

## Addressing Stress, Depression and Suicide in California Dairy Families

*A webinar for dairy producers, their families and the dairy community.  
"Pain is not always obvious."*

**Wednesday, April 3, 2019 10:00 to 11:30 (Pacific Time)**

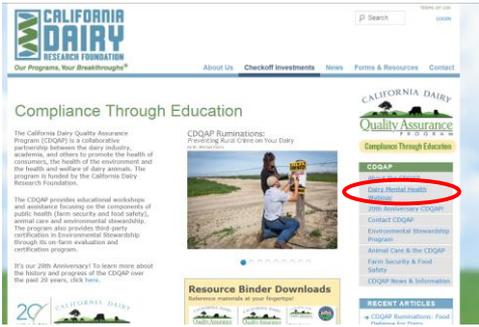
By **Robert J. Fetsch, Ph.D.**  
Extension Specialist & Professor Emeritus  
Human Development & Family Studies  
Colorado State University

Webinar Link: <https://ucanr.zoom.us/j/751701428>  
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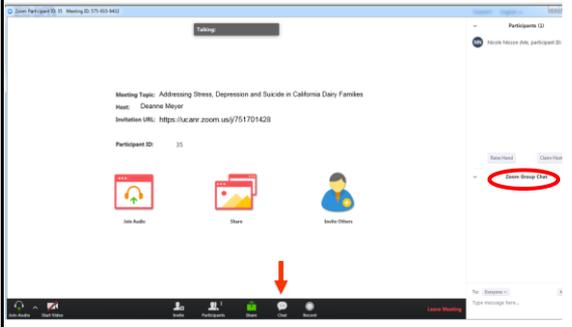



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<http://www.cdqa.org/dairy-mental-health-webinar/>

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either by using the program's "chat" function on-line or, if  
attending by phone, texting a question to 209-585-6744.**



## Addressing Stress, Depression and Suicide in California Dairy Families

By **Robert J. Fetsch, Ph.D.**  
Extension Specialist & Professor Emeritus  
Human Development & Family Studies  
Colorado State University

## Addressing Stress, Depression and Suicide in California Dairy Families

Dedicated to  
Paul J. Fetsch (1918-2008)  
& Marcella T. Fetsch (1924-1997)  
Thanks to my parents whose hard work  
With our dairy farm taught me  
How to work hard and be successful.



### What's our agenda today?

1. Signs of Stress, Depression, and Suicidal Thinking
2. What Can You and I Do?
3. Why Are These Results Important—Especially Now?

### What's our agenda today?

1. Signs of Stress, Depression, and Suicidal Thinking.

### How stressful is farming and ranching?

- Working day in and day out in such highly stressful environments can contribute to high anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.
- Experiencing high levels of fatigue, sleep deprivation, stress, anxiety, and depression probably contributes to ranchers and farmers being less safe around large animals and machinery and therefore explains why farming and ranching are second only to mining in risk of accidents, disabilities, and fatalities.

### Farm/Ranch stress

- Farming is one of the top 12 high stress occupations.
- According to NIOSH, farm owners were second only to laborers in the rate of death for stress-related diseases.

• Source: Smith, M. J., Colligan, M. J., & Hurrell, J. J. (1977). A review of NIOSH psychological research—1977. Paper presented at the conference on occupational stress. Los Angeles.

### What were the top stressors for farmers?

- For < 1,000 New Zealand dairy farmers:
  - Time pressures
  - Machinery failures
  - Weather
  - Government policies

### What were the top stressors for farmers?

- For 1,015 New Zealand farmers:
  - Increased work load at peak times
  - Dealing with workers' compensation
  - Bad weather
  - Complying with health and safety legislation

### What were the top stressors for farmers?

- For 1,343 Iowa farm residents:
  - Death of a spouse
  - Death of a child
  - Disabling injury of a family member
  - Disabling injury to oneself
  - Foreclosure on a mortgage/loan
  - Divorce
  - Machinery breakdown during harvest
  - Loss of crop to weather
  - Loss of crop to pests/disease
  - Severe weather conditions

