The use of paid and volunteer farm families as paraprofessional mental health outreach workers proved to be very effective. Many programs designed to provide employment, educational, legal, or social services to farmers and farm families learned the value and the necessity of linking with mental health services. Some innovative programs actually located mental health counselors in primary care physician offices, farmer-in-transition programs, extension offices and schools. Front line workers such as extension agents, bankers, veterinarians, food pantry workers, clergy, and others became adept at crisis intervention and developed essential referral and supportive relationships with the mental health system. One state developed a voucher program where front line workers were provided training in mental health referral and given vouchers (good for up to eight visits for free mental health counseling) to hand out to farmers and rural residents.

“We see that among people who sought formal mental health care - and we didn’t really have very good measures of this so it’s a pretty broad definition - if they went to talk to somebody, we see evidence of decreased symptoms of depression. We also see a more positive attitude about seeking mental health care in the future.”

Dan Hoyt, Iowa State University

The most effective community mental health centers were those willing to abandon traditional treatment approaches and work outside of bureaucratic constraints. Returning to old models of consultation and education allowed some mental health centers to leverage their scarce resources and create a network of mental health response through other organizations and volunteers. Too often, however, the traditional mental health system continued in denial and avoidance, serving only the clients that showed up at their door. The stigma of seeking help for mental health services combined with the independent, self-reliant nature of farmers prevented many from seeking the help they needed. Not surprisingly, mental health workers who understood farming and the farm culture had the easiest time establishing trust and maintaining a good therapeutic relationship with farmers and farm families. Mental health professionals soon learned that in many cases the presenting problem was not the only or, even, the most important issue.

“Going fairly quickly then to some things that we think didn’t work as well: To expect farm and rural families to come directly for services without any kind of trust being developed in a time and in a situation when they’re under fairly severe stress, when they may be practically immobilized and may not be able to even make good, rational decisions for the day-to-day things they have to deal with. Expecting them to understand the systems and get the kinds of services they need is probably too high an expectation. The thought or idea that we can separate economic stress and recovery from emotional

stress and recovery. When that way of life is threatened, our whole being, our whole body is threatened, and we cannot go through rational decision-making processes the same way we would in another kind of setting, and we can't separate the two."

Jim Meek, Iowa State University, Coop Extension Service

Grass roots organizations, such as the Rural Family Issues Coalition, demonstrated that small groups of committed individuals, not associated with any professional or political organization, have great credibility with national policy makers and can be successful in getting new legislation and appropriations enacted to respond to local mental health needs.

"We don't have recognition by the public and the media of what's going on now, and that contributes to the isolation of the farmers and to our need to bring this to the attention of the general public."

Mike Rosmann, Psychologist and farmer - Harlan, Iowa

Then & Now: Similarities and Differences

"For some of us, it's family reunion time, and we've quickly added, 'Why are we meeting like this again?' As precious as so many of these folks have become to me over the years and long lasting friendships have developed, I don't notice that any of us are eager to launch into this one more time. We remember how it changed our lives in the 1980s, and we don't look forward to the agony of the 1990s."

Judy Heffernan, Heartland Network for Town & Rural Ministries

"Women are finally getting some of the credit for farming, which is good. My wife plays a real big part in our farming. Without her there is no way we'd have survived this. My mother worked all her life, too, but she didn't get a lot of credit. It's time they were applauded for it."

Darrel Buschkoetter, Lawrence, Nebraska

The Crisis

Comparing the 1980s to today, there is agreement that we are entering another farm crisis that is economic in nature. North Dakota's farm income dropped 90 percent between 1996 to 1997. Nebraska farm income decreased 40 percent from 1997 to 1998; other states have posted similar losses. A host of market changes have produced dramatic reductions in the demand, and consequently the price, for grain and livestock. Weather-related disasters in the south and southwest have put many farmers at risk. The loss of family farms continues, with increased rapidity and intensity. Oklahoma's Department of Agriculture predicts that 30 percent of the state's farmers and ranchers will be out of business by the Spring of 1999. Many believe this "crisis" could become worse than the one in the 1980s.

While it is still costing farmers more to produce than they are realizing in earnings, the causes of today's economic woes are different than the situation in the 1980s. In the 1980s many people blamed lenders while today people tend to blame the big agribusiness corporations. As was the case in the 1980s, there is still resentment regarding the government. Today farmers are trying to cope in ways similar to the 1980s, such as giving up health insurance and cutting back on living expenses. Farmers continue to become more and more a disenfranchised minority.

There are, however, a number of important differences with the current situation. Today there is increased credit card debt among farmers; fewer farm subsidies (i.e., Freedom to Farm Act); greater dependence on and impact from the international market place; increased absentee land ownership; more movement of food processing giants into production agriculture; fewer locally owned banks; greater consolidation in the food processing industry; less national awareness of the crisis; greater isolation (fewer farmers-more miles between farms); less direct assistance available; and more of a

“dog-eat-dog” mentality among farmers. In addition, today in rural manufacturing there are reductions in the workforce, plant closings, and plant relocations. This is especially difficult because many of the employees of these factories are people who lost their farms in the 1980s. Many of the “main street” businesses and services that were open in the 1980s are “out-of-business” today. Financial institutions appear to be less at risk in today’s crisis and appear much less willing to stick with farmers who are struggling financially.

“For example, to give you some idea, think about it in your own terms. Nebraska’s farm income was down 40 percent in 1997 over 1996. How many here would be able to get up bright-eyed and cheery and feel real good about everything in the morning if your income was suddenly down 40 percent, not your expenses, but your income.”

