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Farmerhealth.org

The landscape of Mental Health and Financial Supports for Midwest Farmers

PennState.



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Interdisciplinary Project Team



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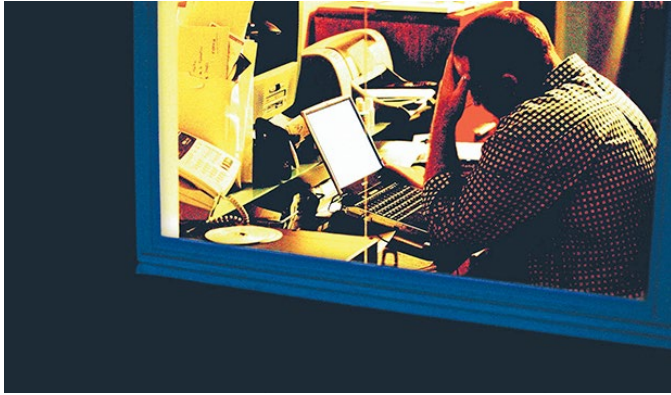
Research Technologist

Why Study the Landscape of Mental Health and Financial Support?

Globally, agriculture is:



Photo: onfliculture.wordpress.com



One of the occupations that experiences some of the highest stress levels

Photo: eclairagepublic.net



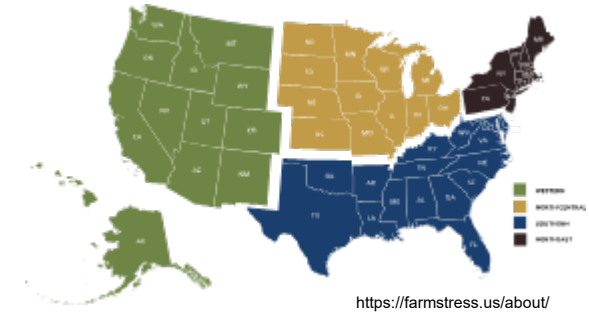
One that experiences some of the highest suicide rates

Calls for swift action in recent years by farm organizations and policymakers

Response to farmer mental health needs



Investment in resources (e.g., suicide hotlines, counseling vouchers, and educational workshops)



BUT investments made with limited understanding of what mental health interventions look like and their effectiveness and acceptability by farmers.

RESEARCH THUS FAR

- Focus on farmers and their help-seeking strategies
- Much less attention to how larger environment shape their help-seeking strategies

- Attention to mental health supports but little to financial supports

- About the 1980s farm crisis in the U.S.
- From countries with stronger government-sponsored social and economic safety nets

Today's webinar:

- **What the landscape of support looks like in the Midwest for mental health and financial challenges;**
- **How farmers engage with that landscape of support.**

Larger project: Farmer help-seeking strategies



- 5-year mixed-methods research project to **identify the individual and contextual determinants** underpinning farmers' help-seeking strategies when facing **mental health and financial challenges**
- Part of research agenda:
 - Exploring interventions to support farm families' ability to meet their social and economic needs;
 - Interrogating common narrative around help-seeking in agriculture.

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Identifying individual and contextual determinants underpinning farmers' help-seeking behaviors and their role in shaping mental health outcomes

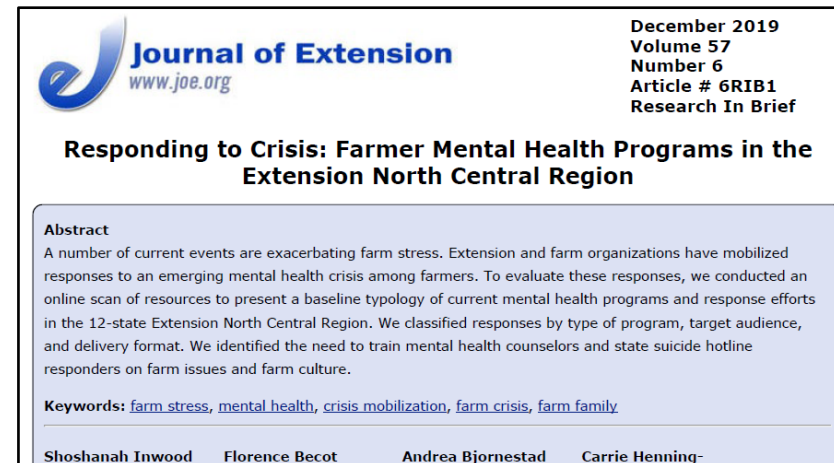
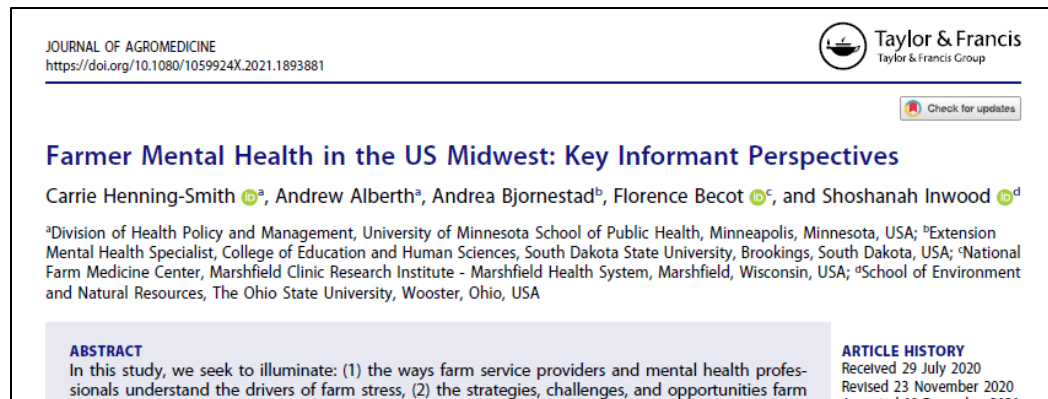


