



## **Study shows positive connection between farm business planning and mental health**

### **Byline: Canadian Agricultural Safety Association**

“This is the way it’s always been done.”

“There’s not enough time.”

“We’re doing fine without one.”

We all know there are endless excuses for not having a farm business plan.

But a recent research study has found that farm business management isn’t just good for business – it’s also good for mental health.

Healthy Minds, Healthy Farms, a research study from Farm Management Canada, explored the relationship between farmer mental health and farm business management, looking to identify how one can help or perhaps hinder the other.

“I wondered if, for already busy and overwhelmed farms, our encouragement to improve farm business practices was adding stress to an already stressful situation, or whether we are helping,” Heather Watson, Executive Director of Farm Management Canada, explains of the research’s premise.

The verdict? Business management practices can play a significant role in producing healthy farms and farmers.

In fact, the research study, which surveyed 1,735 Canadian farmers, found that 88% of farmers who follow a written business plan say it has contributed to their peace of mind.

However, Watson notes there is a flip side to that promising finding. With more than 75% of survey respondents indicating they are experiencing medium to high levels of stress, she says it was surprising that 41% of farmers are not following a business plan because they believe they are succeeding without one.





“It just doesn’t add up when you consider the sheer number of farmers experiencing significant stress,” Watson says, adding that women and young farmers stood out as having particularly high levels of stress as a result of farm transition and family conflict.

“We hope that our research findings can help farmers start to redefine success and what it means not only for themselves but for their farm team.”

So what’s stopping so many farmers from using business management practices? Watson explains that a lot of it comes down to misconceptions about business planning. A prime example of those misconceptions: once a business plan is in writing, it’s written in stone.

“Farmers tell us the agriculture sector is too unpredictable and complex to put any plan in writing. Many cite they have a plan, but then point to their head. However, writing the plan down is key, as it’s not the plan itself that is the most important, but rather the process of planning – thinking about your end goals, risks and opportunities, and inviting others into creating the vision for the farm, family and themselves,” explains Watson.

“Planning ahead does not mean predicting the future – it means preparing for whatever might happen in the future.”

It’s no secret that risk management is a key ingredient for planning ahead. But Watson notes that the common status quo practices aren’t adequate. She explains there is a need for the agricultural industry “to be bold” in taking a more comprehensive approach to managing risk. That means having risk management go beyond just the financial side of things and include business planning factors, like human resources, marketing, and production.

“What good is a profitable farm if its people are stressed and heading towards burnout or worse? What good is a profitable farm if its people are compromising their farm safety and taking unnecessary chances with their lives?” says Watson.





“We must, as an industry, realize and promote the interconnectedness of managing risk, including mental health, and managing the farm through proven business practices.”

In addition to proving a positive connection between farm business management and mental health, the Healthy Minds, Healthy Farms study also identified 24 comprehensive recommendations. Those recommendations include a range of actions from raising awareness about farmer mental health and improving mental health literacy for farmers to providing risk management support and advocating for farmer-specific mental health services.

“Our research results provide a roadmap for Canada’s entire agricultural industry to support mental health and likewise farm business management,” Watson explains. She adds that Farm Management Canada is working to ensure the study doesn’t “sit on the shelf collecting dust,” and has incorporated the findings and recommendations across all of the organization’s services and programs.

“We have a chance to really step up our game as an industry and support our farmers where they need it most.”

After all, as the study title suggests: a healthy mind goes hand in hand with a healthy farm.

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) is a public campaign held annually during the third week of March that focuses on the importance of safe agriculture. The 2021 campaign, Safe & Strong Farms: Lead an AgSafe Canada, takes place March 14-20. CASW is presented by Farm Credit Canada. For more information, visit [agsafetyweek.ca](http://agsafetyweek.ca).