### HANDOUT: Farm and Ranch Family Stress and Depression: A Checklist and Guide for Making Referrals

### Economic stress↔ personal & family stress

- The worse things get, the more likely you and I are to see a friend or family member get mad, angry, and blame others.
- Stress
- Anger
- Depression
- Suicide

### What are signs of high stress?

- Change in routines
- Increase in illness
- Appearance of farmstead declines.
- Care of livestock declines.
- Number of farm/ranch accidents increases.
- Children show signs of stress.

### What are signs of chronic, prolonged stress?

- Physical
  - Headaches
  - Ulcers
  - Backaches
  - Eating irregularities
  - Sleep disturbances
  - Frequent sicknesses
  - Exhaustion

### What are signs of chronic, prolonged stress?

- Physical
  - Panic attacks and/or heart palpitations
  - Sweating, trembling or shaking
  - Shortness of breath, chest pain or discomfort
  - Difficulty swallowing, nausea or abdominal distress
  - Lightheadedness, derealization or depersonalization

Adapted from Rosmann, M. R. (2002, September 9). *Weathering tough times: Responding to farmers, ranchers and rural businesspersons* [Satellite Video Conference]. Available from

### Economic stress ↔ personal & family stress

- During the mid-1980s our interdisciplinary research examined the correlations between stress and depression and last year income/debt, total assets/liabilities and overall financial outlook.
- It's not just the amount of money or debts that we have.
- It's what it *means* to us that makes the difference between how healthy we are.

How do you feel?  
Annoyed?... Enraged?

Enraged?  
Furious?  
Angry?  
Frustrated?  
Irritated?  
Aggravated?  
Annoyed?



### Non-farm/ranch depression

- The lower the monthly income, the higher the chronic depression level (Gilmer et al., 2005).

### Farm/Ranch depression

- Many farmers/ranchers struggle with depression.
- It is not clear whether they experience lower/higher levels of depression and other mental health issues as does the general population.

### Farm/Ranch depression

- IA farm men were more likely to experience depression if within the previous year they had:
  - Lost something of sentimental value
  - Experienced substantial income decline
  - Gone deeply into debt
  - Faced legal problems
  - Or experienced an increase in health problems.

### Farm/Ranch depression

- In North Dakota, farmers' depression levels were almost twice that of other rural populations in the past.

### Farm/Ranch depression

- In Colorado, a study of 872 farmers and spouses found that those more likely to report high depressive symptoms were:
  - Female, in poor physical health, and unmarried; and
  - Those who lived on the farm and were no longer involved in farm work.

Source: Stallones, L., Leff, M., Garrett, C., Criswell, L., & Gillan, T. (1995). Depressive symptoms among Colorado farmers. *Journal of Agricultural Safety and Health*, 1(1), 37-43.

### Farm/Ranch depression

- Depression was associated with high risk behaviors such as:
  - Failure to remain calm around livestock;
  - Not reading instruction manuals or safety precautions; and
  - Not using shields on moving equipment parts.

Source: Stallones, L., & Beseler, C. (2004). Safety practices and depression among farm residents. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 14, 571-578.

### Farm/Ranch depression

- Being depressed puts farmers at risk:
  - Depression leads to increased occupational injury among farmers.

Source: Grisso, R. D., Mariger, S. C., Wong, S. S., Perumpral, J. V., Christensen, N. K., Miller, R. L., et al. (2008). Depression as a risk factor for agricultural injuries. Paper presented at the ASABE Annual International Meeting, Providence, RI.

### Farm/Ranch depression

- Being depressed puts farmers at risk:
  - Depressed farmers are at a 2.7 times greater risk for falls than farmers who do not report depression.\*
  - Male principal operators with high levels of depressive symptoms have a three-fold risk of farm-work-related injuries.\*\*

Source: \*Sprince, N. L., Zwerling, C., Lynch, C. F., Whitten, P. S., Thu, K., Gillette, P. P., et al. (2003). Risk factors for falls among Iowa farmers: A case-control study nested in the agricultural health study. *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 44, 265-272.