Governor E. Benjamin Nelson, State of Nebraska

“I’m dealing as much with plant closings and layoffs because of the Third World problems. The folks that are employed in those industries, many of them are farm families. They took those jobs as a way of getting through the ‘80s.”

Joan Blundall, Seasons Center for Community Mental Health

“Whether you have pro or con feelings about the production of tobacco, the tobacco settlement is going to have a major impact on farm families in eastern states.”

Rick Peterson, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University

Farmers:

Farmers and farm families are still the proud, good, independent, and resilient people that they’ve always been. They continue to have a strong commitment to the land and desire to remain as family farmers. Farmers still feel they do not have a voice and have little control over what is happening to them. Those who are having trouble still have a tendency to deny the harsh realities and to blame themselves for their circumstances. There is still a reluctance on the part of farmers to let others know they’re having financial trouble for fear the “word” will “get out” and they will suffer negative consequences like being denied credit or having someone try to “steal” their lease. The experience of farm stress is the same as before and results in the same set of problems (depression, anxiety, stress-related health problems, domestic abuse, divorce, kids acting out, substance abuse, farm accidents, inter-generational conflict and so on). The loss of the family farm is as traumatic and tragic as it has always been. It is more than a “failure,” it’s more like losing part of your soul. Farm children continue to be the invisible victims of the farm crisis. They experience the stresses of the situation and, for a number of them, see their future threatened. There is more off-farm employment but even with this added income many farm families still have inadequate family financing. As was the case in the 1980s, farmers feel as though they have little or no voice in creating their own present and future alternatives.

Today farm families and communities are more connected electronically and more technologically sophisticated than they were in the 1980s. Farming today is more of a profession; more farmers are college educated. Farmers are more likely to recognize mental health problems as a legitimate concern and more likely to encourage others to seek help. Farmers, however, appear to be as reluctant as ever to seek help themselves. Farm wives continue to be the primary catalysts for seeking mental health services, but today they are more likely to leave rather than “stick it out.” There are, however, disturbing signs which indicate a decline in the resilience of rural people and communities as well as an increasing demoralization of rural populations. Many farm families have weakened emotional reserves because this is the second time they have faced a “farm crisis.”

“For me, one of the lowest points came when I couldn’t feed my three girls. I became really creative in disguising meals made out of nothing, and it finally got to the point where we couldn’t do that. I came to realize there is no shame in asking for help.”

Juanita Buschkoetter, Lawrence, Nebraska

“One of the things we found in the 1980s is that a lot of the farm families that really got in difficulty were those that did not have adequate insurance. Then someone within that family would have a health problem, and so in addition to everything else that was going on in agriculture, the bottom just really dropped out in a hurry.”

Roy Frederick, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Communities:

The economic crisis of today, as yesterday, is more than a farm crisis; it is a rural crisis, a community crisis, a family crisis, and a chronic problem for many rural communities. Schools and churches continue to be important resources, but these social institutions have been weakened and are not viable in a number of rural communities. Rural communities today are experiencing more “big city” problems (e.g., crime, gangs, meth labs), are less safe, and at times risky environments for mental health outreach workers. Rural communities have seen an increase in the amount and varieties of substance abuse and with that, an increase in the prevalence of dual diagnosis. Some rural communities are considerably more diverse today with a variety of ethnic populations and languages spoken. Antigovernment (e.g., militia) activity is still present, but today these groups enjoy greater sympathy in rural communities. However, today’s rural communities have been quicker to recognize the emerging crisis and there appears to be greater awareness of mental health problems and increased receptivity to mental health services. On the other hand, the overall helping infrastructure is far more limited than it was in the 1980s in both formal and informal networks.

“It’s been more of a chronic situation than it has been a crisis. It’s not just a farm crisis that’s happening in rural communities right now. It’s a series of events that come together at the same point in time that result in some significant mental health problems in rural communities. It’s what one person in our state has referred to as kind of a spiraling down over a period of time. It’s the farm crisis. It’s the business failures on Main Street, the impact of urban malls and shopping national chains, the shift in shopping allegiances and so forth. It’s really kind of a spiraling down, and it’s a total impact on the entire community, not just farm families, but the entire community with rural residents. And any kind of revitalization needs to be community-wide, not just dealing with farm families, but community-wide.”

Roger Williams, University of Wisconsin-Madison

“...we’re seeing a real crisis in our religious community in Iowa as well because we’re losing rural churches very rapidly. And so those folks who are working in the religious community either haven’t been there very long and aren’t very well entrenched in the community, or they themselves are wondering, ‘how will my future fit into this community and what will I be doing because my church may not be on very solid ground in terms of survival and existence.’”

Jim Meek, Iowa State University Coop Extension Service

“We see much of the immediate short-term responses to economic stress evidenced in farm families. In the longer term, when those immediate economic conditions have receded somewhat, we see some evidence of a more persistent, longer-term impact in the rural communities, particularly in terms of the farm crisis and a loss of businesses in rural communities and so on, that there’s a lot of evidence that people in the rural towns have not rebounded in the same way that some of the farm householders have after the farm crisis.”

Dan Hoyt, Iowa State University

The Mental Health System:

Kansas has counted 293 farm-related suicides since 1986, Oklahoma— —500. Calls to Wisconsin's Farm Crisis Hot Line numbered around 2,000 per year before 1996 and are now averaging over 7,000 per year. Calls to Nebraska's Rural Response Hot Line have doubled since July. A regional mental health center in Northwest Iowa reports a tripling of crisis calls from farm families to its Triage Department. A University of Iowa study, currently in progress, indicates depression and stress concerns so high that the researchers have met with local mental health authorities to define intervention strategies that can take place during the study despite the fact that such interventions may affect some of the strength of their research findings.

