

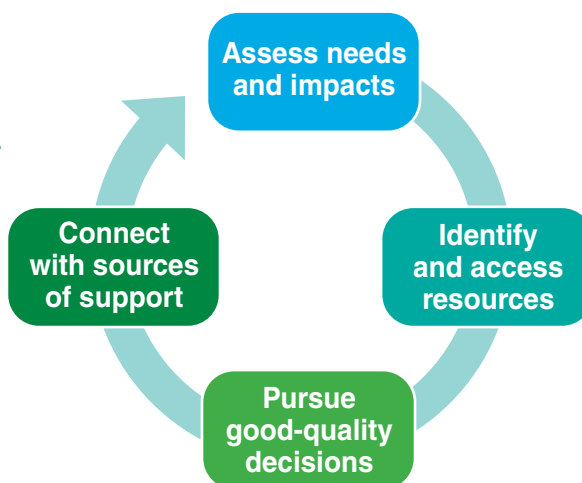


Working in agriculture brings its own set of unique experiences and stresses. These stresses can range from equipment breakdowns to long hours to isolation from others. Signs of stress are **warning signals**, like the flashing yellow or red light on the dashboard of a car, that remind you to pay attention, slow down and take steps to check for signs of trouble.

Having a process that you can use in managing the pressures that impact your family, your farming operation and your life in general is helpful. This publication introduces four steps for managing farm stress in the Managing Rural Stress Model. Although we face common stress experiences, the stresses for each individual or farming operation are unique. This model provides a process and set of steps for thinking about the different stressors you may experience and strategies for managing them more effectively.

The Managing Rural Stress Model allows you to use a reflective approach and explore multiple steps in dealing with stress concerns. It helps identify and use effective resources and strategies. The four steps explored here are the following: (1) assess needs and impacts, (2) identify and access resources, (3) pursue good-quality decisions and (4) connect with sources of support.

## 4 Steps to Managing Stress in Farming and Ranching – A Model



## What is Causing You Stress?

In farming and ranching, a source of stress might be short-term and simple to handle (such as mending a fence where livestock broke through) or it might be more long-term and challenging to handle (such as an injury that limits your ability to work for a couple of months). Stresses are common. You are not likely to get rid of all the stresses. Instead, research suggests that **how we think about** and **how we respond** to stresses are most important in handling them in our lives.

In exploring the steps in the Managing Rural Stress Model, we will use a *continuing example (in italics)* to share ideas about how to use each step. We also encourage you to pick your own example and use the steps as a process to think about and respond to stresses identified in your own life or farming operation. *See italicized text for examples.*

**Key Stressor** (*Example: Doctor diagnosed you with mild to moderate depression in the last month*)

■ Stressor 1 \_\_\_\_\_

■ Stressor 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Once you have identified a particular source of stress, you can engage the steps in thinking about its impact and how to manage it in your life or farm/ranch operation.

## Step 1 – Assess Needs and Impacts

Each source of stress typically creates a need in your life that is important to minimizing or managing the stress. For example, due to long hours or interruptions to your sleep schedule, a need may be “more and restful sleep.” Use the following points to explore this step:

- **Identify the key needs** resulting from the identified stressor in your life, family or farming operation. For the depression example, see two suggestions below. What are your needs?
- Next, **assess the size of the impact** occurring in your life or operation due to a stressor (small, medium or large). Is it like dropping a pebble in your pond or throwing in a large rock?
- Finally, think of the impact on a scale from “easy to manage” to “difficult to manage.” Where does it fit on the scale? **Rate the impact** from “easy to manage” to “difficult to manage.” (scale of 1 = easy to 7 = difficult)

Step 1 – Assess Needs and Impacts										
Key Needs	Size of the Impact			How manageable is it?						
a. <i>(Example: More energy to do farm work)</i>	Small	Medium	Large	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b. <i>(Example: More social support when feeling down)</i>	Small	Medium	Large	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c. _____	Small	Medium	Large	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d. _____	Small	Medium	Large	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

## Step 2 – Identify and Access Resources

To reduce or manage stress, a second step is to identify and access available resources that can assist you. Resources are what you have or can access to meet needs or goals. If you are thirsty, for example, the resource most helpful in meeting or reducing that need would be water (or juice, milk, etc.). Use the following points to explore this step:

- **Identify the resources that will be of most help** to you in managing a specific need or stress. Sometimes, multiple resources can work together and be helpful. For example, if the need is getting more good-quality sleep, resources might include a new pillow, a better sleep schedule, journaling, a warm shower, physical exercise, avoiding TV or other screens before bed or a neck massage to help you relax and feel ready to rest. Brainstorm about the resources that might help you!
- **Assess availability of key resources** and what might be done to access them. Also, think about what other resource types might help with a need. Resource types include the following:
  - **Personal resources** – Knowledge; creativity; optimism; cooperation with others; support from others; trust; etc.
  - **Material resources** – Money; land; labor; capital; equipment; professional help; community organizations; etc.
- Briefly **describe a strategy to access and use key resources** identified.