<https://z.umn.edu/UMASH-Farmer-Mental-Health-Research>

Builds on previous work

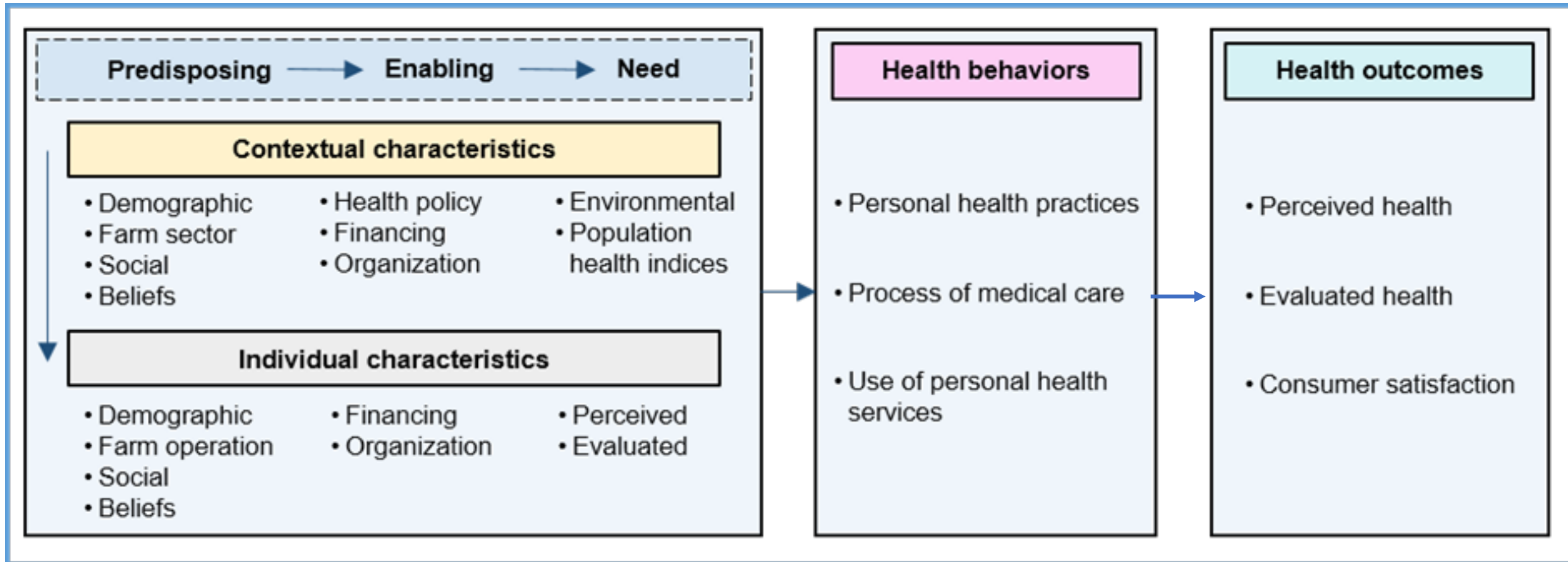


- Farmer mental and physical health
- Farmer's health insurance and health care access
- Mental health interventions, including through Extension
- Informal and formal support systems
- Social isolation
- Rural economic development



NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL CENTER
FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Andersen's Behavioral Model of Health Services Use