Source: \*\*Park, H., Sprince, N. L., Lewis, M. Q., Burmeister, L. F., Whitten, P. S., & Zwerling, C. (2001). Risk factors for work-related injury among male farmers in Iowa: A prospective cohort study.

### Farm/Ranch depression

- Some researchers found a relationship between exposure to pesticides and high levels of depression among CO farmers/ranchers.

- Source: Stallones, L., & Beseler, C. (2004). Safety practices and depression among farm residents. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 14, 571-578.

### Farm/Ranch depression

- Given the high rates of depression that farmers experience, it is no surprise that farmers' suicide rates are also high.

Source: Gallagher, L. M., Kleim, C., Beautrais, A. L., & Stallones, L. (2008). Suicide and occupation in New Zealand, 2001-2005. *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health*, 14, 45-50.

Source: Gregoire, A. (2002). The mental health of farmers. *Occupational Medicine*, 52, 471-576.

Source: Turvey, C., Stromquist, A., Kelly, K., Zwerling, C., & Merchant, J. (2002). Financial loss and suicidal ideation in a rural community sample. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 106, 373-380.

### We've seen progress in physical, but what about in behavioral health?

- We've seen progress in reduced numbers of physical fatalities and injuries in agriculture, thanks to the efforts of OSHA and Extension Farm Safety programs.
- But we've **not** seen progress in reducing behavioral health issues like suicide, especially among older white men.

• Source: M. Rosmann (personal communication, June 4, 2010.)

### Comparison U.S. Workplace Suicides with Non-Workplace Suicides (Per million)



### Factors that may contribute to this risk of suicide for farmers & ranchers include:

- Potential for financial loss
- Chronic physical illness
- Social isolation
- Work-home imbalance
- Barriers & unwillingness to seek behavioral health treatment

• Source: Tiesman, H. M., Konda, S., Hartley, D., Menéndez, C. C., Ridenour, M., & Hendricks, S. (2015). Suicide in U.S. workplaces, 2003-2010: A comparison with non-workplace suicides. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 48*(6), 674-682.

### Factors that may contribute to this risk of suicide for farmers & ranchers include:

- Depression due to chronic pesticide exposure
- Increased access to lethal means
- Firearms & hanging are the two leading methods of suicide for farmers.
- Access to mental health services can be limited in rural locations.
- Finding time to leave the farm to receive medical care can be challenging.

Source: Tiesman et al., 2015.

### Why do farmers/ranchers commit suicide at higher rates?

- It's not increased levels of mental health issues.
- It may have to do with:
  - Demands of family farms
  - Culture of farming communities
  - Shortage of health care professionals in rural farming communities
  - High accessibility to firearms
  - Occupational stress
  - Financial difficulties
  - Family problems
  - Retirement is a trying transition for farmers.

### Masculine “Scripts” (David & Brannon (1976))

1. No sissy-stuff - men are expected to distance themselves from anything feminine.
2. Big wheel - men should be occupationally or financially successful.
3. Sturdy oak - men should be confident and self-reliant.
4. Give 'em hell - men should do what is necessary to “make it.”
5. “When you're hurting, be a man—keep it inside and tell no one!” (Fetsch, 2009.)

**HANDOUT:  
Farm and Ranch Family Stress and  
Depression: A Checklist and Guide for  
Making Referrals**

**California Hotlines for  
Dairy Farm Families?**

- Sorry, but I know of no CA hotlines for dairy farm families.
- However, there is a national call-in hotline 24/7:
  - 1-800-SUICIDE
  - 1-800-784-2433

***Could I now ask that you think of  
someone you know...a dairy farmer  
(or other person) who you think  
might be depressed or suicidal...?  
[Robin]***

**What are signs of depression?**

- Appearance
- Unhappy feelings
- Negative thinking
- Reduced activity and pleasure in usual activities
- People problems
- Physical problems
- Guilt and low self-esteem

**What are signs of depression?**

- Sadness
- Inability to experience genuine pleasure
- Significant weight loss (not due to dieting) or gain (5% of body weight/month)
- Excessive sleep and/or middle or late night insomnia
- Feeling lethargic or agitated
- Loss of energy

Adapted from Rosmann, M. R. (2002, September 9). *Weathering tough times*.

