

## Should I Be Feeling This Way?

With the on-going weather conditions, there is tremendous stress in rural America and Atchison County. I came across the following article of fifteen years ago and find it to be relevant today. We all need to have understanding of the tough situations around us, listen to our neighbors, and reach out with compassion. The following is from *Making it Work-Resources for Rural Communities*.

Have you ever felt that things weren't going your way? Do you feel overworked, but your efforts aren't paying all of the bills? Are the weather conditions not in favor of your crops? Have you had several livestock die or are you paying for the costly medications and just can't keep up? Are you close to retirement, but have nothing saved to retire? Are you in a feud with family or in-laws over the farm operation? Is your stress rate high? Are you feeling frustrated, sad or angry? Have you been losing sleep, waking up at all hours of the night with racing thoughts? Is it becoming more and more difficult to find the energy to even deal with the stress? Have the problems you're facing risen to the level that you don't even know where to start or what to do next? Could you be experiencing depression?

Farming is one of the ten most stressful occupations, so it is no wonder that many farmers often feel depressed. Any of the above stressors can put a farmer and their family at risk of depression. Unfortunately, depression is often labeled as a sign of weakness. However, feeling of depression are actually a normal and common response to negative situations or thoughts. Everyone feels depressed from time to time and the experience of depression differs from person to person. Depression can be situational, stemming from life events, such as death in the family, marital problems, loss or fear of loss of farm, or lack of social support. Depression can also result from physical conditions such as a chemical or hormonal imbalance.

Signs of depression include a depressed mood or persistent unhappy feelings, loss of interest in activities, significant weight gain or loss, negative thoughts, changes in sleeping habits, reduced activity and energy, reduced sex drive, difficulty thinking or concentrating, and thoughts of death or suicide. Physical symptoms such as headaches, chronic pain, or stomach problems may also be signs of depression. If you have low self-esteem and feel insecure, are dependent on others, have a pessimistic outlook, and have low coping ability for stress and anxiety with limited social skills, you are at a higher risk to experience some form of depression. The number of symptoms you experience will determine how well you can cope and manage your feelings of depression.

Keeping yourself occupied, learning to relax, and maintaining a healthy diet are some simple ways to help if you are feeling "slightly depressed" or experiencing only one or two symptoms. You may find that talking with family, friends, and other helping professionals, such as a minister or a doctor, can be an effective way to manage the feelings and symptoms associated with depression. Additionally, attending a support group or beginning a regular exercise routine can be helpful ways to cope and manage depressive symptoms. It is also important to work to change your thoughts by learning to think positively, to accept your situation, take one thing at a time, and find effective ways to manage the challenges you're facing.

If you experience five or more symptoms for more than two weeks at a time with no relief then depression can become a dysfunctional emotional state that creates problems in normal everyday functioning and it is important that you seek professional assistance. Contact your family doctor or mental health professional who is trained in psychology, psychiatry, social work, marriage and family therapy, or counseling.

If you are feeling depressed or overly stressed the impact of depression not only affects you, but also your family. In the midst of the stress and burdens that come with farming today, marital and parental relationships are often strained. If not recognized and handled effectively, increases in farm stress and strains can negatively affect family strengths and the overall quality of family life. When parents are depressed, children feel the effects and it's likely they will show higher rates of depression as well. Recognizing the impact that depression can have, not only on the individual but on the family as a whole, it is important to be able to recognize and seek the proper help for yourself, or a family member who may be experiencing depression.

Depression can be a serious problem and needs to be honestly recognized and appropriately treated. Early intervention is best, but if you have been experiencing these symptoms for a long period of time, take proper measures now. Don't put yourself or your loved ones at further risk. Help is available.

If you don't know where to start, the staff at Kansas Ag Mediation Services is available to talk with you and find the resources you need for more effective problem solving, as well as resources in our community for help in coping with your depression, high stress or anxiety. The AgMediation Services is confidential and can be contacted by calling 1-800-321-3276 or on the web at [www.k-state.edu/kams/](http://www.k-state.edu/kams/) The Guidance Center in Atchison can be reached at 913-367-1593 and our Extension number is 913-833-5450.