There are still too few rural mental health professionals and dollars to meet the needs. There are, however, a number of mental health professionals and other care-givers who have experience working with distressed farm families and some of the programs developed in the 1980s are still operating. Today there is a greater awareness of the mental health consequences of prolonged financial distress. However, there are also many 1980s "farm crisis-mental health programs" that have been eliminated or severely cut back. Many of the "old guard" have moved on, and, among those that are left, there is a sense of anger that "we are going through this again." Today mental health services are even less available and accessible than they were in the 1980s. And for state supported mental health programs there is an increased focus and priority for serving the serious and persistently mentally ill population with less national, state, and local attention to the types of mental health need arising from the farm crisis. Furthermore, with today's reimbursement systems, local mental health programs have less flexibility to respond to mental health needs that are the result of the farm crisis. There are also fewer resources available to support mental health consultation and education services. Stigma regarding seeking help for mental health problems remains a barrier. Finally, traditional models of mental health service are still not appropriate for responding to the needs of farmers. There is a need to reach out to farmers and rural residents, to network with other providers, and to train front line workers (e.g., extension agents). People who have regular contact with farmers (e.g., ministers, extension agents, lenders, veterinarians) continue to be valuable resources for crisis intervention and mental health referral.

"...we found particularly high levels of stigma towards mental health care among rural males and that they are less likely as a result of the stigma and the concerns about mental health care to seek normal mental health care services."

Dan Hoyt, Iowa State University

"...I would say that the resource base is probably 30 percent what it was in the '80s, and the hope for funding is nonexistent. Those providers that remain are at risk. Much of my time is spent dealing with church conflict, marital discord among clergy. It's also the extension workers I work with currently that have had staff layoffs, and they have much more to do with less time to do it. They give information sometimes rather than process it, except for people that have specific crisis issues, but you lose the initial prevention element."

Joan Blundall, Seasons Center for Community Mental Health

"The final lesson learned, seven to nine continuous years of helping and living in an environment of pervasive community demoralization and wave upon wave of tragedy and sadness took a heavy toll on the front line human service providers. Many moved geographically to get away from the farm crisis, despite financial and career loss. Some lost human service careers entirely or redirected their attention to some other endeavor. In my small project of only about 15 to 17 core people, three of them died at relatively young ages, in their 40s of what colleagues viewed as stress-compounded illnesses. Divorce was common among human service council providers as the stressors multiplied. Finally, by 1991, which is three years before we quit, of 17 ad hoc farm helping groups, only this project and one other remained in Missouri. As the desertions of programs and people mounted, remaining providers voiced feelings of abandonment and hopelessness. We in mental health have not taken very good care of our own."

Joanne Mermelstein, University of Missouri-Columbia

The Farmer's Wife

The overwhelming response to the film, *The Farmer's Wife*, was cited as evidence that people across the country can identify with the very human issues and costs associated with farm stress and respond sympathetically to the needs of farmers and rural residents. The national showing of this film garnered an average rating 55 percent higher than the Public Broadcasting System's September average. Fifteen to eighteen million viewers tuned into the mini-series. It is the only show in the history of PBS in which the ratings rose every 15 minutes, over three nights. Over 800,000 visits to the PBS-Frontline website (specifically about *The Farmer's Wife*) and over 14,000 e-mail messages, in addition to the thousands of letters and faxes, demonstrate that while people may not understand the economic and political issues that surround the family farm, they can clearly identify with and care about the human condition of farm families.

"A lot of people took a lot of different messages from the film. If they are having marriage or financial problems or if they suffered a catastrophe like losing a child, they had different responses."

Darrel Buschkoetter, Lawrence, Nebraska

"We had no clue it would be this big. I thought if one family can see they're not alone, it will have been worth it. And this has touched so many people. We've had calls from every state almost-over 200 phone calls. People said we've renewed their faith and dreams again. I never saw that as I was watching the film, but so many people have said that, and it's just been amazing. We had a small-businessman say he could relate to it. Today a woman called. She was crying. Her father-in-law farms and her husband works for him, and she said that after watching the film, she and her husband were going to their first marriage counseling session."

Juanita Buschkoetter, Lawrence, Nebraska

Elements of Successful Mental Health Responses

Most Summit participants were familiar with one or more programs that they believed offered an effective response to the mental health problems associated with the farm crisis. Some of the notable programs that were mentioned often were the Counseling, Outreach, & Mental Health Training (COMHT) program from Nebraska, the Stress Country Style program from Illinois, and the Harvest of Hope program and Wisconsin Farm Center from Wisconsin.

"As part of Nebraska's response to the farm crisis, we developed the Counseling, Outreach, and Mental Health Training (COMHT) program. This program included a voucher program for free mental health services. Darrel and Juanita Buschkoetter signed up to work for COMHT as community-based field staff who would make home visits to farm families experiencing distress. This is where I got better acquainted with them. They not only encouraged others to try mental health counseling through our program, but found the program beneficial for help dealing with their own struggles. Juanita refers to the COMHT program in the film and talks about the impact it made on their situation and bemoans the end of the program due to lack of funding. I have often given credit to this program for introducing them to the concept of counseling. When their personal circumstances became more intense several years later, the idea of getting back into counseling was easier to accept. The COMHT program is a shining example of how a modest amount of money dedicated to a program that works made a significant difference in the outcome of this family's situation."