**What are signs of depression?**

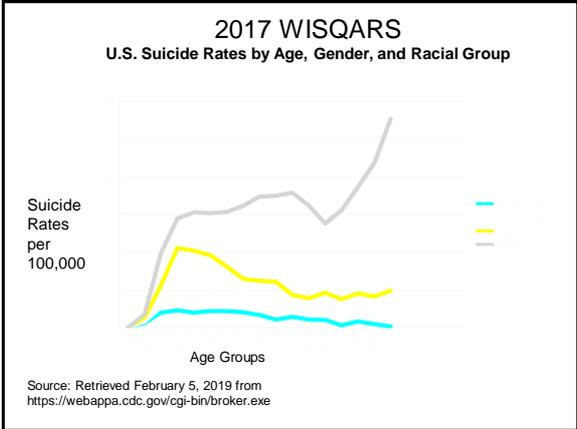
- Loss of energy
- Feeling worthless/inappropriate guilt
- Inability to concentrate
- Preoccupied with negatives
- Recurrent thoughts of suicide

Adapted from Rosmann, M. R. (2002, September 9). *Weathering tough times*.

**Now would you think again of someone you know...a dairy farmer (or other person) who you think might be depressed or suicidal...?**  
**[Robin]**  
**How depressed are you (0-10)?**

**Suicide red flags**

- **Who is most at risk of suicide?**

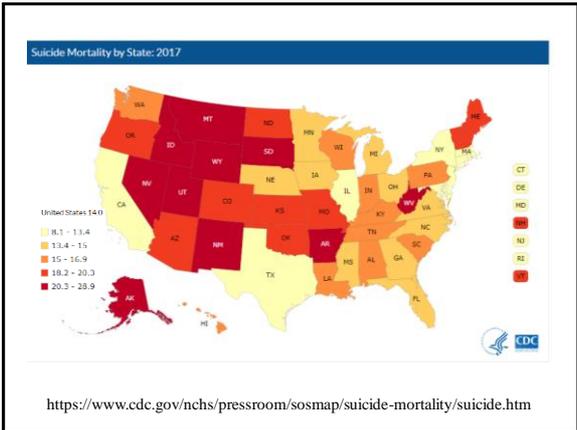


**What are common predictors of suicide?**

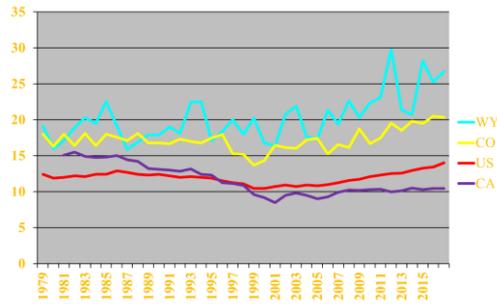
- Being an older, white male with risk increasing with age—1/2 suicide deaths are by white males 35 years+.
- Work problems, unemployment—1/3 who commit suicide are unemployed at the time of their death.
- Source: Colorado Trust, (2002), p. 8.

**Western mountain states have the highest suicide death rates.**

- The risk of suicide death increases among older men and is especially high for 75 years plus—especially if they lose their spouse and their dairy/farm.
- Most are white and not married.



### Suicide rates per 100,000 population by state and US



Source: Centers for Disease Control. (2015). Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS). Retrieved February 5, 2019 from <https://webappa.cdc.gov/cgi-bin/broker.exe>

### What are some “last line” signs of suicidal intent?

- “I’m thinking about calling it quits.”
- “Maybe my family would be better off without me.”
- “Let’s have a last cigarette together.”
- “Want to buy a box of shells with your new handgun?” “Only need one....”

