

Farm stressors can come from many directions including the agricultural system, farm and family finances, mental and physical health challenges, and relationship difficulties. A healthy response to these challenges involves paying attention to the stressors within all of these areas and determining coping strategies that are useful in each area.

To manage stress, it can be helpful to be reflective through a five-step process (Brotherson & Berg, 2017):

- 1. Assess Needs and Impacts.** Any stressor can impact the individual, family, or farming operation. What is a need resulting from stress in your life? What is size of the impact (manageable or not manageable)?
- 2. Identify and Access Resources.** What resources are needed to help manage the stressor(s) you identified? Are the resources available to you? Resources can be tangible (knowledge, creativity, optimism) or material (money, land, equipment).
- 3. Pursue Good-Quality Decisions.** Decision-making involves assessing the options and determining how to respond. How should you use your resources? How can you be more open to change? In assessing your options, it can be helpful to become as informed as possible while thinking about the benefits vs. costs. Clarify your values and goals and discuss the options with those you trust (family, friends, professionals).
- 4. Connect with Sources of Support.** An important aspect of decreasing stress is to engage in a support system. What type of support is most helpful for you to pursue quality decisions? Do you need to talk to someone at a bank regarding financial decisions, or would a more appropriate source be a counselor or pastor to discuss personal concerns? Find a support system that fits for you, whether the support is informal (close friends, neighbors, fellow farmers), within your family, or formal support (faith community leaders, medical providers, counselors).
- 5. Use Effective Coping Strategies.** Think about the coping strategies that you use. Are they harmful (alcohol use, tobacco, unhealthy eating), or are they helpful (exercise, mindfulness, watching a movie, family conversations)? Try to match a coping strategy with an identified need. It also does not hurt to learn new strategies to help alleviate stress.

To access community resources, visit <http://www.helplinecenter.org> or dial 211. For immediate assistance with mental health concerns or suicidal thoughts, please call 1-800-273-8255.

With all of the factors that cannot be controlled in farming and ranching, using this five-step method for stress management may help farmers become better prepared for tough times. By identifying needs, resources, and sources of support, farmers can identify factors that can be controlled. Establishing a support system and using effective coping strategies are important in self-care and can help improve one's overall health and well-being.

Reference

Brotherson, S., & Berg, L. (2017). Managing stress and pursuing wellness in times of tight margins. Fargo, ND: North Dakota State University Extension Service.