Joanne Komenda, Nebraska Farm Mediation Service Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska

These "successful programs" tended to have similar themes that were the underpinnings of their structure and strategies. While these themes may seem obvious, they are not always practiced or fully implemented by traditional mental health providers. The themes are, not surprisingly, consistent with the APPLE principles which were originally developed by the Rural Family Issues Coalition when lobbying Congress during the 1980s for increased attention to rural mental health needs. It should be noted that these principles could be applied to any mental health outreach effort. They are the underpinnings of cultural competence and program access regardless of the target population. The APPLE principles are

Accessible

Most of the successful farm crisis and mental health programs had a strong emphasis on accessibility. Toll free, 24 hour hotlines and aggressive outreach were the cornerstones of many successful programs. For example, in Stress Country Style, outreach workers worked out of their cars being dispatched directly to the farm by hotline operators. Flexible hours were another key component of accessibility; programs and professionals did not limit visits to a “50 minute” hour or an 8 to 5 time slot. Co-location was another strategy of accessibility. Some programs tried locating mental health staff in primary care clinics, extension offices, legal aid offices, community colleges, and social services agencies. Some even tried a “one-stop shopping” approach such as the “Ag Action Centers” in Nebraska where a variety of services were accessed via community colleges. Free or low cost mental health services were also a means to enhance accessibility. Farmers about to “go under” financially have a very hard time justifying spending money on counseling. One program distributed vouchers for free mental health services. Another vehicle to improve accessibility was to label the services something other than mental health. Some programs used stress counseling or stress management as titles.

“...the first and most important thing we offered was outreach. And what we did was we hired farmers who could speak to them and who were not from government. In fact, we kept all the government people in the background, and we sent them to the communities to hold meetings and to begin to assess what were their needs. So that was the most important thing I would say that we did. Most important thing I would recommend you do again is hire farmers and farm wives to be outreach.”

Mollie Anderson, Director Nebraska State Personnel

“We marketed our mental health services as stress management or stress counseling, and that got us around some of the stigmas. Also, by going directly to the home, or wherever this consumer wanted to be seen, we were providing that service and empowering that consumer at the same time. When you knock on their door and they invite you in, they’ve made an empowered decision. It may be the only one they’ve had any opportunity to make in the past several months, but they’ve made an empowered decision to invite you in, and that begins that process of putting some hope at the end of the tunnel.”

Roger Hannan, Farm Resource Center - Illinois

Personal

Many successful programs emphasized a personal touch and personal empowerment. They were set up to meet the farmer on his/her own terms and give the farmer as much control over the situation as possible. Outreach workers were sent out to farms, and workers often got acquainted with farmers at their kitchen table or on walks out to the barn. The COMHT program passed out vouchers for free mental health services, allowing farmers a choice of where and when they wanted to get the help they needed. All programs emphasized taking the time to build trust and establish a good relationship. Successful programs emphasize working with the whole family, including the extended family if warranted. Personal meant relating to the farmer as a whole person, not just within the narrow confines of a therapist/client relationship.

“We also found that non-mental health case management as a tool to gain the confidence of the consumer was absolutely essential. If the person didn’t have food in the ice box or the pantry, our first goal was to get food into that home. That was a case management activity that was very important to us. If the family was suffering some serious medical problem and was having difficulty getting the medical service because of their financial status or needed medication, we worked on that. Then we worked on the mental health issues.”

Roger Hannan, Farm Resource Center - Illinois

Professional

All of the successful programs emphasized maintaining the highest professional standards. There was a strong emphasis on confidentiality and ensuring that volunteers and outreach workers were adequately trained and provided with professional backup. Further, providing professional mental health consultation and education was seen as a key vehicle through which to strategically leverage scarce mental health resources. Finally, these programs ensured that persons with mental disorders or high suicidal risk got professional mental health services quickly.

“We have recruited as additional volunteers clinical buddies from within the community mental health system to expedite our linkage back to that system when there are serious mental health issues that have to be dealt with. If someone is suicidal or is in some serious mental health issue, we don’t compete with the mental health system. We see ourselves as a conduit to get these people in.”

Roger Hannan, Farm Resource Center - Illinois

Linked

The response to the needs of farmers and rural residents requires a collaborative effort. Farmers and others may need help in any number of areas: financial counseling, emergency assistance, spiritual guidance, legal advice, food stamps, health care, career counseling, mediation, job retraining, mental health services, crisis intervention, stress management, support, child care, and other forms of assistance. A collaborative response both at the state and local level is important. A number of the successful programs involved state and local Farm Crisis Councils where organizational and agency representatives worked together to plan and implement a comprehensive and integrated response to the Farm Crisis. Collaboration is also a key theme at the practitioner level. Mental health professionals need good working relationships with ministers, social service workers, extension agents, food pantry workers, legal aid lawyers, mediators, etc. Mental health outreach workers and volunteers need backup and referral relationships with mental health professionals or “clinical buddies” as one program calls them. Primary care providers need sound linkages to mental health providers and farm mediation workers need to be able to work jointly with mental health professionals.

“We also found that as a part of this process coalition building was absolutely essential with these non-mental health groups working within the agricultural community, coalition building with cooperative extension, legal assistance, farm bureau, farm lenders, and on and on. We didn’t assume that we knew everything we needed to know or we could open doors that we needed open without this coalition building. And so we built a strength to our program that way.”

Roger Hannan, Farm Resource Center - Illinois

“Let’s start with what worked in responding to mental health needs of farmers and rural residents. I think very clearly that informing and networking the professionals worked. When we got extension people aware that there were clergy in the community that might have clinical pastoral education and that could be translated into helping, that was very helpful. Then we realized that the school superintendent was having difficulties because some of the teachers were farm spouses and kids were coming without food, and were affected. When we started telling the story to a group of professionals in rural communities and networking with them over a bag lunch, a pot of coffee in a drafty church basement once a month, wonderful things happened.”