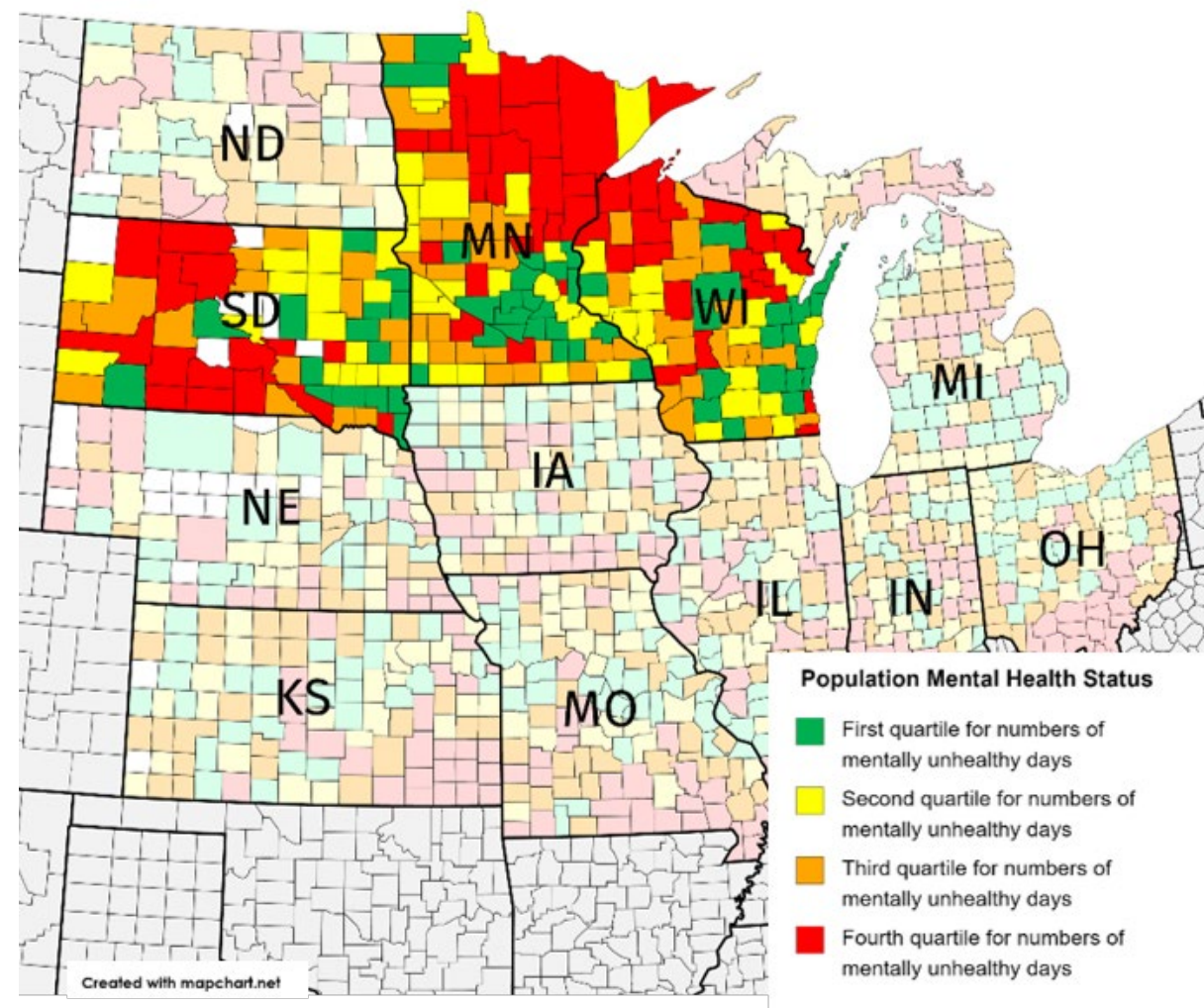
Study areas

12 Midwest states:

- Almost **half** of all U.S. **farm sales**
- **Second** largest share of **farmer suicides**

Choice of counties and states:

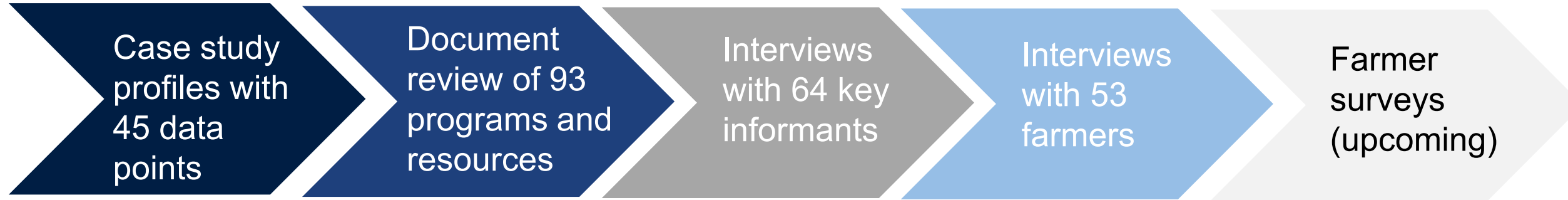
- Variations in health policy environment at the state level
- Variations in mental health outcomes at the county level



Study approach



Mixed-methods research design



Focus of today's presentation



Photo credit: Olivia Wilson

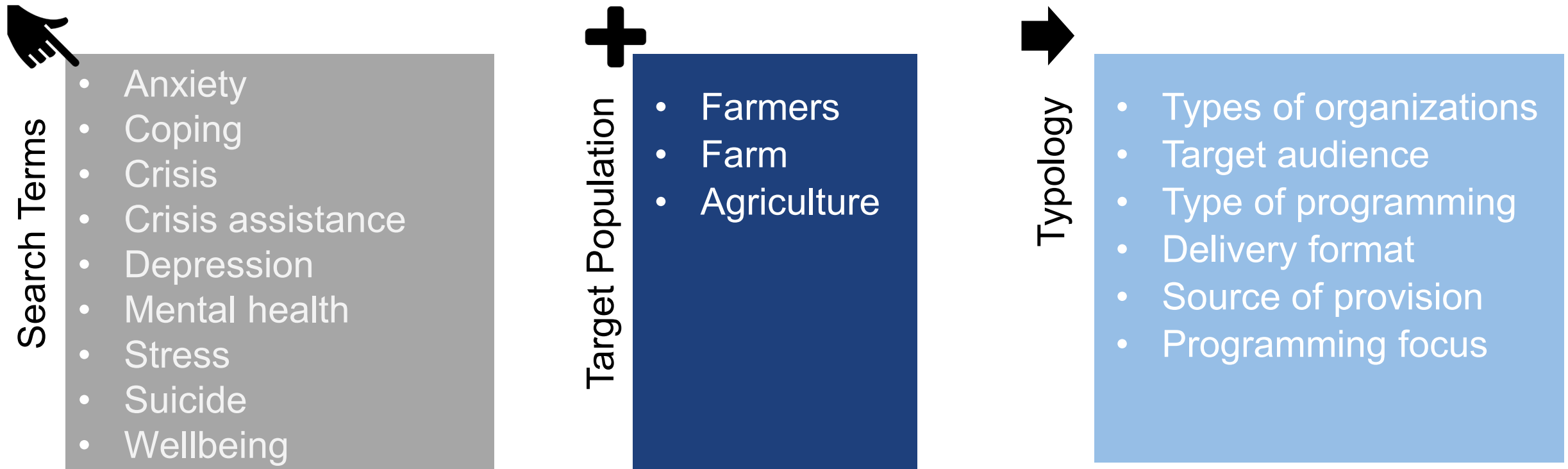
Answering our research questions:

