



The Farm Safety, Health & Wellness Toolkit

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About the VCE Farm Safety, Health, and Wellness Initiative

The Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) Farm Safety, Health and Wellness Initiative was led by a coalition of Virginia educators, farm service providers, and farmers to improve farmers' and service providers' knowledge of themes related to farm safety, health, and wellness, including but not limited to agritourism safety, diversification of farm income, farm finance decision making, identifying and addressing mental health concerns, operating machinery safely and effectively, farm stress, aging, farm succession planning, and more. Within the initiative, team members put together a number of webinars, publications, and other resources to inform farmers and service providers about how to maintain a safe and healthy environment on the farm, within the farm business, and for the farm family. All of the toolkit resources are enumerated and linked in this document.

About the Toolkit

Farmers nationwide are experiencing socio-economic crisis and Virginia's farmers are no exception. Farmers in Virginia are under immense stress due to various threats including social threats (within the family or community), economic threats (including land or market loss and associated financial stress), political threats (such as systemic discrimination, racism, and disadvantageous political policy), and environmental threats (like drought, flooding, or pest infestation). Farmers in Virginia experience overwhelming feelings of stress and may encounter associated mental health issues due to the current crises and the threats they face. To address this, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) designed a Farm Safety, Health, and Wellness Initiative funded by the Southern Extension Risk Management Education grant. Over the course of two years, the Initiative created resources, developed trainings and webinars, and conducted farm dinner theatres, ultimately culminating in the creation of a farm stress and mental health toolkit for farmers and farm service providers to use. In addition to webinar recordings and a how-to guide for farm dinner theatre, the toolkit contains resources on grief during the time of the coronavirus pandemic, best practices for farm financial wellness, a decision-making guide for farm service providers, fictional case studies highlighting various farm stress and mental health issues, and a mental health assessment that farm service providers can use with farmers experiencing stress. As one program participant noted, "This is a really good program and it is good for folks to come together to realize we are all in the same boat."

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How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit represents a suite of resources for farmers and farm service providers. The resources included in this toolkit detail how to make choices that promote the mental and physical health of farmers and farm families, as well as the financial health of the farms they operate. This toolkit is designed to be used as a resource guide for farm financial and emergency planning, building empathy and enhancing communication about mental health between farmers and farm service providers as well as among farm family members. This toolkit also offers resources with coping strategies for handling farm stress and grief. We encourage farmers, farm service providers, and farm family members to review the resources included and linked here to identify which would be useful to them in ensuring the health and wellness of themselves and the farmers they work and live with, as well as the viability and vitality of the farms they work on, live on, and serve.

VCE Publications

Refer to these publications to learn more about farm safety, health, and wellness:

Best Practices to Managing Farm Financial Health and Wellbeing

This publication draws attention to the hardships farmers face in developing and maintaining their farm businesses. This document provides best management practices to manage and mitigate the whole-farm and whole-family risks associated with finances, production, marketing, legal issues, and human interaction. This brief resource is designed to be a reference for farmers but can also be used as a tool by farm service providers when working with struggling farmers.

- https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/ALCE/alce-222/ALCE-222.pdf

Managing Farm Financial Stress for a Healthy Farm and a Healthy Farm Family

This comprehensive resource provides insight into the nuances of farm stress and the mental health concerns that accompany it. It describes the psychological and physical impacts that stress can have on mind and body, and provides information on how farm financial stress might be avoided. This resource explains the characteristics of a financially healthy farm and the steps needed to obtain financial health on the farm. It shares the signs of impending mental health crisis and how to reach out to a struggling farmer. There are numerous resources related to mental health and farm finance listed in this document for farmers to use or to be used as referrals by farm service providers.

- <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/ALCE/ALCE-220/ALCE-220.html>

Farm Financial Stress Assessment Tool for Farmer Advisors and Practitioners

This is a tool to be used by farm service providers such as extension agents or farm finance professionals to assess farmer mental health and wellbeing. This is not a formal diagnostic tool, but rather is designed to provide farm service providers with talking points and communication strategies to open up conversation with farmers about their mental health and the levels of stress they are undergoing. The document also shares advice gleaned from practitioners about how to facilitate successful conversations on farm finance and farm stress, and advice about developing relationships built on trust.

- <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/ALCE/ALCE-226/ALCE-226.html>

Farm Safety, Health and Wellness Resource: Decision-Making Guide for Farm Service Providers and Educators

This resource is a decision-making guide designed to be used by farm service providers and educators working with farmers who are undergoing stress. The guide contains examples of the types of stress farmers may experience, warning signs for those experiencing acute stress, and a step-by-step guide to communicating with farmers undergoing stress and referring them to the right resources.