Judy Heffernan, Heartland Network for Town & Rural Ministries

Empathetic

Central to the successful programs was an emphasis on involving people who understood farmers, farming, farm economics, and farm culture and who were personally concerned about the plight of farmers. A number of programs recruited farmers and farm couples to be outreach workers, support group leaders, and hot line workers. Other programs

hired mental health professionals who had come from farm backgrounds. Still other programs worked hard to educate their mental health staff about farmers, farming, and rural culture.

Some programs recruited local farmers to be local liaisons for their mental health professionals. In some cases the above were paid positions and in others they were volunteer positions.

“In other words, hire a farmer if you want them to reach out and provide service to farm families. Hire a dislocated coal miner if you want to reach coal miners. We found also that recruiting volunteers within the community to lend us their credibility gave us a way to get into those communities and into those groups in a way that allowed us to begin service a lot quicker than if we wandered in there just on our own because an outreach worker covering several counties may not be known in one of the counties or more than one of the counties. So volunteers have been very, very important to us. Thirty-three percent of our referrals come from volunteers still today.”

Roger Hannan, Farm Resource Center - Illinois

“Why do we need to teach the individuals who are hurting? Because we needed to teach them that what they were feeling was normal. Most of them don’t think they’re behaving normally. I used to say to farmers, “‘When you’ve gone through this much loss and you’re not depressed, there’s something wrong with you. Get yourself into mental health, people, and find out what it is.’ Most of them could still laugh at that. They need to learn what help is available.”

Judy Heffernan, Heartland Network for Town & Rural Ministries

Conclusions

“I’ve jotted down some things that I hope everyone heard that seems to be the common themes of the learning - that rural people to rural people is effective; that outreach is essential; that the way you do it is important - it has to be acceptable to the farm families and rural people that you’re trying to intervene with - that it’s a community issue as well as an individual issue, and you can’t treat the individual without attending to the issues of the community as well; that rural resources are powerful and that there are positive resources that exist within the rural community that need to be built upon; that you need to network and link those resources and provide those resources and those linkages with the technical assistance and the support that they need; that the faith community is an essential partner as well as nontraditional and other informal helpers, like bartenders and beauticians and UPS delivery people and other folks that interact with people on a regular basis. That it needs to be empowerment based. People need to have a feeling of control and so much of what we’ve heard here today is how control and power is being taken away from folks and so, in fact, what we need to make sure is that the strategies that we use to intervene with folks don’t further erode that power, so they need to be empowering. There needs to be formalized agreements between the agencies and others that are necessary to work together to promote that cooperation; that local response coordinating models are effective.”

Dennis Mohatt, Deputy Director, NE Health and Human Services

“We’ve got to see rurality as an asset and not a limitation, as a connective tissue that shapes our work. We’ve got to remember that that connective tissue is both toxic and pure. We can’t romanticize it. That’s for the poetry and short stories that we write. We’ve got to take on the toxicity, too. The farmer who came in who said, ‘Prices are really bad. I’m glad I’m renting my land.’ ‘How much are you renting it for?’ ‘One hundred and fifty an acre.’ ‘What do you think it’s really worth?’ ‘Sixty bucks.’ ‘Are you going to lower your rent?’ ‘Hell no. There will be five or six farmers ready to rent the land if I let this one go.’ ‘Who is farming your land?’ ‘My grandkids. It’s good for them to learn hard times. Hell their parents got through the ‘80s. This is the chance for a lesson.’ That’s toxicity and that’s inter-generational stress. The other side is a man, 80 years old, very vibrant, who rents his land out to two farmers. He took himself off a kidney dialysis machine last week because he decided he had lived as well as he could long enough, and it was all downhill, and he wanted his legacy

to be without debt. He gave those two farmers his land at a cost of zero. That's the purity in rural America. Both of those stories are accurate and true, and everyone who touches farm families has to see those realities. So seeing rurality as an asset, we've got to do it."

Joan Blundall, Seasons Center for Community Mental Health

"We found that the first stage is what we call anticipatory, with the growing realization that, oh, hard times are coming along, and why should I be farming if I'm going to lose money this year and I am supplementing the production of food with off-farm income.

There is a second stage that includes a growing realization that I could be one of those that's going to be forced out. This sense of growing realization often is accompanied by much internal bargaining to try and figure out, 'Boy, what can I do to make it? Should I drop the hog operation and see if I can get into dairy in a hurry? Maybe I should look at a different crop, growing asparagus.'

A third stage is the actual foreclosure period, and it's a stage at which most people are most vulnerable, because that's when people are the most desperate for some relief and for some attention. During this foreclosure period is when we often see people most vulnerable to suicide, and we're going to see an increased rate of suicide over the next year or two, and we need to keep our eyes open.

The fourth stage occurs two, three, or four years after the anticipatory stage. It's characterized by what we call realignment. Often that involves a restructuring of the farm operation, a change in off-farm income, or a change perhaps in living arrangements or even a move.

Finally there is a stage of acceptance, and that stage is sometimes eight, ten years down the road, because in some sense most people who leave the farm don't totally ever accept it. They just learn to live with it. But like the people who survived the Great Depression, like my grandparents, they're extremely low risk-taking, frugal, and they're hardy and will continue on."

Mike Rosmann, Psychologist and farmer - Harlan, Iowa

"...I thought, 'Okay, there are some things that didn't work at the micro level.' Avoiding hurting families does not work, period. You all know that. Secondly, denying the legitimacy of the anger felt by hurting families doesn't work either. And this business of patting them on the head and saying, you know, 'It's going to be okay,' — I mean that is denying them the anger. Advising hurting families that God must surely be punishing them. Now this is one of the things I really nailed the clergy on. We have got to re-think the theology that if something bad happens to you, God is sending them a message. Pretending that it will all work out for those folks. It hasn't in some cases.