- **What does the landscape of support for mental health and financial challenges look like in the Midwest?**
- **How do farmers engage with that landscape of support?**

Methods: Document review



- Reviewed programs and resources intended to address mental health challenges in the farm population
- Documents identified at 2 points in time: 2019 and 2022
- Focused on Minnesota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin



Methods: Interviews



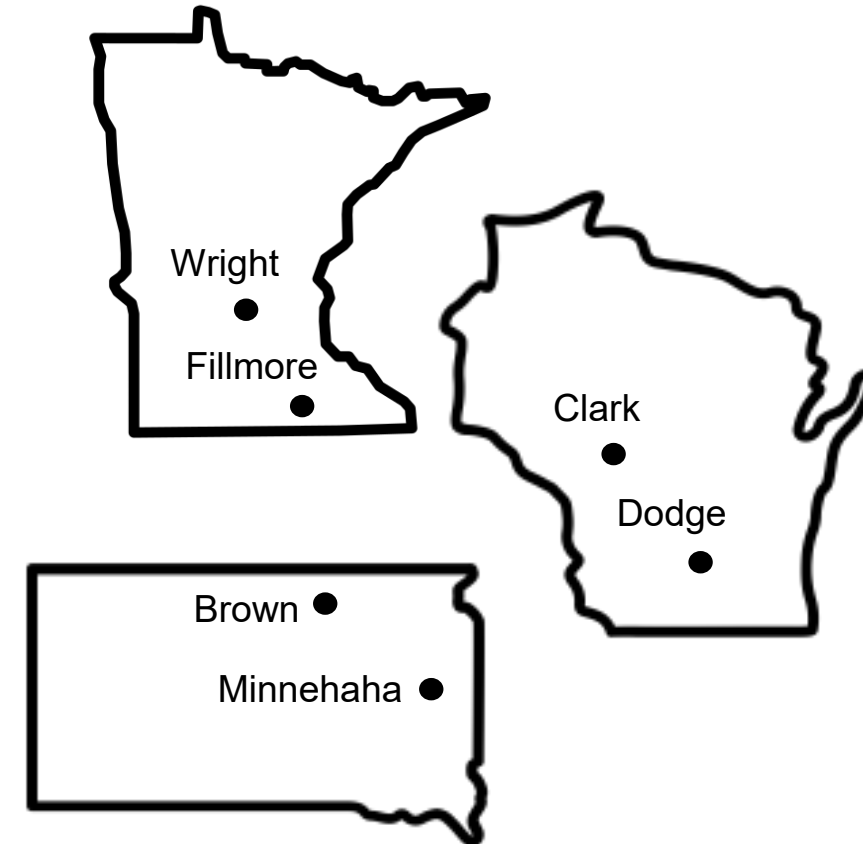
Conducted 59 key informant interviews with 64 people (Fall 2023)

Agricultural informants

- Farm organizations reps
- University extension professionals
- Farm service providers (banker, vet, farm input dealers, etc.)

Non-agricultural informants

- Health care providers (primary and specialty care)
- County/city officials
- Health agencies (state and county level)
- Faith leaders



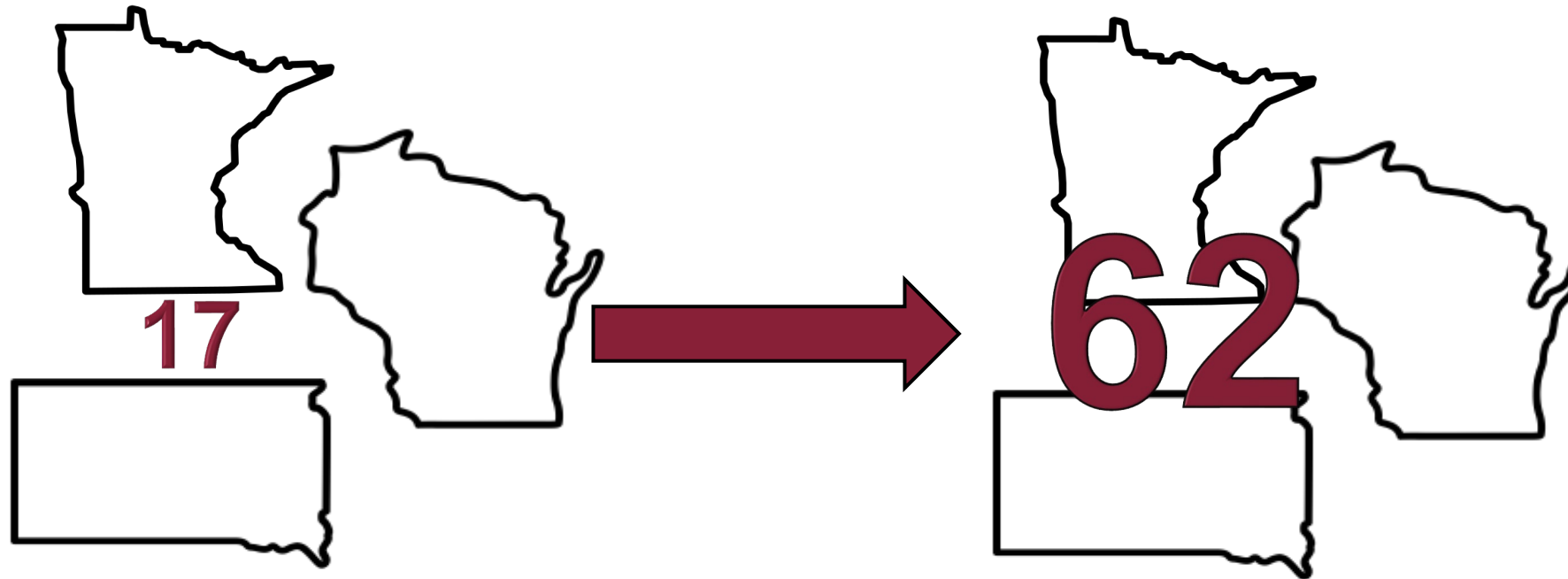
- Coding of interviews: based on interview guide and new relevant themes
- Analysis: thematic analysis