- https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/ALCE/alce-187/ALCE-187.pdf

Mental health case studies

In partnership with Mary Baldwin University's Murphy Deming College of Health Sciences, the team put together a series of fictional mental health case studies designed to provide insight into real-life scenarios of farm stress and mental health concerns for practitioners working with farmers. The case studies come with study guides to help extension agents and other farm service professionals identify their role in addressing farm stress and mental health concerns while engaged in their daily work.

- [The Dunlap's Beef Cattle: The Impact of Intergenerational Farm Transfer](#)
- [Financial Strain on Dairy Farmers: The Cooper Family Story](#)
- [The Johnsons' Broiler Farm](#)
- [The Montel Family: An Intergenerational Farm](#)
- [The Family Vegetable Farm in Roanoke, Virginia](#)

Farm Stress and Grief in the Time of COVID-19: Strategies and Resources

This resource on farm stress and grief focuses on the hardships particular to farmers during the coronavirus crisis. The resource, which is oriented toward both farmers and farm service providers who advise farmers on dealing with stressors, offers concrete coping strategies to help ground and center during times of mental health difficulty or crisis. It also offers a list of resources and other articles related to stress due to the pandemic.

- https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/ALCE/alce-202/ALCE-202.pdf

Virginia Farm Emergency Plan

The Virginia Farm Emergency plan details why an emergency plan is an essential communication and training tool for every farm and offers a template for a farmer to fill in with important contacts, farm maps, directions and details about the farming operation for emergency service providers. The plan includes details on where and how the plan should be stored and used, and who should be made aware of the plan and who should have access to it. This is an important emergency preparedness tool that every farm and farm family should take advantage of.

- <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/ALCE/ALCE-219/ALCE-219.html>

Webinars

The VCE Farm Safety, Health, and Wellness Initiative produced a number of webinars between 2019 and 2020. The webinars focused on themes related to mental health, farm stress, farm financial wellbeing, and diversification of income streams for the reduction of farm stress and the improvement of farm financial wellbeing. Refer to the following webinars and the links to the recordings to learn more:

Mindfulness and Self Care for Farmers

September 30, 2020

Presenter

Kara Dodson, Farmer, Full Moon Farm in Triplett, NC

Overview

This webinar covers the ways farmers can take care of themselves to protect their physical and emotional health through the seasons. Here, Kara Dodson reviews yoga postures, movements, and other forms of bodywork that can help to relieve stress; heal tired, aching muscles and tendons; and restore

energy. Dodson also covers the reasons why self-care should be a priority for all farmers and the ways that taking care of one's body and mind can improve the vitality and viability of life on a farm. The webinar included options to participate in mindfulness and yoga movement exercises for a portion of our time. When watching, if you would like to join in these activities you may want to have paper, pen, and a quiet and comfortable space to sit or lie down on the ground.

Recording

<https://www.vabeginningfarmer.alce.vt.edu/webinar/Archive/2020/FarmerSelfCare.html>

Spotlight on Farm Safety, Health, and Wellness Toolkit for Managing Farm Stress and Mental Health

Wednesday, September 16, 2020

Presenters

Garland Mason Program Coordinator, AgrAbility Virginia*

Nicole Nunoo, Graduate Research Assistant*

Kim Niewolny, Director AgrAbility Virginia & Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition*

*Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education, Virginia Tech

Overview

This webinar covered the most recent resources developed for farmers and service providers by Virginia Cooperative Extension's Farm Safety, Health, and Wellness Initiative. Here, speakers shared the toolkit that includes discussion-based, decision making, and "best practice" resources for addressing the growing concerns about farm stress and wellbeing, specifically as they pertain to the current coronavirus crisis. These resources address several issues and themes that build upon each other, including: how to identify and manage farm financial stress, understanding stress and grief in farm families, and ways to improve mental health communication and referral strategies with farmers and farm organizations. Presenters also raised awareness about current programs led by VCE agents and AgrAbility Virginia field staff for continued education and community outreach.

Recording

<https://www.vabeginningfarmer.alce.vt.edu/webinar/Archive/2020/FarmSafetyToolkitWebinar.html>

Using the Farm Financial Stress Assessment Tool: A Webinar for Extension Agents

September 9, 2020

Presenters

Dr. Kim Morgan, Associate Professor, SW FL Research & Extension Center, University of Florida, Adjunct Faculty, Dept. Agricultural and Applied Economics, Virginia Tech

Nicole Nunoo, Graduate Research Assistant, Dept. of Agricultural, Leadership & Community Education, Virginia Tech

Overview

Extension agents are closely involved in advising farmers and farm families on identification and mitigation of financial risks unique to the agricultural industry. Financial decisions are often time-sensitive and complicated, and the source of many sleepless nights to farmers and advisors alike. This webinar provides agents with an overview and demonstration of our Farmer Financial Health and Wellbeing Assessment. This tool is intended for use as a communication aid to foster safe, productive conversations between farmers and agents. This webinar is designed to complement related resources aimed at supporting the mental health of our farmers who make tough decisions under conditions of uncertainty on a daily basis.

