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Farmsafe Australia: Mental health a critical step to improving farm safety

Australian farmers have never had to balance more priorities than now. Working multiple jobs, beginning to take over the family business, market fluctuations, family responsibilities and uncontrollable weather events and natural disasters can all have a profound effect on the mental and physical health of middle-aged Australians.

Amplified by the fact that those living in rural Australia are more likely to suffer from depression caused by financial pressure and isolation¹, and that suicide rates are 50 per cent higher in rural communities compared to rates in major cities², mental health continues to weigh down farming communities.

This is something Farmsafe Australia wants to change this National Farm Safety Week. The organisation is shining a spotlight on the importance of adopting more effective and supportive farming practices that improve the safety and well-being of farmers and their communities.

Charles Armstrong, Chair of Farmsafe has encouraged members of farming communities to seek help from family, friends, and colleagues during challenging times or periods of significant stress.

“It is a common characteristic for farmers to put up a strong façade when they are experiencing social or financial difficulty. While Australians take pride in our successes, we can also neglect our own mental and physical well-being when stress sets in.”

Farmsafe Australia says families naturally tighten their already stretched financial budgets during times of hardship. Upgrades to farming equipment and routine maintenance may be overlooked and combining this with stress-induced distraction frequently results in farm-related injuries or fatalities.

“We must take active steps to dispel the stigma associated with mental health issues and support each other to speak up when we feel overwhelmed with the stresses associated with working and living on a farm. By failing to improve understanding of mental and physical health on farms, we will subsequently fail to improve safety and well-being which is directly correlated,” Mr Armstrong said.

For more information on farm safe practices visit www.farmsafe.org.au.

If you or anyone you know needs help:

- Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800
- National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline on 1800 250 015
- MensLine Australia on 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467
- Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636
- Headspace on 1800 650 890
- ReachOut at au.reachout.com
- Care Leavers Australasia Network (CLAN) on 1800 008 774
- HeadtoHelp on 1800 595 212

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¹ National Rural Health Alliance INC., *Mental Health in Rural and Remote Australia: Fact Sheet, 2017*

² Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health and University of Newcastle's, *Australia Rural Suicide and its Prevention: a CRRMH position paper, 2017*

Committed to keeping you safer on Australian Farms