**Description of the landscape of support based
on information from online searches**

Number of organizations involved



Between 2019 and 2022, the number of **organizations** offering programming more than **tripled**



Types of organizations involved



Shift in the type of organizations providing resources

Most prevalent in 2019



FARM

Farm organization

University extension

Farm service providers

State agencies of agriculture

Community-based

Most prevalent in 2022



HEALTH

Healthcare providers

County/state health agencies

Community-based

OTHER

Faith group

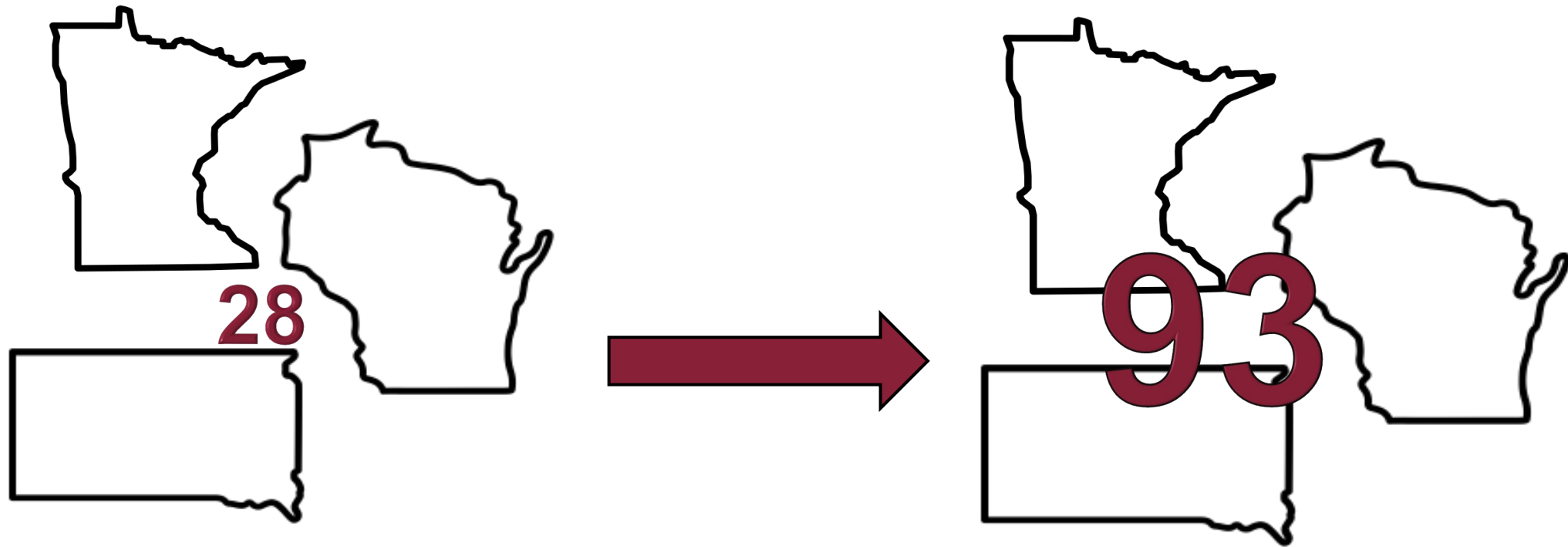
Non-health related county departments

News outlet

Number of programs and resources



Between 2019 and 2022, number of **programs and resources** more than **tripled**



Population most targeted in 2022:

- Farm population (63.4% of programs and resources) but limited representation of the diversity of farm population (gender, race/ethnicity, age)
- Service providers (4.3% of programs and resources)

