



SESSION 3: BREAK THE SILENCE: NEW MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES & INITIATIVES FOR CANADIANS FARMERS

SPEAKERS:

- Deborah Vanberkel, Cultivate Counselling Services
- Jérôme Gaudreault, General Manager, The Quebec Association for Suicide Prevention
- Adelle Stewart, Executive Director, Do More Agriculture Foundation

BRIEF SUMMARY:

This session's aim was to address the unique stressors faced in the agricultural sector and share resources and ways to support producers and their families.

Jérôme Gaudreault, The Quebec Association for Suicide Prevention:

Jérôme introduced the group to the broad range of mental health and suicide prevention services available to farmers in Quebec. He noted the goal of the association was to build a province without suicide. From what they've surveyed, they found that there are higher rates of suicide in the farming community compared to the general population. They found that 46% of farmers suffer psychological distressed (compared to 18% in the general population), and 4.8% have experienced suicide ideation (compared to 2% in the general population). Through working with farmers, they learned that the main stress factors include: revenue and weather fluctuations, workload, availability of workers, indebtedness, machinery breakage, livestock health, masculinity model, red tape, farm succession, international agreements, work and family dynamics. One of the Association's initiatives, the Gatekeeper Program, is carried out in co-operation with Quebec's farmers' association, UPA, and has had 2000+ followers since its inception in 2016 with more than 40 trainers. The program helps identify the persons vulnerable to suicide and encourages the request for help. The Association has also helped set up crisis centers and resting houses. The respite home, located just outside of Montreal, is the first resting house for farmers in Canada. It is meant to help break the isolation and help offer balance. The stays are typically 2-4 days and are split between counselling, leisure and relaxation. Arrangements are made for farm work to be done in the farmer's absence. They have also trained 'road workers' – social workers with a knowledge and experience in farming. When help is requested, they can meet the farmer where they're at and even accompany them to do their farm work.

Deborah Vanberkel, Cultivate Counselling Services

As a registered psychotherapist, Deborah brought her expertise to the table outlining the markers of a mental health issue. She noted that when the stress – the difficulty in concentrating, the racing

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thoughts – shift to mood (irritability, anger, defeat, sadness) and behavioural (restlessness, avoidance of tasks, withdrawal, isolation) changes, you are moving into distress that can be escalated if not treated. She spoke to several available resources, including the Farmer Wellness Program which is tailored to address the unique needs of the agricultural community. Currently offered to members of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Members have access to four sessions at no cost.

Adelle Stewart, Do More Agriculture Foundation

Adelle noted that Do More Ag, a national charity, is working to expand its reach across the country to keep up with the demand for ag-specific mental health resources. She talked about one of their flagship programs, the Community Fund, which offers free mental health training to rural communities. The program’s success can be attributed to its reliance on community leaders. The leaders have ties in the community and act as an interface to organize get-togethers and trainings with Do More Ag. The Foundation also offers mental health first aid. In its first year, the feedback was that it needed to be more specific to agriculture, so changes were made. Through the “Talk, Ask, Listen” half-day workshops, over 800 farmers were reached and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. The workshops are offered for free to communities and are delivered by mental health professionals. Communities needing this workshop can apply at the Foundation’s website.

RELEVANT RESOURCES

- suicide.ca
- [Quebec Association for Suicide Prevention programs and resources](#)
- [Farmer’s Toolbox – Regional \(ON\) and National resources](#)
- [Do More Agricultural Foundation programs](#)

MEETING LINKS:

- Watch the session recording here: <https://youtu.be/pryxr25xrvw>