***From your experience, what are some “last lines” that got your attention?***

### What’s our agenda today?

2. What Can You and I Do?

### What can you and I do?

- Listen very well.
- Hear the sounds of depression and suicidal thinking.
- Ask not “how are ya?” but, “How are *you* doing, George?... You must be going through hell!”
- Really connect.
- Empathize.
- Be mindful of their well-being.

• Source: Call to support farmers’ mental health. (13 October 2015). Radio New Zealand News. Retrieved October 20, 2015 from <http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/rural/286867/we-just-need-a-listening-ear>

***Now would you think again of someone you know...a dairy farmer (or other person) who you think might be depressed or suicidal...?***

***[Robin]***

***What can you say and do?***

### What can you and I do?

- Watch for subtle signs that something is not right.
- Don't wait for the "right" time to reach out.
- Source: Bowman, Angela. (2014, September 2). The unspoken tragedy. Retrieved October 20, 2015 from: <http://www.porknetwork.com/pork-news/Commentary-The-unspoken-tragedy-27358295....>

### What can you and I do?

- Connect them with local professional behavioral health therapists.
- Connect with a family member.
- Connect with a
  - family physician,
  - veterinarian,
  - milk/feed hauler,
  - AgrAbility team member,
  - Extension Agent,
  - rural banker, and ...
  - *[Who else?]*

### When I search for behavioral health therapists, I check:

- <http://therapistlocator.net/>.
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com>
- [http://www.networktherapy.com/directory/find\\_therapist.asp](http://www.networktherapy.com/directory/find_therapist.asp)
- <http://therapists.americanmentalhealth.com/therapistlocator.page1>

### HANDOUT:

#### Farm and Ranch Family Stress and Depression: A Checklist and Guide for Making Referrals

### What are signs of suicidal thinking?

- Anxiety or depression
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Helplessness and hopelessness
- Alcohol abuse
- Previous suicidal attempts
- Suicidal plan
- Cries for help

### The "common cold" of modern psychology is depression.

- What is the best, most effective "cure" for depression?
- Combination of taking good care of yourself, exercise, counseling, and medication.

### How can I respond best?

- With respect
- With sincerity and honesty
- By listening and hearing their pain and worry—not by pitying them
- By caring

Source: Adapted from Bosch K., & Griffin, C. (2002, September 5). *Weathering tough times: Responding to farmers, ranchers and rural businesspersons* [Satellite Video Conference]. Available from [http://www.panhandle.unl.edu/tough\\_times](http://www.panhandle.unl.edu/tough_times).

### HANDOUT: Farm and Ranch Family Stress and Depression: A Checklist and Guide for Making Referrals

#### Where can we find research-based Family Life Fact Sheets? <http://extension.colostate.edu>

- Ranching and Farming with Family Members – 10.217
- Farming, Ranching: Health Hazard or Opportunity? – 10.201
- Managing Stress During Tough Times – 10.255
- Youth Suicide – 10.213

#### Where can we find research-based Family Life Fact Sheets? <http://extension.colostate.edu>

- Making Decisions and Coping Well with Drought – 10.256
- 10 Tips for Successful Family Meetings – 10.249
- Dealing With Couples' Anger – 10.238
- Children's Anger and Tantrums – 10.248

### How can I respond best?

- **IF YOU'RE UNSURE—REFER!**

### What do we do next?

- Recognize signs of high stress, anger, depression, and suicidal thinking.
- Take action. Find out about which local resources are available.
- Check your yellow pages under "Counselors."
- Call 1-800-SUICIDE/784-2433 24 x 7 for a live trained person to talk with and to find local resources.

