

Episode Title: Pilot Spotlight – Stress on the Farm: Strategies to Help Each Other

Summary: The Great Plains Center funds pilot projects that promote innovative outreach and research efforts to prevent agricultural injury and illness. In this episode, we talk with Dr. David Brown, the behavioral health state specialist at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, about his pilot project that provided suicide prevention trainings for over 4300 producers and landowners in Iowa. This is the first episode where we talk to pilot grant recipients about their projects, what they did, and how they got the ideas for them.

Expert: David Brown

Episode Quote:

“We knew that farmers and producers had a lot higher rate of suicide than the general population. We also knew that they had a lot higher rate of depression and anxiety than the general population, and so we felt it was important to get out and to start the conversation about suicide prevention in the agricultural community.”

– Dr. David Brown, behavioral health state specialist at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach

Transcript**00:04 K. Crawford**

Welcome to the FarmSafe Podcast brought to you by the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health. The mission of the Great Plains Center is to improve safety and health among agricultural communities. One of the ways the Center accomplishes this mission is by funding pilot projects that promote innovative outreach and research efforts to prevent agricultural injury and illness. Projects can be funded up to \$30,000 which can be used to cover staff salary, supplies, equipment, materials, and other expenses necessary to complete the project.

Today I am joined by Dr. David Brown, the behavioral health state specialist with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. He works with programs on farm stress management, mental health literacy, and suicide prevention. Dr. Brown received a Great Plains pilot grant in 2019 for his project titled, “Stress on the Farm: Strategies to Help Each Other.”

Thanks for joining us today, Dr. Brown. Could you tell us a little bit about your project?

01:03 D. Brown

It was a project that we worked in collaboration with our ag and natural resources specialists across the state with Iowa State University Extension. Basically was, the key components, were to develop and implement a short, culturally specific suicide prevention program for agriculture producers and landowners in Iowa.

Part of that project was the development of a suicide prevention model, which we called the “**CORN**” model, because, you know, many suicide prevention models across the nation have different acronyms. Air Force has Ask, Care, Escort, and of course the QPR model- question, persuade, refer. We wanted, our own model that was more specific to the agricultural community that we knew that the farmers could remember, and that was “corn.”

And so that was to **C**hose to engage, **O**ffer assistance to support, provide **R**esources locally and hotlines, and then the “n” was for **N**ever leave a person alone without a plan and without hope. And so that was the model that we used to provide the training. We provided three different scenarios for them to practice using the model. We also provided a list of warning signs of suicide, so that they could observe those in the scenarios, so they knew what to look for, and then how to implement the CORN model related to those scenarios, and then at the end we provided a lot of different resources that they could access as well.

02:37 K. Crawford

How did you get the idea for this project?

D. Brown

Well, what we knew— we knew that farmers, producers had a lot higher rate of suicide than the general population. We also knew that they had a lot higher rate of depression, anxiety than the general population, and so we felt it was important to get out and to start the conversation about suicide prevention in the agricultural community. Now, what was really interesting is, the timing could not have been better because right after we finished one of our last presentations, the COVID pandemic struck and so we did all of these programs in person, so we had the resources, information out to the farmers and the landowners in Iowa ahead of the pandemic. And so really it was just fortunate timing.

One of the things I may add is, we developed a kind of a pocket card for the producers, landowners to take home with them. It had the CORN model on one side and had a list of resources on the other side. So, everyone who left the program left with a resource, a list, plus how to use a CORN model as well. So, we provided over 4300 of those CORN cards, and the farm service agency representatives there took a lot of the cards with them as well.

04:00 K. Crawford

Did this project lead to any new opportunities?

D. Brown

I think it led to enhanced opportunities, because right at the same time we got this Great Plains grant, we also received a USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture Grant and what we built into that grant were two other programs: question, persuade, refer, and mental health first aid. And so, what we have talked about, in other presentations is that the funding we received from Great Plains was our first entry into the suicide prevention realm with agricultural producers in Iowa. And that opened up a lot of doors with us, I think, [for] offering question persuade refer, and mental health first aid, a lot longer program, to not only producers, but also those that were what we've described as agricultural advocates, you know, veterinarians, bankers, the commodity groups of other associations like that, who have, you know, fairly good access to farmers. And we wanted to make sure that they were all also aware of the signs of stress, signs of suicide, and they were prepared to engage farmers and producers as needed and have available resources as well.

05:11 K. Crawford

What did you learn from this? Was there anything that you took away from the project that was especially impactful, or perhaps surprising? Or was there anything that you learned about how to maybe do things differently?