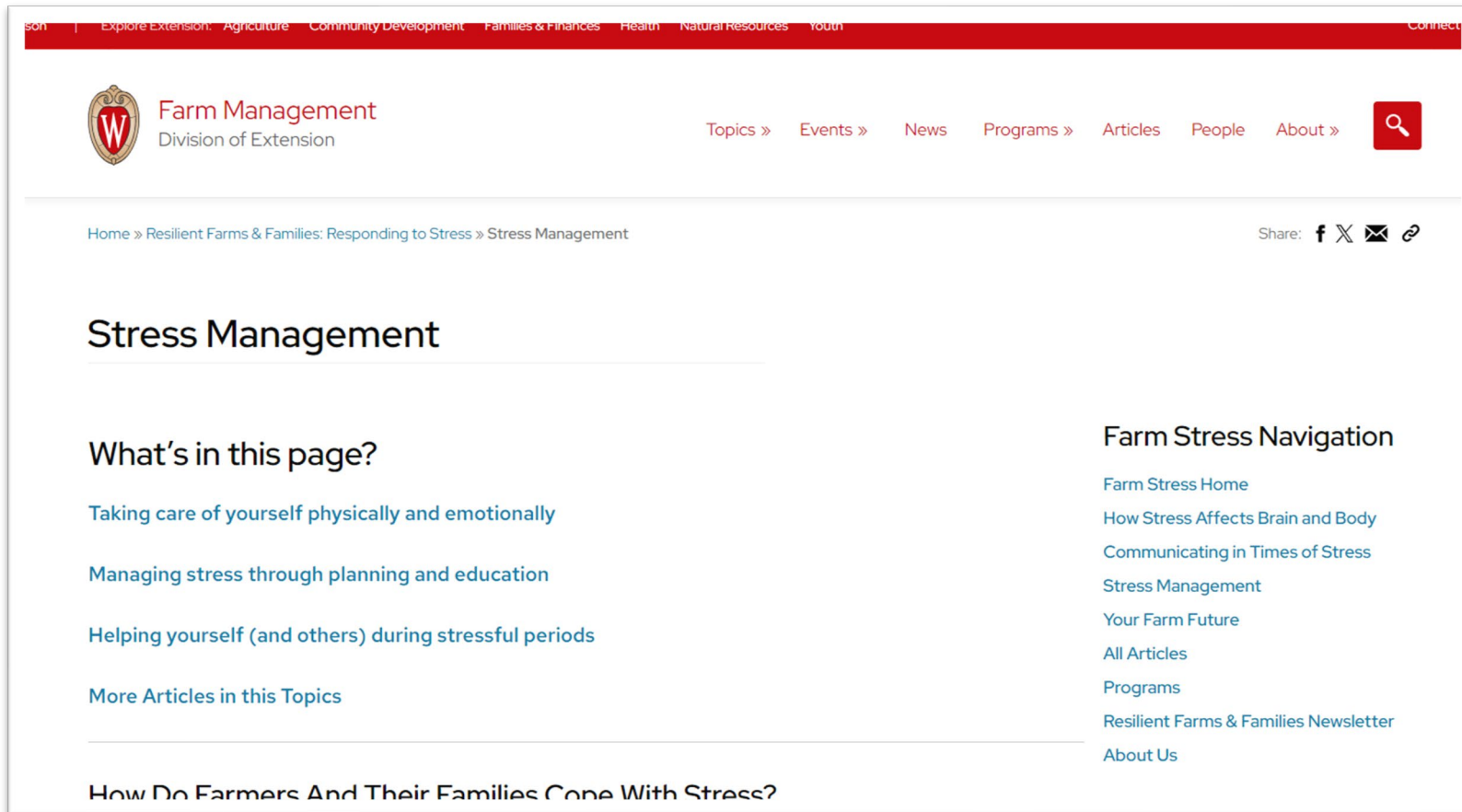
Types of programming



Fact sheet/web page

2019 8 (29%)

2022 38 (41%)



Types of programming



Fact sheet/web page Hotline

2019	8 (29%)	2 (7%)
2022	38 (41%)	11 (12%)



BUSINESS DEV, LOANS, GRANTS ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABILITY PESTICIDE, FERTILIZER FOOD, FEED PLANTS, INSECTS LICENSING & INSPECTIONS

STRESS & CRISIS: GET HELP NOW

[Home](#) > [Coping with Farm & Rural Stress](#) > [Stress & Crisis: Get Help Now](#)

Minnesota Farm & Rural Helpline

Phone: 833-600-2670

Text: FARMSTRESS to 898211

Email: farmstress@state.mn.us

Free, confidential, 24/7. If you or someone you know is struggling with stress, anxiety, or depression, call us. Calls are answered by trained counselors, and sometimes it's easier to talk to someone you don't know. And if you are experiencing business, financial, or legal problems, we can connect you to that kind of help.

EXTERNAL LINKS

- > [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#)
- > [Crisis Text Line \(TXT4Life\)](#)

CONTACT US

Types of programming



Fact sheet/web page Hotline One-on-one counseling

2019	8 (29%)	2 (7%)	6 (21%)
2022	38 (41%)	11 (12%)	13 (14%)

Wisconsin Gov

State of Wisconsin
Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

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Counseling Services

24/7 Farmer Wellness Helpline: (888) 901-2558

Free, confidential, and immediate support any day, any time. Helpline representatives can also make referrals to Farmer Wellness Tele-Counseling Sessions or the Counseling Voucher Program for on-going, long-term support.

If you are feeling suicidal, contact the helpline or 9-8-8 immediately.

Tele-Counseling

Farmers and their family members can receive free, confidential, and unlimited sessions from a licensed mental health professional online or by phone. Sessions can be requested by contacting the 24/7 Farmer Wellness Helpline at (888) 901-2558.

Meet the Wisconsin Farm Center: Jessica Beauchamp, Farmer Wellness ...
Watch later Share

Watch on YouTube

Counseling Vouchers

Farmers and farm family members can obtain in person counseling services from a participating mental health provider in their local area at no cost. Vouchers can be requested by contacting the Wisconsin Farm Center Helpline at (800) 942-2474.