### When I search for behavioral health therapists, I check:

- <http://therapistlocator.net/>.
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com>
- [http://www.networktherapy.com/directory/find\\_therapist.asp](http://www.networktherapy.com/directory/find_therapist.asp)
- <http://therapists.americanmentalhealth.com/therapistlocator.page1>

### What's Our Agenda Today?

3. *Why Are These Results Important—Especially Now?*

### What Works to Address This Problem?

- FRSAN (Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network)
- AgrAbility

Source: Fetsch, R. J., & Collins, C. L. (2018). The effects of AgrAbility on the mental/behavioral health of farmers and ranchers with functional limitations: A comparison study. *Medical Research Archives*, 6(2). <http://www.journals.keio.org/index.php/mra/article/view/1691/1762>

### What Works to Address This Problem?

- FRSAN (Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network) could help distressed farmers and their families and save lives if it was available.

Source: Rosmann, Mike. (2016, August 15). Employee assistance programs reduce workplace stress and improve agriculture. [News Release]. Available from author.

### What Works to Address This Problem?

- FRSAN
  - Each of seven upper Midwestern states (IA, KS, MN, NE, ND, SD, and WI) had a farmer-friendly telephone hotline and website.
  - They offered free, confidential telephone counseling 24/7 to callers and emailers, as well as up to five prepaid counseling sessions from licensed behavioral healthcare professionals with a farm background/experience working with farmers.

### What Works to Address This Problem?

- FRSAN
  - Between September, 2005 and October 2007 hotline telephone responders referred 10,647 individuals, couples, or families involved in agriculture in the seven states for professional behavioral health services.
  - The rate of farmer suicide did **not** increase in the seven states, despite a difficult economic era.

Source: Rosmann, Mike. (2016, August 15). Employee assistance programs reduce workplace stress and improve agriculture. [News Release]. Available from author.

### What Works to Address This Problem?

- FRSAN

- 93% reported that their services were helpful and they would recommend that people involved in agriculture obtain similar services if needed.
- Many stressed farm and ranch people could benefit from an EAP like the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network.

Source: Rosmann, Mike. (2016, August 15). Employee assistance programs reduce workplace stress and improve agriculture. [News Release]. Available from author.

### What Works to Address This Problem?

- AgrAbility:

- In 14 states, a group of 269 AgrAbility participants' **mental/behavioral health levels** improved significantly ( $p < .001$ ) as compared with no change in a no-treatment comparison group ( $n = 99$ ).

Source: Fetsch, R. J., & Collins, C. L. (2018). The effects of AgrAbility on the mental/behavioral health of farmers and ranchers with functional limitations: A comparison study. *Medical Research Archives, 6*(2). <http://www.journals.ke-i.org/index.php/mra/article/view/1691/1762>

### Results from 14 States Found that on Average...

- 240 AgrAbility intervention group participants'...
  - QOL levels increased 26% ( $p < .001$ ).
  - ILW levels increased 28% ( $p < .001$ ).
- 99-100 non-AgrAbility comparison group participants'...
  - QOL levels declined 4% (N.S.)
  - ILW levels increased 8% ( $p < .05$ ).

Source: Fetsch, R. J., & Collins, C. L. (2018). Behavioral health of farmers and ranchers with functional limitations: A comparison study. *Medical Research Archives, 6*(2). <http://www.journals.ke-i.org/index.php/mra/article/view/1691/1762>

### Results from 14 States Found that on Average...

- 269-271 AgrAbility intervention group participants'...
  - Psychological WB levels increased 28% ( $p < .001$ ).
  - Existential WB levels increased 21% ( $p < .001$ ).
  - Support levels increased 20% ( $p < .001$ ).
- 99-100 non-AgrAbility comparison group participants'...
  - Psychological WB levels fell 0.04% (N.S.)
  - Existential WB levels fell 0.02% (N.S.)
  - Support levels fell 0.05% (N.S.)