05:23 D. Brown

Well, I think the one thing that we learned, and we actually planned it this way, was that if you just offer a stress assistance program or a suicide prevention program to agriculture producers as a stand-alone program that's probably not going to work very well. We actually provided this at a farm bill meeting. We knew that that was a program that many of our producers and landowners were going to be very, very interested in, too. So, they came for that, but they also got a little bit of information regarding suicide prevention at the end. It was really interesting. A lot of our feedback, we had some very positive feedback, but we also have some feedback, that the farmers didn't want to hear that at the time, you know they thought they were just coming for this even though the brochure was very clear about what we were going to provide, they were surprised to hear this information. We also had to be a little bit more prepared, because there was a couple programs that we had individuals that struggled with that and we had to kind of do some individual work with them afterwards and we had all of our presenters were trained in mental health first aid we made sure that you couldn't present this program without being trained in mental health first aid, and so they were able to kind of step out with the individual and kind of process some of the feelings they were having related to the training, and so we were prepared for that as well.

Now, in the end, what's really happened in the last couple years, I've talked with our key partner in this, with Dr. Chad Hart, who's our grain market specialist in extension, he said he is now hearing almost all 100% positive feedback, and said, "Thank you for providing that program when you did it." And so, I think in hindsight the participants are starting to see the importance of the program that we offered.

07:15 K. Crawford

I imagine the timing is difficult because if you're presenting this when people don't think they need it, they're not as interested but you don't want to be in a situation where you do need those resources but you don't have them.

07:28 D. Brown

And we have some additive reports in our three months follow up that a number of farmers actually had the opportunity to use the card and provide the card to individuals who are struggling and so we know, we've have had some impact that way as well.

K. Crawford

Speaking of impact, this project provided 95 suicide prevention trainings in 87 different counties and reached over 4300 agricultural producers and landowners. That's a lot of people.

07:55 D. Brown

That's a lot of people, and it took a lot of staff time and a lot of effort to make that happen. But it was kind of an all-hands-on deck with ISU extension and outreach, as far as our human sciences, specialists, and some of our farm management specialists were also involved. And so, we wouldn't have been able to do that without the Great Plains funding to make such a project happen and provide all the resources that we did.

K. Crawford

Based on your experience, would you encourage others to apply for pilot grants? And, if so, do you have any recommendations for them?

08:27 D. Brown

Oh, I would think so. If you have an idea of what you'd like to do, or you know, gosh, "if I just had a little bit more money, I'd have this great project to implement and offer," this is a great source of funding to be able to do that. It's enough funding to get a project off the ground, and if it's, smaller projects, certainly, you're able to implement it as well get as much data as you can to provide that. If you have an idea that you want to try to test out, it's a great opportunity.

One other thing I also want to add is those CORN cards that we've developed, we're actually continuing to use those in a variety of different projects. We just received another grant last year from the USDA in collaboration with Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, and with that money we developed a couple different farm stress publications. One focused on agribusinesses and one focused on the farm family members, and for those with agribusinesses we use the CORN model and have a picture of the CORN model within the publication and so far, we've provided about 13,000 of those documents across the state. And so, we are using that model still pretty heavily, as we're working with agribusinesses and farmers still. So, it's a model that has we've gotten out in a variety of different ways. There [are] thousands of those CORN cards still out there that we'll continue to be passing out to Iowa entities involved in Iowa agriculture.

09:55 K. Crawford

Are those resources you'd like to share? I can provide links in our episode resources section on our website.

D. Brown

Certainly, our publications are available, and I can share that with you, as are the Iowa Corn cards are available at the ISU extension store, and I have links I can share if anyone wants us to access those documents.

10:15 K. Crawford

Check out the links provided in the episode resources section of our website, which include links to the publications Dr. Brown mentioned. These include a Farm Stress and Mental Health fact sheet for agricultural advocates and a Stress on the Farm document for farmers, families, and communities. We also provided a link to the Pilot Project page on the Great Plains website. Check out the

page to find out more about pilot projects and opportunities for funding. There's contact information on the website, so please reach out if you have any questions.

We want to hear from you. Share your stories about health and safety issues on the farm, about injuries that made you change the way you work, or about the ways you keep yourself and others safe on your farm. Also let us know if there are any topics that you want to hear about on the air. You can visit our website at gpcah.org or email us.

Original music for the FarmSafe podcast was written and performed by Ben Schmidt.

This work was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as part of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health.

Episode Resources

- [Farm Stress and Mental Health: A Fact Sheet for Agricultural Advocates \(includes CORN Model\)](#)
- [Stress on the Farm – a resource for farmers, families, and communities](#)
- [GPCAH Pilot Grant Opportunities](#)

Photo

