

February 2024 - MBP column

Nurturing mental health in agriculture

Mental health challenges and resources in the agriculture industry

For several years, the topic of mental health within the agricultural sector has emerged as a pressing concern in the community. In our last month's column, we referred to a [study](#) revealing alarming statistics: 57% of individuals in the agriculture industry met the criteria for anxiety, and 34% for depression, which [echoes the very high suicide rate in this industry](#). Additionally, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business' [Business Barometer](#)[®] painted a concerning picture, where in 2023, the agriculture sector consistently displayed the lowest levels of optimism both in short and long-term. While agriculture inherently involves uncertainty and risk, these numbers are alarming.

The CFIB has done its best to shed light to this very important matter, notably through its report, [Near the Breaking Point: Mental Health in Small Business](#). The report highlighted that, in the aftermath of two stressful years, heavily induced by the challenges of COVID-19, , in 2022, a staggering 55% of small business owners in the agriculture sector found themselves teetering on the edge of burnout.

Compounding this issue, farmers may grapple with exhaustion due to extended working hours exacerbated by labour shortages. In fact, a striking [82%](#) of small business owners in the agriculture sector have been forced to extend their working hours, with farmers now averaging an intense 58 hours a week - far surpassing the typical [35-hour](#) workweek. It is no wonder that many farmers find it hard to strike a healthy work-life balance or find themselves overwhelmed by stress.

Although stress itself is not classified as a mental illness such as anxiety or depression, prolonged exposure to stressors heightens the likelihood of developing mental health conditions. As it happens, farmers are [twice](#) as stressed as the general population.

So where can Canada's producers turn to when it comes to taking care of mental health?

The CFIB [Wellness Hub](#) provides useful tips and practical advice on how to introduce and promote wellness in the workplace. The [Business Development Bank of Canada](#) (BDC) also offers a comprehensive library of resources focusing on mental health, while the Government of Canada collaborates with provincial and territorial governments to provide [agriculture-specific resources](#) and initiatives.

Some of these resources may also be useful for employees or Canadians more broadly. Ultimately, governments have a role to play in ensuring that adequate mental health supports are available and accessible to all types of business owners, their employees, and Canadians.

Good mental health enhances professional and personal life, and farmers are no exception.

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