



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

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### Coronavirus & Stress

Stress goes hand-in-hand with farming. In recent years market volatility, unpredictable weather, and loss of resources in rural areas among other factors have impacted farm families and caused undue stress. The current coronavirus pandemic has only made these stressors worse. In addition to immediate concerns for health and safety, we have lost our ability to perform daily routines and tasks without fear or worry. For many, this loss of normalcy has created an overwhelming feeling of stress, anxiety, and grief.

Scott Berinato wrote an article on this topic titled [“That Discomfort You’re Feeling Is Grief.”](#) He described the grief we are collectively experiencing this way: “We feel the world has changed, and it has. We know this is temporary, but it doesn’t feel that way, and we realize things will be different... The loss of normalcy; the fear of economic toll; the loss of connection. This is hitting us and we’re grieving. Collectively. We are not used to this kind of collective grief in the air.”

These issues were already impacting farm families: farmers have experienced an increasing loss of normalcy over the past decade in the face of a changing climate and lessening predictability in the seasons. A tumultuous and volatile economy has only compounded the loss of normalcy and is exacerbating farmers’ worries about the economic toll the industry may experience as part of the coronavirus fallout. Further, rural farming communities may be particularly vulnerable to feeling a loss of connection that comes with social distancing.

### Coping Strategies

Berinato suggested coping strategies to help fortify ourselves in the face of anxiety and grief. Here are the several suggestions you may consider trying. Sharing these strategies with family members and co-workers may also help make an impact:

#### “Find balance in the things you’re thinking”

Balance worst case scenarios with scenarios that are not so dire. If you are thinking of something awful happening, try to imagine something good happening as well. Remember: both the bad scenarios and the good are possible.

#### “Come into the present”

Try naming objects in the room or finding items in the room that are a certain color or tuning into the five senses and stopping to breathe. This practice can help “ground” you when moments might feel especially challenging or difficult.

#### “Let go of what you can’t control”

Focus on what you can control. For example, let go of what your neighbor is doing and focus more on what you can do to stop the spread.

#### “Stock up on compassion”

Practice understanding when people aren’t acting like themselves. Everyone is stressed and people may respond to stressors (or day-to-day interactions) with less patience and more fear than usual.

#### “Become okay with feeling our feelings”

If you feel sad, stay with it, let the feeling come and go on its own. “Let yourself feel grief and keep going;” “emotions need motion.” It’s okay and normal for feelings to come and go.

## Mental Health Resources in Virginia and Nationally

There are several resources and hotlines available to assist individuals and caregivers facing mental health crisis, some operate in Virginia and others operate nationally.

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.**

1-800-273-TALK (8255) Available 24/7 to anyone in emotional distress or at risk for suicide.

- **Crisis Text Line.**

Text "CONNECT" to 741741. Available 24/7 to provide crisis intervention via mobile messaging

- **Mental Health America (MHA):**

[www.arc.mhanational.org/](http://www.arc.mhanational.org/)

MHA provides information on diagnoses, symptoms, treatments, payment help, and referrals. Users can find their local MHA office through the website. Also, screenings are available via the website to use with individuals and then decide on appropriate referrals for future assistance.

- **Virginia AgrAbility:**

<https://www.agrability.ext.vt.edu/>

Virginia AgrAbility is a program designed to assist farmers with disabilities and their families. AgrAbility also does outreach related to farm stress and mental health. AgrAbility can make referrals related to farm stress and mental health. To learn more about AgrAbility visit the website or call (540) 231-4582 for a referral.

Virginia AgrAbility's website provides a [PDF document](#) discussing what stress is and the other diagnoses it can lead to, how to recognize these, why mental health is important, and additional resources on where to turn.

## COVID-19 Mental Health Resources & News Articles

These are resources for coping with coronavirus and associated stressors, as well as news pieces and fact sheets on the impact of coronavirus on mental health.

- **How to manage anxiety during a pandemic**

An article published by Vox that explains why and how coronavirus triggers anxiety and offers coping strategies and tips for how to manage anxiety during the pandemic. There's also a helpful resource guide with links for more information about staying safe during the pandemic at the end of the article.

Provenazo, B. (2020, March 21). How to manage anxiety during a pandemic. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/identities/2020/3/21/21188362/manage-anxiety-pandemic>

- **Why your mental health may be suffering in the COVID-19 pandemic**

A piece published by PBS describing the mental health implications of social distancing during global pandemic. Santhanam's article describes why social distancing is so effective, gives examples on how stress may manifest in adults and children, and provides advice from trusted experts on how to manage stress imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Santhanam, L. (2020, March 19). *Why your mental health may be suffering in the COVID-19 pandemic*. PBS. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/why-your-mental-health-may-be-suffering-in-the-covid-19-pandemic>

- **CDC Statement on Daily Life and Coping during COVID-19 pandemic**

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/index.html>

A toolkit with tips on stress and coping as well as resources for caring for children and animals.

- **COVID-19 Resource and Information Guide**

<https://www.nami.org/getattachment/About-NAMI/NAMI-News/2020/NAMI-Updates-on-the-Coronavirus/COVID-19-Updated-Guide-1.pdf>

A resource guide from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) with frequently asked questions relative to mental health and caring for those struggling with mental health issues during COVID-19.

- **Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services COVID-19 page**

<http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/covid19/clients-individuals>

A resource guide that includes virtual meetings and recovery groups.

- **Virginia Cooperative Extension COVID-19 Updates**

<https://ext.vt.edu/covid-19updates.html>

A Virginia resource for updates and resources related to coronavirus.

## References

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Adapted from:

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