



Agricultural Producers *&* STRESS

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Finding Your Team of Experts

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Expert (Eks purt), n. An experienced person; hence, one who has special skill or knowledge in a subject; a specialist.

—Webster's New International Dictionary

Ranch and farm families should have their own experts—a team of experts. A team of experts is made up of individuals, organizations, and businesses that possess important skills or information to help agricultural producers in needed times. Why have a team of experts?

Case of Peter G.

Peter, in his mid 40s, was a successful rancher. He raised over 2,000 head of cattle, was active as a 4-H leader, and served on the school board. He was married to Joan. They have 5 children, ranging from 15 to 4 years of age.

On her way home from town one day, Joan was killed in a head-on collision. After recovering from the shock, Peter was in need of a team of experts. Who will care for the children? Are there services for housekeeping? What help is there for single parents? Who can help him cope with the crisis?

Regain Strength. One of the functions of a team of experts is to provide emotional support during times of high stress. During such times, you may function at very low levels. This may be because of depression, the energy it takes to cope with a crisis, or an overload of decisions. A good team of experts can provide support, take the load off, and help you return to normal.

In Peter's case, his family, Homemaker Services, a mental health center, a day care center, Parents Without Partners, and other groups could be on his team of experts.



Case of Joyce and Ted T.

Joyce was born on a farm, but when she married Ted they moved to the East Coast. After spending 25 years in the “rat race of big city living,” they are moving back to the country to take over the family farm. Joyce and Ted need a team of experts.

Gain new skills. A somewhat different function of a team of experts is to assist in developing new skills. What are needed here are persons who can challenge, teach new skills, serve as role models, and provide emotional help during times when you feel awkward or insecure while learning new skills.

Members of Joyce and Ted’s team might be neighbors, agri-business dealers, farm business associations, Cooperative Extension Service educators, community colleges, and others.

Case of Jim J.

Jim, 34 years old, is a successful farmer. He farms 2,500 acres and has a knack for turning a profit even when neighbors have trouble. He has received several outstanding farmer awards, and is in demand as a speaker on farm issues and practices. Jim needs a team of experts.

Provide a Challenge. It’s just as important to have contact with stimulating people when you are doing well in order to maintain a high level of performance. During good times, it’s easy to ignore suggestions, but support from others may keep you sharp and prevent problems.

Case of Anne B.

Anne continues to live on the same ranch where she grew up. She has seen a lot of changes in ranching; a lot of people have come and gone in the area. She is concerned about the lack of housing and care for older people in rural areas. She would like to see a retirement center in the small community near her. Anne needs a team of experts.

Achieve goals. Many of the goals you try to achieve cannot be met without help and contributions from a number of people. This often requires people who have skills and resources that you do not have. A team of experts can provide this support.

Different types of experts

Members of a team of experts should provide various kinds of help depending on the situation. The following list of



the different functions a team of experts might serve also provides examples of different types of team members.

Helpers. These people are needed in times of crisis. Helpers are experts in solving particular problems that occur during high stress times. These experts provide counsel.

- National Suicide Hopeline Network. Staffed by professionals skilled in helping ranchers and farmers within a network of 100 crisis centers. 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)
- National Domestic Violence Hotline. 1-800-799-SAFE (7233), 1-800-787-3224 (TTY), or www.ndvh.org
- National Pesticides Telecommunication Network. Consumer and medical information on pesticides. 1-800-858-7378 or <http://ace.orst.edu/info/nptn>



- Pesticide Accident Hotline (CHEMTREC). Help with spills and leaks. 1-800-424-9300
- USDA Agricultural Mediation Program. Contact information for state mediation programs. 202-690-2807 or www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/publications/facts/html/mediate01.htm

Mentors. These experts are respected because of their success. Mentors show what is possible in a certain job and also the opportunities and problems of a given role. These are experts to be copied.

Common Bond. People who share the same concerns and problems can be helpful. They can keep you motivated, be a sounding board for ideas, or share your burden. By grouping together, they can solve difficult problems.

- Alcoholics Anonymous. For those concerned about their use of alcohol. Box 459 Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 or www.alcoholics-anonymous.org
- Al-anon. For adults affected by the drinking of a family member or friend, and Alateen, for youth affected by someone else's drinking. 1-888-4AL-ANON (Monday through Friday, 8 A.M. to 6 P.N.

- EST) or www.al-anon.alateen.org
- Farm Women Network. Promotes unity among women in the agriculture industry. 320-589-1711
- Farm Support Group Manual. How to start a farmer support group. 607-255-1603 or www.nyfarmnet.org
- Parents Anonymous. Peer support for those interested in breaking the cycle of abuse. 909-621-6184 or www.parentsanonymous.org

Close Friends provide security and caring. They may have similar interests or hobbies. They are especially helpful during periods of stress to provide stability. These experts can be family, relatives, or neighbors.