I think denying that there was a problem or that there is a problem is also something that didn't work. We watched the government in the 1980s do it. We watched farm organizations, commodity organizations, agribusiness denying that it was a problem. And then when the data mounted and they could no longer deny it, the third thing that didn't work was they admitted that a problem exists, but they blamed the victims for the problem. It was just the greedy land speculators. It was just the bad managers. Continuing to repeat ideological positions that run counter to the personal experiences of hurting families. You've got to get bigger or you've got to get out. All that didn't work or help!"

Judy Heffernan, Heartland Network for Town & Rural Ministries

"What we're really saying is that people are becoming isolated at a time they need to be reaching out, and they're not thinking very clearly. And so the major point I would make on that is to simply say that all other programs designed to help these people, whether we're talking about job training programs, whether we're talking about the programs available to provide for the basic physical needs of food, clothing, and shelter, any - all those programs that are out there

are fine and dandy, but they - those people who are helping to provide those programs need to understand how they fit in context with the mental condition that these people are in at the time. They are simply not ready to go back to college and continue their work. They're not ready to do job retraining for another job. That's not where their head is."

Bill Heffernan, University of Missouri-Columbia

"...we have to remember that farmers are isolated, and some of that is by choice, and they like that. And you have to really provide them some private time as well."

Mollie Anderson, Director Nebraska State Personnel

"The most important thing that we have to do is listen. Go back and recheck with our communities and with our families. What's happening? Because there is a connective tissue out there that is getting thinner and thinner between people. We've got to understand that connective tissue because that's where the hope is more so than in our systems. We've got to know what's happening externally to us. Some of us have less ability now to intervene as we might like because of managed care, because of systems issues that have taken place in the last decade, so we've got to listen and we've got to see farm families as part of a community that needs them. Then I think we have to go on another step, and we've got to reflect. What does this mean and how can it make sense? Which means we're going to have to have necessary conversations with ourselves and what we can do, and, when necessary, conversations with individual farm families and workers, and with our staff."

Joan Blundall, Seasons Center for Community Mental Health

"So we need to use empowerment models. We need to build on what's strong with families, not what's wrong with families."

Jim Meek, Iowa State University Coop Extension Service

"So we need to look at what are those at-risk factors that we can identify to make a difference in, and also look at what are those protective factors on the other side that we can be proactive in to identify, to help farm families, individuals, cope and adjust and adapt to the changing circumstances and the continuing restructuring that's going to go on in agriculture,..."

Rick Peterson, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University

"Each program must be designed and implemented within the current sociopolitical context of that particular state. In the 1980s, a programmatic design that worked in one place did not work in another. All successful program administrations were locality specific in terms of sponsoring agency, personnel used, and services provided. The successful programs used the unique strengths, linkages, and entry to the farming community that were available to the sponsoring agency and program developers. All took into account all the parallel systems operating in the same service arena and were able to achieve no duplication of effort and no turf battles."

Joanne Mermelstein, University of Missouri-Columbia

"I've experienced as a clergy person now in a rural community a new experience that I hadn't had before, and maybe I did as the hotline responder, and that was to be the container of collective community anxiety. I identified it not long ago after I was at a meeting and I came home and I was jelly inside, and I was feeling a little of that earlier this morning. When the community is under anxiety, I feel myself pulling it in. And you as caretakers, no doubt, have that same experience. So all that to say, we as clergy and you as mental health folks need to be on the team together because we need each other bad. I need you folks out there, and I want you to know I'm out there to be there for you."

Rev. Judith Dye, Pastor, United Methodist Church Blue Springs, NE

“As has been stated already, it’s critically important that both within our systems and between our systems we develop the kind of networks and linkages that allow us to understand what’s happening and develop a more universal understanding of that and allow us to act within those systems and act between systems. You know, it’s very difficult when you get involved in something this complicated as an economic and emotional situation that links mental health and physical health. It links education. It links religion and links all of our community systems together. It’s very complicated to work through all that. The better job we can do of providing the kind of networking and linkages between those systems, the more able we’re going to be to be successful with that effort.”

Jim Meek, Iowa State University Coop Extension Service

“One of the things we learned was you need to have a conduit. And you cannot assume that even though you have great programs and services, there has to be someone to get them from here to there, and that probably, in my opinion, is a farmer. Support groups are essential. You need to give them as much control and decision-making as possible. Even though they are at their lowest, they still are very proud.”

Mollie Anderson Director Nebraska State Personnel

Recommendations

The following represents a summary of the small group recommendations from the Farm Crisis and Mental Health Summit.

- Mental health needs should be acknowledged as a primary issue in the farm crisis.
- Farmers and rural residents need access to affordable and acceptable mental health services.
- When determining mental health and other needs, preventive, supportive, and clinical interventions must all be considered to deal with the wide range of assistance necessary to meet individual needs and stabilize families.
- Specific attention, in collaboration with the schools, should be focused on the mental health needs of rural children and adolescents.
- Policy makers, service providers, the public, and farmers need to be made aware of the farm crisis and the potential negative effects it can have on the mental health of farmers and rural residents.
- Responses to the mental health needs of the farm crisis need to replicate and build upon the strategies that were effective in the 1980s.
- There needs to be effective collaboration and networks among key service providing agencies and organizations at the state and local levels which create a seamless system of services including the concept of “one-stop-shopping.”
- Whenever services such as financial counseling, job retraining, legal aid, career counseling, etc. are made available to distressed farmers, mental health counseling needs to be an integral part of the package.
- Hotlines, outreach, support groups, suicide prevention, etc. should be developed to respond to the mental health needs of farmers and rural residents.
- Front-line crisis intervention efforts (e.g., hotlines, outreach, support groups, stress management clinics) need to be well integrated with the mental health system and have solid mental health referral and back-up arrangements.