Types of programming



Fact sheet/web page Hotline One-on-one counseling Workshop/conference

2019	8 (29%)	2 (7%)	6 (21%)	6 (21%)
2022	38 (41%)	11 (12%)	13 (14%)	18 (19%)

Comparing between 2019 and 2022:

- Increase in absolute for all types of programming
- Share of fact sheet/webpage and hotlines increased

Delivery format:

- 54% self-help
- 33% mediated help with biggest increase between 2019 and 2022

Categories based on priorities identified by experts in 2019 (Henning-Smith et al, 2020)

	2019 (n=28)	2022 (n=93)	% change in share 2019-2022
	%	%	
Education on mental health	64.3	60.2	-6%
Improve access to care and reduce cost	17.9	31.2	+74%
Address key stressors	17.9	8.6	-52%

➡ Programming most often focused on mental health education in 2019 and 2022

Greatest increase in the share of programming to improve access to care but
decrease in share of programming to address key stressors

Description of the landscape of support based on key informant interviews

Spread of programs mentioned



MENTAL HEALTH

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

- Address mental health stigma
- **Identifying stress, ways of coping with stress, suicide prevention**
- **Raise awareness about/refer to available resources**

ACCESS TO CARE

- **Provide mental health services and support groups**
- Increase providers available
- Offset costs for MH services

ADDRESS KEY STRESSORS

- Financial and logistical root of MH challenge
- Health insurance

Financial and logistical
root of mental health
challenges

Health insurance

Family leave due to
changes in family
structure

Medical benefits

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

FARM BUSINESS

- **Programs to support specific stages of the farm business cycle**
- **Farm business viability programs**
- Environmental preservation programs
- Farm income support (e.g., crop insurance, commodity price supports, loans/grants)
- Mediation services

FAMILY

- Childcare assistance
- General family financial counseling
- **Housing and food assistance (e.g., SNAP, WIC)**
- **Household income support (e.g., cash aid)**
- Clothing drives
- Family leave due to changes in family structure

HEALTH

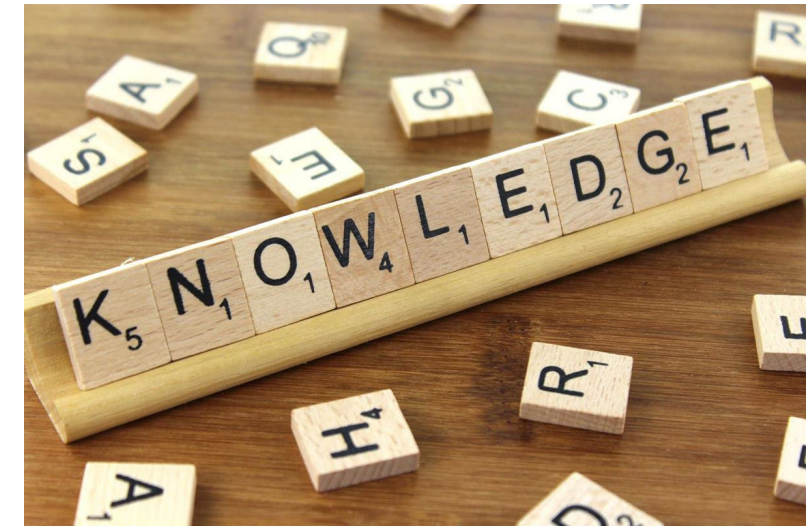
- Medical/dental/vision benefits
- Workers' compensation

This list captures the spread of programs and resources mentioned rather than a summary of program reach or frequency of use.

Who knows what?



- **Each sector knew the most about the financial programming closest to their sector**
- **Health sector informants had a greater understanding of agricultural financial support programs than the agricultural sector informants had of health financial support programs.**
- Agricultural informants mentioned financial programming for the family the least.



“We channel resources to producers of different places where to go, where to ask for help. We're not the experts, we are just a bridge to try to help”. (South Dakota, agriculture sector)

“There is an incredible request for help [with finances], and they have limited resources to do that. We have a number of food pantries. We have churches and other communities that do community meals that are free for anybody in the community. It's just the need is so overwhelming that we can't help everybody consistently”. (Wisconsin, health sector)

**Farmers' ability and willingness to seek help
when facing mental health and financial
challenges**

Willingness and ability to seek help



Key informants described farmers as...

Most



Least

**Willing to seek
financial help**

Publicly visible
challenges and “in
the same boat” as
farmers

“[When] we say we might be able to find some [financial] resource, literally, everybody is like yes. They're always interested in whatever we can find for them for financial help.”

Willingness and ability to seek help



Key informants described farmers as...

Most



Least

**Willing to seek
financial help**

Publicly visible
challenges and “in
the same boat” as
farmers

**Willing to seek mental
health support**

Mental health stigma
dissipating, openness and
enthusiasm

*“I think that it's [stigma] getting better, they feel
like they can seek help and be honest.”*

Willingness and ability to seek help



Key informants described farmers as...

Most



Least

**Willing to seek
financial help**

Publicly visible
challenges and “in
the same boat” as
farmers

**Willing to seek mental
health support**

Mental health stigma
dissipating, openness and
enthusiasm

**Able to seek
financial help**

Overwhelmed with
daily operations
therefore limited
ability

“I think the greatest challenge on a lot of farms is they’re so focused on the day-to-day operations that they don’t really see the function of economics and profitability.”

Willingness and ability to seek help



Key informants described farmers as...

Most



Least

Willing to seek financial help

Publicly visible challenges and “in the same boat” as farmers

Willing to seek mental health support

Mental health stigma dissipating, openness and enthusiasm

Able to seek financial help

Overwhelmed with daily operations therefore limited ability

Able to seek mental health support

Even when willing, farmers often unable to get mental health support

“I think there's increasing openness about it in the community in general, but the challenges are just finding a provider in our local community.”

