

# Your Farm's Greatest Asset

## TIPS AND RESOURCES TO HELP YOUR WELL-BEING



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To be a farmer is to deal with uncertainty. Many farmers have had a slew of trying circumstances of late. Mother Nature whips up hurricanes that affect the fall harvest and even homes. Dairy farmers receive letters canceling contracts. Hog producers get slapped with nuisance lawsuits. The government imposes tariffs that affect the markets.

Added to the mix is the fact that farming is so intertwined with a way of life that sometimes it's difficult for farmers to separate from the stress.

"We call it inseparable connectedness," says Dr. Robin Tutor-Marcom, director of the N.C. Agromedicine Institute at East Carolina University. (The Institute partners with N.C. State and N.C A&T State universities.)

"There is no separation between the farm and the person. They are the farm and the farm is them. If the farm fails, they see themselves failing. They don't see themselves as being able to survive apart from the farm. When they are not at the farm, where

do they go? They go to a Farm Credit meeting, or a Farm Bureau, Extension or commodity meeting. Even if they are not on the farm, they are at a farm-related activity or they are constantly thinking about the farm and so they are not able to separate and have their own identity. That's a real concern."

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Many farmers in the dairy industry, have been been particularly hard hit with some farmers losing contracts.

For many farmers it's a 7 day, 80- to 90-hour-a-week job that these people have been doing their entire lives. It's all they've ever done and now they are going in the hole doing it due to the milk prices. It is a great concern about what farmers are going through and farmers often keep their problems bottled up.



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Dr. Tutor-Marcom who works with farmers statewide says it's not uncommon for farmers to go inward but she stresses that farmers need to do the opposite. "They need to talk with someone. That is the first step."

Tutor-Marcom oversees a staff that offers programs across the state to individuals and groups to promote the health and safety of farmers. Their goal is to

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reduce injury and illness. A new program, "Tape & Twine" provides farmers and their families with practical solutions for dealing with farm stress. They encourage farmers to talk with their support network and step away from farming to get a break from the demands.

Institute programs are wide-ranging, from how to properly use a respirator, to grain bin safety, to proper response if first on the scene of an accident, to guidelines on reducing stress, to health assessments such as blood pressure and diabetes monitoring. If you need help in any aspect of health and safety for farmers, contact the N.C. Agromedicine Institute at 252-744-1008 or [agromedicine@ecu.edu](mailto:agromedicine@ecu.edu). Learn more at [www.ncagromedicine.org](http://www.ncagromedicine.org).

Dr. Michael Hester, the director of the Pastoral Counseling and Growth Center in Asheville, and a frequent presenter at the AgSouth Farm Credit Agricultural Leadership Institute, stresses the importance of self-care and provides a tool he calls MEDS to help cope with and reduce stress. MEDS stands for Meditation, Exercise, Diet and Sleep. He also includes the importance of having a support group of 5 or 6 people, and ways to find meaning in your life. Taking time to simply pause during a busy day, breathe deeply, and express gratitude for at least five things every day can lend a more intentional way to bring meaning to your life.