Teachers are people who have special skills that can help improve your occupation or career. Teachers may have one special skill, one piece of information, or an abundance of ideas. These experts might be vocational or agricultural teachers, researchers, or other producers.

Referral agents can be especially helpful because they know the community and its organizations. They can connect you to those places where help or information can be obtained.



- Church, synagogue, or archdiocesan center
- Clergy member, doctor, or health care provider
- Local Department of Health and Human Services
- Public or private mental health center or hospital
- Cooperative Extension Service office

Special interest. People who have valuable resources or influence are special interest experts. They can provide financial support, materials, tools, skills, or guidance. Special interest experts are helpful in accomplishing large-scale projects. Business and community leaders can be part of this category.



- Farm Resource Center. 618-718-9623, crisis hotline: 800-851-4719, or www.frci.org
- USDA Risk Management Agency. Both risk management and successful agricultural techniques information. www.rma.usda.gov/news/archive.html
- Sowing the Seeds of Hope: Responding to the Mental Health Needs of Farm Families. 608-277-7464
- Out of the Blue: Understanding and Responding to Depression. 859-257-7753
- It's All in the Farm Family. Resource for family communication. 608-262-2063

Challengers. These people question, motivate, or push you forward. They may be disagreeable, play the devil's advocate, or be in direct competition. These experts help you improve your abilities.

Team of experts review

Following are qualities of a good team of experts:

- Provides support and acceptance
- Builds confidence and skills
- Performs duties for you
- Changes over time

Who is on your team of experts? Think about the type of help you want from each team member and how much help you are receiving from them.

When you are a team member

It's possible that you may be a member of another ag producer's team of experts. How can you be a good team member, especially to a rancher or farmer who is facing a difficulty? Sociologist Jerry Robinson outlines four steps necessary in helping others cope with stress.

1. *Encourage expressing feelings.*

It's important that a person under stress be allowed to vent his or her feelings. This means that you allow the person to talk, to yell, or to cry. This helps to reduce the feelings of stress temporarily so the person can take a realistic look at the problem. Acknowledging the situation and getting feelings out in the open are the first steps in managing stress.

How you respond to someone feeling stressed is important. Typically, people take a "parenting" approach: advising, analyzing, or judging the person experiencing stress or crisis.



Responses such as "don't get so emotional," "try to get organized," or "it's silly to worry about it" are examples of parenting responses.

What stressed people need is someone to listen, to support, and to allow feelings to be expressed. It's helpful to ask short, neutral questions or express concern and willingness to listen, for example, "would you like to talk about it," "you sound upset," or "I can see why that would bother you."

2. *Identify causes of stress.* Sometimes a person can find the cause of stress simply by expressing feelings. Other times a person may have difficulty seeing the source of the problem and need help from others.

If you want to find the real source of a person's stress, it's important to re-



spond in a way that helps a person talk. If you ask loaded questions such as, "Are you too scared to ask the bank for an extension," you may never get to the source. It's important to communicate an acceptance of what the person is saying. If you judge or make the person feel worse, you will only compound the problem.

3. ***Relieve the pressure.*** If the source of stress is something that can be controlled, you can attempt to relieve the pressure. If the problem is work overload, perhaps you can help with the work. If the problem is economic, you can suggest sources of financial help. Even if the problem is not work related, you may sometimes be able to relieve the pressure if you are supportive and understanding.
4. ***Take action.*** A fourth step in helping others deal with stress is find-

ing solutions to the problem. Sometimes the person is able to do this simply by expressing feelings. Other times, an objective viewpoint might be needed to explore alternatives. The alternative might be taking action to remove the stress, finding temporary outlets for recurring stressful situations, or accepting the situation for what it is and trying to live with it.

Finding your team of experts

A team of experts is especially useful in coping with stress—the stress that comes from experiencing a crisis, learning new skills, or keeping your job productive. It takes skill and time to develop and utilize a team of experts. But a well-chosen and helpful team may make an agricultural producer more successful and is another way of dealing with stress.

The social scientist John Cassel has studied the value of a team of experts. He found that people who used very little support from others had more stress-related problems and took longer to recover from them. Successful people were more likely to seek and use assistance from others. They knew how valuable a team of experts could be.

*Revised and adapted from:
Iowa State University Cooperative Extension Service. *Stress on the Farm: Team of Experts*. Pm-988b. Ames: Iowa State Cooperative Extension Service, 1981.*

References

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Editor: Hattie Penny, College of Agriculture, Office of Communications and Technology

Graphic Designer: Tana Stith, College of Agriculture, Office of Communications and Technology

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Glen Whipple, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming 82071.

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