

Resilience in the Era of COVID-19

Key Points

1. Farmers and ranchers have had a difficult few years. Economic stress, weather related issues, and now the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the closure of meat processing plants, have placed unprecedented pressures on the agricultural community.
2. Remarkably, among those impacted by adversity of this proportion, a significant number of those will only be minimally affected and able to adapt well. However, there will be minority of those exposed that will exhibit stress responses of concern or clinical symptoms.
3. Stress responses can vary from person to person. Most stress responses, if present, are short-term. However, some stress responses will persist or be delayed, and those may need to be addressed.
4. There are some immediate signs of stress that persons will need to pay attention to, such as numbness, anxiety, and irritability or outbursts of anger. Individuals may also show signs of helplessness, feeling out of control, difficulty concentrating, and sadness. Other signs may include nausea, elevated blood pressure, extreme fatigue, sleep and appetite disturbance, and racing thoughts. Note that these signs are normal stress responses. What that means is that these are very **normal** responses to **extraordinarily** abnormal situations.
5. Sometimes, exceptionally stressful events can energize us into action, which is probably happening right now as people deal with work that must be done. Unfortunately, individuals may see delayed responses such as irritability or hostility, depression, emotional detachment, persistent fatigue and withdrawal. Delayed responses can occur three months or more after the event.
6. There are also delayed responses that are more concerning, such as intrusive memories or flashbacks, difficulty concentrating, preoccupation with event, hyperarousal, avoidance of event reminders, increase in alcohol or drug use, and suicidal thinking. These responses begin to appear more like clinical symptoms or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Individuals showing these signs may need to seek out a consultation with a healthcare or mental health care professional. Such an assessment may include recommendations for psychotherapy and/or psychotropic medication, especially if there are concerns related to depression or PTSD. There are also very effective methods of psychotherapy to treat both issues.
7. Four key resilience strategies can help. These include excellent self-care, social support, purpose, and embracing positive thoughts.
8. Self-care strategies such as using spiritual practices and prayer may be helpful in times of difficulty. Deep breathing calms the mind and can help you focus. Try breathing deeply three times, releasing the air slowly. Others may also benefit from time to themselves. You might wish to try the *Tactical Breathing* app, which can be downloaded at the App Store or Google Play.
9. Individuals also benefit when they talk about their stress with someone else. If you are not sure whom to ask, maybe consider these questions. Are there people who have done something similar to what you are trying to do? Whom do you really trust to talk with? Could be a minister, a close friend or family member. Think about whom you can talk to this week.
10. Going on a date with your partner is important, because during difficult times we often forget about that most important relationship. You may want to figure out a way to get in some additional social time with family and friends. Joining a group might also help. This could be a business group, a church group, or some other group. It could be a coffee group at Casey's.

11. One way to help others is by finding opportunities to perform a random act of kindness to family members, friends or colleagues. It could mean increased charitable giving and volunteerism. Develop some realistic goals, even if the goals seem small. That still enables you to move toward the things you want to accomplish. Maybe to goal this week is to actively seek out additional social contacts or make an appointment with a healthcare or mental health provider. What I mean by being “more than a farmer” is that is also important to have hobbies, play sports, or participate in other social roles, like a community or church leader or as a parent. This also provides an opportunity to disengage by getting off-farm. There is also a strong social aspect to this as well.
12. It may help to identify areas of irrational thinking, such as a tendency to assume the worst or assume the world is out to get you. A person can easily slip into that type of thinking, given everything farmers have faced over the past few years. We have to remind ourselves that what has happened to you is not a predictor of how your future will go. A person can still control many things. You may not be able to change this disaster, but you can change how you understand and respond to it.
13. Individuals are constantly adjusting to change, even if he or she does not realize it. When difficult changes come along or when change happens quickly, persons might struggle to cope with it. That is when individuals need to look back and realize that they have dealt with change before and have survived. Now is a good time to think about one way you have dealt with difficult change and actually came out better. A way to think about gratitude is to consider two people that you would like to thank for something they have said or done. Maybe during this week take the opportunity to thank them.

Resources

- **Iowa Concern:** 1-800-447-1985, offers 24/7 free assistance and referral for stress counseling, legal education, and financial concerns. <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/iowaconcern>
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-8255 (TALK), provides 24/7 free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals. Go to <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
- **Your Life Iowa Treatment Finder:** Go to <https://yourlifeiowa.org/finder>
- **Finding Answers Now:** Resources from this site provide information that addresses healthy eating, relationships, mental health and wellbeing, personal finance, food safety, and nutrition and wellness. Some materials are also available in Spanish. Go to <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences/disaster-recovery>
- **Ag Decision Maker** is an agricultural economics and business website that provides information, resources and decision tools for farmers, lenders, farm managers, agriculture instructors and others. Go to <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/homepage.html>
- **Iowa Pork Industry Center (IPIC)** focuses efforts across departments and partners with other agencies and commercial entities to better serve the educational and informational needs of the industry. Through IPIC, Iowa producers receive accurate and timely information to aid in making their operations more efficient and profitable. Go to <https://www.ipic.iastate.edu/>.
- **Integrated Crop Management (ICM).** Resources, tools, and information specific to crop production and management. Go to <https://crops.extension.iastate.edu/>
- **Farm Financial Planning.** Farm Financial Planning is Iowa State University Extension and Outreach's farm financial analysis program. It consists of one-on-one financial counseling, a computerized analysis of the farm business, and referral to other extension programs or outside services that may be useful. Go to <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/farmanalysis/>
- **Iowa's Center for Agricultural Safety and Health (I-CASH)** works to improve the health and safety of the agricultural population by developing statewide prevention and educational initiatives. Go to <https://icash.public-health.uiowa.edu/about-us/>

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