- Federal aid, including support for mental health services, should be made available to states and communities adversely affected by the farm crisis.
- Whenever possible, co-locate mental health with other services (e.g., health care, education, social service, extension).
 - Ways to use new technologies (e.g., the Internet) to make mental health services more accessible and acceptable to farmers and rural residents should be explored.
- Rural churches can, and should, play a key role in responding to the mental health needs of farmers, farm families, and rural residents.
- An effective mechanism for states and managed care organizations to pay for mental health consultation and education services should be developed.
- There should be a national clearinghouse, training, and technical assistance center established to coordinate a national response, receive and distribute federal funds, evaluate progress and program models, and be a resource for those responding to the mental health needs of the farm crisis.
 - State and federal officials should take steps to protect and further develop the rural mental health infrastructure.
- State and federal officials should ensure that “managed care plans” and “managed care organizations” effectively address rural mental health needs.
- Rural economic development planning should take into account the potential health (including mental health) impacts of proposed options.
- Rural and farm advocates should use the “arts” (e.g., films such as “The Farmer’s Wife,” photography, poetry, music, and literature) to focus attention on the “human dimension” of the plight of farmers and rural residents.

“Dare we not minimize the loss because there’s a danger in that. It’s not the same as another job or another income around the corner. Remember, it’s connective spirit, it’s connective tissue that involves the head, the heart, the soul. We can’t minimize it, or our folks won’t get through it. And, please, what I say to myself all of the time is don’t let training and myths limit you. This room is full of myth-breakers, and we’re going to break more myths in the next decade. We’re not going to weep about the structures and the money not being there. We’re going to deal with what we have to deal with -- the resources that we have, because the political solutions aren’t going to be there as easily now, and this is not a continuation of the demise of agriculture. I think and I fear we’re at a different plateau. So, people, hopefully, if we’re doing things right we’ll be in church basements. We’ll be having trainings with hairdressers and bartenders, and we won’t be billing for it. And kitchen tables will become more familiar than our desks. And when people ask us what we’re doing and why, we won’t be able to give them a quick answer, but we’ll know. I believe that’s what worked in the ‘80s and it’s something to build on. But we’re going to be going out and grounding assumptions. Some will be those of the ‘80s, but some of them will be those of the next century.”

Joan Blundall, Seasons Center for Community Mental Health

NARMH Collaborates with CMHS

NARMH and the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) have agreed to collaborate on a project to survey and assess mental health service needs in rural and frontier areas. The project continues the longstanding relationship between NARMH and CMHS, and specifically seeks to determine the elements of consultation and education that are needed in rural and frontier areas, and to highlight existing consultation and education programs that are innovative and successful in these areas. Following the collection of data for the project, a written report will be issued containing the information compiled, and recommendations for achieving the project's goals, which include:

- Assisting individuals, programs and organizations to increase and enhance their ability to identify and respond to mental health problems.
- Providing factual mental health information to the community to increase the awareness and knowledge of mental health issues and access to services.

Over the course of the next six months, NARMH will be soliciting input from rural mental health stakeholders for this project. If you would like to participate, please send your comments to the NARMH office in St. Cloud (see ad on next page).

Rural Reading

The family farm has over the years been the subject and setting of many great works of fiction, memoir, and journalism. As we stand on the verge of what some say is another “farm crisis”, it is worthwhile to explore some of the literature around the family farm.

In recent years, journalists have found in the family farm or ranch a window worth looking through. Some of the better accounts are Richard Rhodes’ *Farm: A Year in the Life of An American Farmer*, Sam Bingham’s *The Last Ranch: A Colorado Community and the Coming Desert*, Verlyn Klinkenborg’s *Making Hay* and Dan Butterworth’s *Waiting For Rain: One Farmer’s Struggle to Hold on to a Vanishing American Dream*. Some of these, like Jonathan Raban’s *Bad Land: An American Romance* and James R. Dickenson’s *Home on the Range: A Century on the High Plains*, are more socio-historical in nature.

There are, of course, the many classics about the early years. Great pioneer novels such as Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!*, O.E. Rolvaag’s *Giants in the Earth*, Bess Streeter Aldrich’s *A Lantern in Her Hand*, Hope Williams Sykes’ *Second Hoeing*, and Mari Sandoz’s *Old Jules*. Too many to cover here. For a study of these, see Diane Dufva Quantic *The Nature of the Place: A Study of Great Plains Fiction*.

The personal memoir about farming or ranching is a growing collection. Some examples are: Ivan Doig *This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind*, Ronald Jager’s *Eighty Acres: Eulogy for a Family Farm*, Linda Hasselstrom’s *Land Circle: Writings Collected From the Land*, Howard Kohn’s *The Last Farmer: An American Memoir*, David Mas Masumoto’s *Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on My Family Farm*, John Hildebrand’s *Mapping The Farm: The Chronicle of A Family*, Mary Elizabeth Fricke’s *Dino Godzilla and the Pigs: My Life on Our Missouri Hog Farm*, Alan S. Kesselheim’s *Silhouette on a Wide Land*, Teresa Jordan’s *Riding the White Horse Home: A Western Family Album*, Alan Pistorius’ *Cutting Hill: A Chronicle of a Family Farm*, Wallace Stegner’s *Wolf Willow: A History, a Story, and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier*, and Brent Olson’s *The Lay of the Land: A View from the Prairie*.

