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Farm Update

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Clint Hardy

Daviess County Extension Office

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Stress in Farming

Owning and operating any business is a lifestyle that most will admit they enjoy despite how stressful and challenging it can be. Farming may be the most stressful and rewarding business to operate. We don't spend much time reflecting on stress, farmers just continue managing day-to-day activities while planning larger projects to accomplish in the upcoming weeks and months. This might be an opportunity to acquire additional land, add a new enterprise, adjust after losing the opportunity to farm a number of acres, manage debt service, or consider if it's economically possible to add another employee or family farming partner. These are all decisions that can be stressful. The underlying goal is to make a comfortable living wage for your family while increasing capital to allow growth in the business. Farming is a stressful occupation, no matter how much equity you have accumulated. Property assets, no matter how valuable, only become cash when they are sold. This often leaves narrow family living allowances in economic times like we are currently encountering.

Lately, there has been more attention on the risks of allowing stress to become a major issue in the life of a farmer. Due to the points mentioned above in addition to personal issues such as family or physical health, there have been more instances of people recognizing that stress is becoming a constant burden in their life.

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Stress is a normal emotional response to daily life. The results vary in intensity from a bad mood to a complicated illness. The key is to keep it in check because chronic stress can lead to serious health problems such as high blood pressure, increased blood sugar, and a decrease in the ability to fight infection. Stress increases a reactive protein called cortisol. Cortisol is nature's built-in alarm system. It works in the brain to control mood, motivation, and fear. It manages how the body uses carbohydrates, fats, and proteins. It keeps inflammation down and regulates blood sugar. It controls your sleep and wake cycle, and boosts energy to overcome stress. Cortisol is a wonderful mechanism in moderation, but prolonged stress leads to prolonged cortisol release which leads to the factors that can cause heart attack or stroke.

The first key to managing stress is to know that research conducted to determine what caused stress in people indicated that 95 percent of what the people worried about never happened. Think about that, you'll find it to be true in most of the things that worry you. So how can you lower stress? There are several scientifically proven methods. The first is to identify the sources of stress in your life. Are weather, cash flow, and labor some of the largest stressors in your life? Are personal stressors such as health, family challenges, or debt affecting your business decisions? Don't mentally combine these stresses into one overwhelming obstacle. Address each individually, allowing them to be manageable. Seek help in addressing problems when possible and find ways to relax. Start each morning by thinking of one positive thing and stretch before breakfast and bed. It will make you feel better. Laughter may actually be the best medicine as it releases chemicals to improve your mood and health. Exercising your faith through prayer is very worthwhile. It's okay to turn off the tv, computer, and phone before

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bed and focus on one restful thing. Practicing slow deep breathing when angry will lower your stress.

If you don't have stress, congratulations. But ways to protect yourself from becoming stressed is to watch for warning signs of thoughts that make you mad, lose sleep, or lose appetite. Say no to extra activities during the busy season and focus on one thing at a time. If labor is a limitation, consider activities to hire out. Let someone come in and spray or plant some soybeans or haul some grain for you. It might cost a little more but will free up your time and reduce your worry about getting it all done.

Ultimately, even in the busiest seasons, taking some time for your family is the most important. Communicate with your family, farming partners, and employees about the issues you face and celebrate your accomplishments.

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