Step 2 – Identify and Access Resources		
Useful Resources to Help	Available to you? Yes / No Resource Types:	How will I access and use it?
a. <i>(Example: Supportive sibling)</i>	Personal – <i>(Example: Support relationships)</i>	• <i>(Example: Talk to a sibling, or others about some temporary support – work on farm, talk about concerns)</i> • •
b. <i>(Example: Faith community leader; counselor)</i>	Personal –	
c. _____	Material – <i>(Example: Health care office)</i>	
d. _____	Material –	
e. _____	Other –	

### Step 3 – Pursue Good-quality Decisions

In the process of managing stress, another step involves assessing the options and then making choices about how to respond. This step involves pursuing good-quality decisions and cultivating a mindset open to change. Perhaps you need to add a commodity crop to your farming operation, but you have not used it before. Maybe you need to visit with a counselor, but you feel uncertain about sharing your stresses with someone. Use the following points to explore this step:

- **Explore critical decisions you face** about using resources to resolve concerns or reduce stresses, such as: Should we invest in new equipment or crop and livestock production strategies? Am I willing to visit with a professional about health concerns?
- **Write down information that you need to feel informed** and to enable you to make a good decision. Be open to new ideas and information.
- **Assess the options that are available to you.** What are the pros and cons, or benefits and costs, associated with each particular option? Explore how you feel about each option.
- **List others with whom you trust to discuss a decision** (family members, professionals, etc.).
- **Clarify any values you hold or goals that are relevant** to guide you in making a decision.
- **Be open to the possibility of change** because you may need to make decisions that are different from past experience or go against old habits you have developed.

Step 3 – Pursue Good-quality Decisions		
<b>What Information is Needed</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• (Example: Is my sibling available to help out on the farm? When and how?)</li><li>• (Example: Can I do some informal counseling with a faith leader or counselor one to two times a week?)</li><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>	<b>2-3 Possible Options</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. (Example: Sibling comes to help out one to two times a week on key jobs for a month.)</li><li>2. (Example: Schedule at least one hour a week to talk through current feelings with faith leader, counselor, etc.)</li><li>3. _____ _____ _____</li><li>4. _____ _____ _____</li></ol>	<b>With whom will I discuss it?</b>  (Example: Sibling or other family member; faith community leader; counselor)  <b>What values or goals are important here?</b>  (Example: Family and faith community are important sources of support)

# Step 4 – Connect With Sources of Support

Another key step in managing stresses is to reach out and connect with sources of support. This is important, because typically, we are able to access resources or communicate about decisions we plan to make through connections with others. Connecting with others can help us move forward and begin implementing strategies to manage or cope with stresses. Use the following points to explore this step:

- **Identify sources of support** that can help you access resources, explore options or implement coping strategies. Also, consider whether you are willing to approach others for support or resources (this may be a personal barrier you need to address).
- **Seek out a support source that “fits” the need you are seeking to address.** For example, a pastor, counselor or close friend would “fit” the need to discuss stress concerns, while seeking a loan would involve a bank or other lending institution.
- **Write down a specific plan to make contact with the support source.** Also, list one to two ways a support source can be of help to you.
- **Talk with others to learn about how they might approach an issue.** Brainstorm ways to face or resolve a problem. If possible, join or establish a small group to network or support in addressing key issues or stresses.

Step 4 – Connect With Sources of Support		
<b>Possible Support Sources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• (Example: Supportive sibling; other family member)</li><li>• (Example: Faith community leader; counselor; lender)</li><li>• _____</li><li>• _____</li><li>• _____</li><li>• _____</li><li>• _____</li></ul>	<b>Plan to Make Contact</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• (Example: Call brother on Monday evening to talk about depression diagnosis, farm needs)</li><li>• (Example: Talk to the pastor after a church meeting on Sunday about doing a weekly visit for next four weeks.)</li><li>• _____</li><li>• _____</li></ul>	<b>How can this source of support help me?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• (Example: Sibling – physical help on the farm due to low nergy; social support, someone to talk about concerns.)</li><li>• (Example: Faith leader – weekly opportunity to air feelings, get spiritual support.)</li><li>• _____</li><li>• _____</li></ul>

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