Source: Fetsch, R. J., & Collins, C. L. (2018). Behavioral health of farmers and ranchers with functional limitations: A comparison study. *Medical Research Archives, 6*(2). <http://www.journals.ke-i.org/index.php/mra/article/view/1691/1762>

### California AgrAbility

- Calagrability.ucdavis.edu
- 800-477-6129
- 530-752-1613
- fathallah@ucdavis.edu

**Be careful out there.  
Take good care of yourselves!**

## Questions? & Answers

**Thank you very much!**

**For More Information, Contact:  
Bob Fetsch  
970-491-5648  
robert.fetsch@colostate.edu**

**Thank you  
very much!**

### **How do I make an effective referral?**

- 1) Be aware of the agencies and resources available in your community—what services they offer and what their limitations are.
- 2) Listen for signs and symptoms that the person or family needs help which you cannot provide, i.e., financial, legal or personal counseling.

### **How do I make an effective referral?**

- 3) Assess what agency or community resource would be most appropriate to address the person's/family's problems.
- 4) Discuss the referral with the person/family. "It sounds/looks like you're feeling \_\_\_\_\_. I think \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, or \_\_\_\_\_ could help you deal with your situation."

### **How do I make an effective referral?**

- 5) Explore the individual's/family's willingness to initiate contact with the resource. "How do you feel about seeking help from this person/agency?"
- 6) Where the person or family is unwilling to take the initiative or where there is some danger if action is not taken, you should take the initiative.

### How do I make an effective referral?

- Call the agency and ask to speak to the intake worker (if there is one).
- Identify yourself and your relationship with the person/family.
- Say what you think the person's/family's needs are. "I think that Mr. \_\_\_\_ needs immediate protection from harming himself, needs a counseling appointment, and needs financial and legal assistance."

### How do I make an effective referral?

- Provide the agency with background information (name, address and telephone; age and gender; nature of current problem or crisis; any past history you're aware of; further information as called for).

### How do I make an effective referral?

- Ask the agency what follow-up action they will take:
  - When will they act on the referral?
  - Who will be your contact later if necessary?
  - What will be the cost of the service (flat fee/sliding scale)?
  - Do you need to do anything else to complete the referral?

### How do I make an effective referral?

- 7) Make sure the person/family and the referral agency connect and get together.
- 8) Make one or more follow-up contacts with the agency if the situation calls for it.

**Thank you  
very much!**

### Addressing Stress, Depression and Suicide in California Dairy Families

*A webinar for dairy producers, their families and the dairy community.*

*"Pain is not always obvious."*

**Wednesday, April 3, 2019 10:00 to 11:30 (Pacific Time)**

*By Robert J. Fetsch, Ph.D.*

*Extension Specialist & Professor Emeritus*

*Human Development & Family Studies*

*Colorado State University*

Webinar Link: <https://ucanr.zoom.us/j/751701428>

Phone Call-in: +1 669 900 6833 or +1 646 558 8656

Webinar ID code: 751 701 428

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### AgrAbility Works:

- Both the Quality of Life (QOL) and the Independent Living and Working (ILW) levels of AgrAbility participants in 10 states improved ( $p < .001$ ) (cf. Fetsch, Jackman, & Collins, 2018).
- The QOL levels of a group of 225 AgrAbility participants in 12 states improved significantly as compared with a group of non-AgrAbility participants whose QOL levels did not change (cf. Fetsch & Turk, 2018).

### AgrAbility Works:

- In 12 states, a group of 196 AgrAbility participants' QOL levels increased 28% as compared with a group of 97 non-AgrAbility participants' QOL levels that decreased 4% (cf. Fetsch & Turk, 2018).
- A group of 196 AgrAbility participants' ILW levels increased 30% in 12 states as compared with a group of 97 non-AgrAbility participants whose ILW levels increased 8% (cf. Fetsch & Turk, 2018).
- In 14 states, a group of 269 AgrAbility participants' mental/behavioral health levels improved significantly ( $p < .001$ ) as compared with no change in a no-treatment comparison group ( $n = 99$ ) (cf. Fetsch & Collins, 2018).

### National Institute of Mental Health Current Suicide Rates in U. S.