Recording

<https://www.vabeginningfarmer.alce.vt.edu/webinar/Archive/2020/FarmFinancialStressAssessmentTool.html>

Collaborative and Cooperative Thinking for Farm Resilience

Wednesday, July 29, 2020

Presenters

Michael Carter Junior, farmer at Carter Farms, coordinator of VSU's Small Farm Outreach Program, and collaborator of the Black Church Food Security Network

Anna Wills, co-owner Bramble Hollow Farms, co-founder of a regional farm cooperative, Edible Goose Creek

Brent Wills, co-owner Bramble Hollow Farms, President of the Virginia Association for Biological Farming

Overview

At a time of great unrest and uncertainty, more than ever we need to think about and plan for resiliency in our local and regional food systems that also ensures long term community well-being. This includes shifting towards and expanding a collaborative mind set as farmers and farmer educators. This webinar shares collaborative marketing and distribution models and best practices for networking to realize collective action among farmers. Panelists include Michael Carter Junior and Anna and Brent Wills. Michael is a farmer at Carter Farms, coordinator of VSU's Small Farm Outreach Program, and collaborator of the Black Church Food Security Network. Anna and Brent Wills, own and operate Bramble Hollow Farms in Montvale, Virginia. Anna is a co-founder of a regional farm cooperative, Edible Goose Creek and Brent is President of the Virginia Association for Biological Farmers. Participants had the opportunity to hear from our panelists and ask them questions about their experience working in collaboration with other farmers.

Recording

<https://www.vabeginningfarmer.alce.vt.edu/webinar/Archive/2020/CollabThinkingWebinar.html>

Adding Value to Your Harvest for Year-Round Income

Tuesday, July 7, 2020

Presenters

Laurette Tucker, a Rural Business Specialist at USDA's Rural Development

Coley Drinkwater, a Managing Member of Richlands Creamery, LLC

Overview

With shifts in the value chain due to COVID-19, many farmers are looking for ways to make their product shelf stable. This webinar explored processes, experiences, resources, and support for farmers interested in determining the feasibility of making value added products from their farm. Participants heard from Laurette Tucker, a rural business specialist at Rural Development, and Coley Jones, a managing member of Richlands Creamery, who has gone through the Value-Added Producer Program to create value added products on her farm.

Recording

<https://www.vabeginningfarmer.alce.vt.edu/webinar/Archive/2020/ValueAddedWebinar.html>

Farm Financing Options for Historically Underserved and Beginning Farmers Through the USDA Farm Service Agency

June 25, 2020

Presenters

Brandon Waldron, Acting Farm Loan Manager in Fredericksburg FSA Office

Laura Fisher, Farm Loan Specialist in Virginia State FSA Office

Overview

Are you curious about loans to beginning and historically underserved farmers? Learn what financing options are available through the Farm Service Agency Farm Loan Programs. Discussion includes types of loans, rates and terms, eligibility and feasibility requirements, and an opportunity for questions.

Recording

<https://www.vabeginningfarmer.alce.vt.edu/webinar/Archive/2020/FarmFinancing.html>

Hemp Panel Webinar

May 13, 2020

Presenters

John Fike, PhD, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist Virginia Tech;

Kelli Scott, Manager of Production and Marketing at TruHarvest Farms;

Adam Taylor, M.Ag, Hemp Small Farmer at Singing Spring Farm and Farm Manager at the Virginia Tech Catawba Sustainability Center

Overview

A panel webinar on hemp farming in Virginia where Kelli Scott, Adam Taylor, and Dr. John Fike, share the ins and outs, dos and don'ts, whys and why nots so you can understand the opportunities alongside the concerns and issues in order to make informed decisions around farming hemp. Each speaker shares their experience and knowledge related to hemp farming and then they answer participant questions.

Recording

<https://www.vabeginningfarmer.alce.vt.edu/webinar/Archive/2020/HempPanelWebinar0.html>

Stress and Safety: Decrease one, Increase the other

April 20, 2020

Presenter

Deborah B. Reed, PhD, FAAOHN, FAAN, RN, Agricultural Health Nurse and Farm Family Member

Overview

This seminar illustrates the relationships between stress, injury and overall health among farmers.