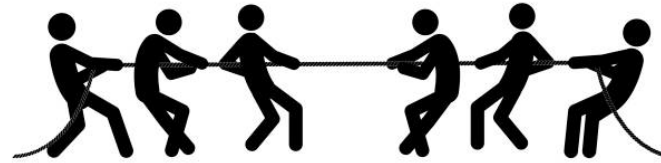
What impacts farmers' help-seeking?



Common perception that farmers don't want to seek help

Tension

Willingness



Ability

- **Farm viability**
- **Stigma (or lack thereof)**
- Demographic characteristics (age, gender)
- Existing relationships with healthcare provider
- **Cost (health insurance, health care)**
- **Time required away from work**
- **Availability of services**
- Internet access
- Awareness of programs and resources

Farmers more willing than able to seek help

Applies to mental health and financial challenges

Key take aways:

Highlighting 4 today but there are many more!

Finding

- Notable increase in organizations and programs with shift from agricultural to health care sector
- Awareness of financial and mental health supports among informants differed by sector

Likely explained by

- FRSAN and COVID-19 funding
- Improving access to care is a FRSAN priority
- People most familiar with what connects to their area of expertise

Implications

Service providers

- Opportunities to collaborate between the agricultural and health care sectors
- BUT need caution around medicalizing mental health challenges in agriculture

Decision makers

- Concerns connected to sustainability of programming over time since COVID-19 funding was temporary and FRSAN needs Farm Bill re-authorization

Finding

- Programming largely for farmers but likely not all of them

Likely explained by

- Stereotype of who 'counts' as a farmer
- Documented emphasis on white, male, farmers in mental health programs in other regions/countries

Implications

Service providers

- Potential reinforcement of norms, narratives, and stigmas
- Need to ensure that programs and resources speak to the diversity of needs and lived realities

Decision makers

- Caution against using a one-size-fit all model due to ineffectiveness

Finding

Farmers perceived as **more willing** than they are **able to seek** help

Likely explained by

- Increase in mental health programs
- Willingness or ability kept separate in previous research

Implications

Service providers

- Be mindful of your own biases related to farmers
- Careful with language connected to stigma and convincing
- Help farmers access programs

Decision makers

- Importance of addressing barriers connected to cost and availability of support

Seeking help for financial challenges



Finding

Key informants perceived farmers to be willing and open to seeking help for financial challenges

Likely explained by

- Connection to farm viability and transitioning the farm to the next generation
- Way to address underpinning stressors

Implications

Service providers

- Importance of including financial-related information to support the farm business and farm household

Decision makers

- Support for diverse teams of service providers to assist farm families: farm financial viability, farm transition, social work, behavioral health
- Importance of addressing root causes of financial challenges

For more information about the study

PennState.



FARMER MENTAL HEALTH HELP-SEEKING STRATEGIES



PennState.



Case Study Profile Series: Fillmore County, MN

STUDY BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Farmers experience more mental health challenges than other occupational groups, which can lead to additional health and financial challenges [1, 2]. Farmer trade organizations, advocacy groups, and policy makers have called for swift action in response to the ongoing farm income crisis, sudden shifts in international trade policies, and ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While rapid intervention is essential to relieving the high mental health burden of farmers, current interventions may be ineffective or insufficient, in part due to key gaps in knowledge about this issue [3-5]. The literature's current focus on individual-level factors limits our understanding of the role played by larger socio-economic

CORE PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Examine the connections between farmers' help-seeking strategies and their larger social and economic environments by:
 - ✓ Developing a database of the contextual determinants that may play a role in farmers' help-seeking strategies;
 - ✓ Describing farmers' help-seeking strategies, mental health challenges, and the role played

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OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

The Landscape of Farmer Mental Health Programs in the US Midwest

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Agricultural sector crises have historically led to a sharp increase in resources for farmers' mental health. Yet, our understanding of the effectiveness, acceptability, and long-term sustainability of these is limited, and research rarely assesses the offering of programming within a geographic region.

Methods: We conducted online environmental scans in 2019 and 2022 (a period that encapsulates a farm income crisis and the height of the COVID-19 pandemic) in three Midwest states to understand: 1) what the mental health programming landscape looks like, 2) how it has evolved in response to crises, and 3) the progress made toward addressing major stressors and key barriers to care.

Findings: The number of organizations providing resources more than quadrupled, and the number of programs and resources more than tripled. Organizations most represented shifted from the farm sector in 2019 to the health sector in 2022. Educational material comprised most

KEYWORDS

Agricultural and farm population; extension programming; mental health; rural healthcare; service delivery

And more!



<https://z.umn.edu/UMASH-Farmer-Mental-Health-Research>

Next steps



Case study
profiles with
45 data
points

Document
review of 93
programs and
resources

Interviews
with 64 key
informants

Interviews
with 53
farmers

Farmer
surveys
(upcoming)

Extension educators' and agricultural service providers 'perspectives and experiences supporting farmers' mental health

Deep dive into farmers' help-seeking strategies – tease out the role of individual and contextual level factors

Regional survey in
Winter 2025

Thank you!



Funding

CDC National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health: U54 OH010170-11

Project webpage

<https://z.umn.edu/UMASH-Farmer-Mental-Health-Research>

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Identifying individual and contextual determinants underpinning farmers' help-seeking behaviors and their role in shaping mental health outcomes



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