



CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL SAFETY WEEK MARCH 11-17

SEMAINE CANADIENNE DE LA SÉCURITÉ EN MILIEU AGRICOLE mars 11-17

Stress farm safety, then be well

As many farmers manage one or more employees, wellness issues are a bottom line concern and a necessary part of a farm's operational safety and business plan.

Besides training an employee to operate equipment, producers need to encourage everyone living and working on the farm to regularly visit a doctor for a check-up, eat a balanced diet, follow a fitness program and manage stress.

To help producers manage stress, a farm management tool called *Difficult Times: Stress on the Farm* has been developed by the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA). A free download of the booklet is available at <http://casa-acsa.ca/content/difficult-times-stress-farm>.

The *Difficult Times: Stress on the Farm* booklet supports the theme *Plan • Farm • Safety*, a three-year focus for the Canadian agricultural safety campaign. In 2012, emphasis is on "Safety" including assessment, improvement and further development of safety systems. Last year, the focus was on "Farm" including implementation, documentation and training. In 2010, the campaign promoted "Plan" featured safety walkabouts and planning for safety.

The yearlong "Safety" campaign will be launched with Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW), March 11 to 17. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) and CASA deliver CASW in partnership with Farm Credit Canada (FCC) and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through Growing Forward, a federal, provincial, territorial initiative.

"Recognising there is a problem is half the solution," says Ron Bonnett, President of CFA. "People are the most important asset that a farm business has, so it is imperative for everyone living and working on the operation to take care of themselves both mentally and physically."

Stress is the body's response to the demands placed on it. Causes of stress may include weather, debt load, long working hours, or machinery breakdowns – the list of potential stressors on a farm is endless.

Physically, prolonged stress can result in headaches, stomach problems, chest pain, racing heart and fatigue, among other symptoms. Mentally, stress alters the way one thinks and can lead to frustration, paranoia, negative thinking, and depression and reduces our tolerance levels which can lead to difficulty handling anger. Behaviourally, stress may show itself with overeating, increased smoking or alcohol consumption, poor sleep, lack of concentration, forgetfulness, emotional withdrawal and short temperedness. Unchecked stress spirals downward quickly.

Each person is unique in his or her ability to handle stress. What may be tolerable to one person may be insurmountable to another. The key is to be aware of stressors and accept that some are out of your control. Then concentrate energy towards problem solving and coping with stressors that are within your control.

Five easy steps to help keep stress in check are:

- Take breaks regularly and relax at least 20 minutes each day.

- Talk about your stress with someone.
- Eat three meals a day at consistent times while comfortably seated.
- Prepare for known stressful events well in advance.
- Strengthen your relationships with others and regularly make time to have some fun!

Stress management is good life management. Identify priorities and deal with them; acknowledge and accept that there is not enough time to do everything.

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For more information contact:

Theresa Whalen, CFA Farm Safety Consultant, Tel: (613) 822-0016 E-mail: farmsafety@cfafca.ca

Diane Wreford, CASA Communications, Tel: (204) 275-8874 E-mail: dwreford@casa-acsa.ca

Aliya Ladha, FCC Communication Consultant, Tel: (306) 780-5635 E-mail: aliya.ladha@fcc-fac.ca

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