Recording

<https://www.vabeginningfarmer.alce.vt.edu/webinar/Archive/2020/StressandSafety.html>

Forest Farming in Virginia

March 26, 2020

Presenter

John Munsell, Associate Professor and Forest Management Extension Specialist at Virginia Tech

Overview

Dr. John Munsell briefly covered the basics of forest farming and shared new opportunities for farming in Virginia's forestlands. He also described the remarkable rise of forest farming in the state and beyond, and discussed the development of an American Forest Farming Council to support forest farmers.

Recording

<https://www.vabeginningfarmer.alce.vt.edu/webinar/Archive/2020/ForestFarminginVirginia.html>

Agritourism Safety in Virginia

February 12, 2020

Presenter

Livvy Preisser, Virginia Cooperative Extension Agent in Isle of Wight County

Overview

An overview of Virginia Agritourism is presented as well as the importance of the industry to the Commonwealth. Agritourism Safety is explained and discussed for producers that have agritourism operations or producers that are possibly looking to diversify and begin an agritourism operation. Topics included: insurance, signage, employee and visitor safety, and much more.

Recording

<https://www.vabeginningfarmer.alce.vt.edu/webinar/Archive/2020/protecting-your-health-and-safety1.html>

Protecting Your Health and Safety as the Years Go By

November 18, 2019

Presenter

Deborah B. Reed, PhD, FAAOHN, FAAN, RN, Agricultural Health Nurse and Farm Family Member

Overview

As we age, our bodies change in ways we might not anticipate. In this webinar, participants learn how to protect your health and modify your farm work as the years roll on so you can continue doing what you love.

Recording

<https://www.vabeginningfarmer.alce.vt.edu/webinar/Archive/2019/protecting-your-health-and-safety.html>

Stress on the Farm: Getting Through and Thriving

October 28, 2019

Presenter

Deborah B. Reed, PhD, FAAOHN, FAAN, RN, Agricultural Health Nurse and Farm Family Member

Overview:

This webinar explains the stressors associated with farming and how to deal with that stress to maintain an active body and thriving mind, even when times are tough.

Recording

<https://www.vabeginningfarmer.alce.vt.edu/webinar/Archive/2019/20191028-farm-stress.html>

Farm Stress Workshops

As part of the Farm Safety, Health, and Wellness Initiative, team members were trained to provide two workshops related to farm stress. These workshops are titled ‘Weathering the Storm: How to Cultivate a Productive Mindset’ and ‘Communicating with Farmers Under Stress’ and were developed by Michigan State University Extension. Full descriptions of the workshops are available on the Michigan State University Extension website: https://www.canr.msu.edu/managing_farm_stress/response. The coronavirus pandemic limited the ability of the Initiative to deliver these trainings in-person. To mitigate this limitation, team member Jeremy Daubert recorded the presentations and uploaded them to YouTube.

Weathering the Storm: How to Cultivate a Productive Mindset

This presentation, directed toward farmers, farm service providers and farm family members, helps participants to develop a constructive mindset and other tactics to ‘weather the storm’ of farm stress.

Recording

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuxbpZKWGSU&ab_channel=JeremyDaubert

Communicating with Farmers Under Stress

This presentation provides resources to help farmers experiencing stress. The resources presented may help not only farmers, but anyone experiencing feelings of overwhelming stress. The resources are research-based and are available from several land grant universities.

Recording

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1cp-ZD2B3s&t=222s&ab_channel=JeremyDaubert

Farm Dinner Theatre

Farm dinner theaters, created by Dr. Deborah Reed from the University of Kentucky, are a safe environment where, over a meal and through truthful, humorous stories, members of a local farm community may share conversations about the sensitive topics of farm stress and farm safety. Dr. Reed has found through her research that over 60% of farm dinner theatre participants make significant changes to their farm safety practices within two weeks of the theatre.

As part of our Farm Safety, Health, and Wellness Initiative, we hosted two farm dinner theatres in Virginia that took place on February 20, 2020 in Madison County hosted by Brad Jarvis and February 22, 2020 in Lee County hosted by Amy Byington. These were attended by local and regional farmers and stories were shared by farmers and 4-H youth about often times real events in their communities that highlight the importance of farm safety practices.

More information about the concept of farm dinner theatre is available here: <https://blogs.cdc.gov/niosh-science-blog/2019/05/10/farm-theater/>

Continuing Support

AgrAbility Virginia, a federally-funded statewide program designed to assist farmers experiencing disability, illness or injury will carry on the work of the initiative by holding continuing trainings and releasing publications on related themes.

For more information on AgrAbility’s programming as well as to access an electronic version of the toolkit and other resources, visit: <http://www.agrabilityvirginia.org/>

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