The farm has been, and continues to be, the setting for many works of fiction. Jane Smiley won the Pulitzer Prize for her novel, *A Thousand Acres*, set on an Iowa farm. Lois Phillips Hudson’s *The Bones of Plenty* is a far better, and I suspect truer, account of farming during the great depression than Stienbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*. Farm and ranch literature is too vast to give a complete review here or even a good sampling. Here are a few possibilities: Jim Harrision’s *Farmer*, Wright Morris’ *Plains Song*, Don Kurtz’s *South of the Big Four*, Robert Day’s *The Last Cattle Drive*, Doug Unger’s *Leaving the Land*, Ralph Beer’s *The Blind Corral*, Edith Forbes Nowle’s *Passing*, and Matthew F. Jones’ *The Cooter Farm*.

Finally, there is one book, Gary Paulsen’s *Clabbered Dirt, Sweet Grass*, that stands by itself as a great, lyrical evocation of the essence of farming.

Rural Resources

NARMH Web Site: The National Association for Rural Mental Health now has its own web site (www.narmh.org). The NARMH web site contains information about NARMH and rural mental health with links to other relevant web sites.

The Farmer's Wife: The David Sutherland documentary film, *The Farmer's Wife*, which chronicled the real life struggles of a young Nebraska farm family has received far more public response than anything ever shown on public television. The film which aired nationally September 21-23, 1998 on PBS's FRONTLINE series provides an in-depth look at a number of issues which are of interest to rural mental health professionals. Personal copies of *THE FARMER'S WIFE* video (3 tapes, 6 1/2 hours total) can be ordered by calling 1-800-PLAY-PBS (1-800-752-9727). Cost for the set of tapes is \$56.23 which includes shipping and handling. In addition, Viewers' Guides, Discussion Leaders' Guides and National Resource Directories are available at no cost from local Public Television stations or through Independent Television Service, 51 Federal Street, Suite 401, San Francisco, CA 94107; (415) 356-8383, e-mail: itvs@itvs.org. The Discussion Leaders' Guide contains a brief rural mental health perspective. For more information contact Joanne Komenda, Interchurch Ministries of Nebraska at (402) 476-3391.

Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network (SPAN): SPAN is a non profit organization dedicated to the creation of an effective national suicide prevention strategy. SPAN links the energy of those bereaved by suicide with the expertise of leaders in science, business, government and public service to achieve the goal of significantly reducing the national rate of suicide by the year 2010. SPAN exists to create a broad working coalition to develop, implement and evaluate the best available suicide prevention practices, programs and policies. You can contact SPAN via phone at 1-888-649-1366 or E-mail: act@spanusa.org or Fax: 770-642-1419. You can also visit their Website: <http://www.spanusa.org>

Farm Resource Center's Outreach Manual: The Farm Resource Center is a private not-for-profit agency which provides in-home crisis intervention services through aggressive outreach. Created in 1985 to respond to mental health problems resulting from the Farm Crisis, the Center has expanded its operation over the years to include a variety of services to rural populations including coal miners in West Virginia and Pennsylvania. This manual describes the Farm Resource Center's outreach model and provides a basic guide to understanding the provision of outreach crisis intervention, linkage/referral, and emergency response services. This outreach manual is available through the Center for Mental Health Services; contact Buddy Ruiz at (301) 443-3653 or e-mail: sruiz@samhsa.gov.

Mental Health, United States, 1998: The Center for Mental Health Services will publish shortly the eighth edition in their series of "Mental Health, United States." *Mental Health, United States, 1998* provides the latest statistics on mental health service delivery, and is intended to serve as a reference source for systems and program managers, clinicians, and researchers. This volume also includes discussions relevant to mental health policy. Of specific interest to NARMH members is a chapter entitled, "Rural Mental Health at the Millennium." Single copies of this publication can be requested by writing to: CMHS/DSCSD/SAB, 5600 Fishers Lane, Room 15C-04, Rockville, MD 20857 or Phone: (301) 443-3343 or Fax: (301) 443-7926.

ADD YOUR VOICE BECOME A MEMBER OF NARMH

Strategies

- Represent rural mental health stakeholders in national and state public policy arenas.
- Develop and proactively support state-of-the-art policies for rural areas. See Rural Mental Health: 2000 & Beyond
- Provide a forum for rural mental health professionals and advocates to identify problems, find solutions, and work cooperatively.
- Improve the delivery of rural mental health services.
- Promote the unique needs and concerns of rural mental health programs.
- Develop educational resources and disseminate information about rural mental health policy and practice issues.
- Sponsor an annual conference where rural mental health professionals benefit from sharing knowledge and resources.

Membership Benefits

- National forums (newsletter, journal, conference, and focus groups) for sharing your work and knowledge and for learning what you need to be successful.
- Representation of your interests in public policy formation.
- Receive NARMH's special publications
- Rural Community Mental Health Journal published quarterly.
- Party-Line newsletter published quarterly.
- Discount on registration fees at NARMH Annual Conference.
- Full voting rights on NARMH business.
- Web page with electronic publications and communication with NARMH
- Six levels of membership available.

Annual Conference

Providing an opportunity for our members:

- 1) to exchange ideas and to share what they are doing;
- 2) to learn about national issues and trends;

- 3) to develop new knowledge and skills about best practices;
- 4) to develop professional networks;
- 5) to participate in the formation of national Mental Health policy;
- 6) to share problems and collaborate on solutions; and
- 7) to have fun.

Call the NARMH office for more membership information at 320-202-1820 or visit our website www.narmh.org