



Agriculture and Natural Resources  
Part of Cooperative Extension, UW-Extension  
[www.uwex.edu/ces/ag](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/ag)

NOTE to editor: This is one in a series of articles produced by University of Wisconsin-Extension agents and specialists to address farming through difficult times. More articles can be found on the Extension Responds website at: [www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/farmingindifficulttimes.html](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/farmingindifficulttimes.html)

July 2009

Contact: Roger T. Williams, UW-Madison/Extension professor emeritus, 608-839-4758  
[rtwillia@wisc.edu](mailto:rtwillia@wisc.edu)

Managing through Difficult Times: Sowing the Seeds of Hope-Programs Responding to Wisconsin Farm Family Distress

Madison, Wis. – Many Wisconsin farm families have experienced financial distress for the past 25 years. They have struggled with plummeting land values in the mid-1980s and a host of other stressors since then: severe drought, floods, wet springs, major feed shortages, low milk prices at various times, low prices for other commodities (beef, hogs, corn, soybeans) at times and escalating costs for farm inputs (fuel, seed, fertilizer, herbicides).

The “Sowing the Seeds of Hope” project is a seven-state, grant-funded project to help farm families respond to stress. In Wisconsin, the project offers the following targeted services to ease the chronic, prolonged stress facing Wisconsin farm families.

### **Weekend Getaways for Farm Couples**

Taking a weekend away from the farm is something people who milk cows two or three times a day seldom do. During these Weekend Getaways, farm couples learn to handle stress more effectively, to communicate more clearly with spouses and kids and to problem-solve and plan for the future. They also learn about helpful state and local resources and start to create a network with other farm families in similar situations. The project also offers Weekend Getaways for farm women, farm men and farm families, as funding allows. The project provides funds to help cover the cost of farm labor and child care to assist people in getting away from the farm for the weekend experiences.

### **Trainings for Professional and Natural Helpers**

Seeds of Hope offers training to sensitize both professionals and natural helpers (people who regularly work with farm families) to the farm culture, the stressors farm families face, signs and symptoms of distress, resources available to help farm families, and ways they can respond to farm families in distress. Professional helpers include health care, mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence prevention professionals; clergy; University of Wisconsin-Extension agents; and technical college instructors. Natural helpers include veterinarians, milk testers, milk haulers, cattle haulers, machinery dealers, feed and seed dealers and creditors. The training program fosters a network of “helpers” and informs them about resources available through the Wisconsin Farm Center, the Harvest of Hope Fund, UW-Extension, technical colleges, health agencies, food programs, winterization services and other resources for farm families.

## **Resources for Stressed-Out Farm Youth**

Farm financial and family stress has unique effects on young people. A sample of Wisconsin farm teenagers said they are most stressed by three circumstances:

- Farm responsibilities in addition to church, school and extra-curricular activities.
- The stigma of being farm kids in communities where farm families are a minority.
- Their lack of money in comparison with urban and suburban kids in their communities.

Seeds of Hope project funds supported development and distribution of a guidebook called "It's All in The Farm Family". This booklet is packed with materials designed to strengthen communication and problem solving with youth in farm families.

## **Counseling Services**

Counseling programs for farmers have been helpful in other states, and farm families have increasingly requested counseling in Wisconsin as well. The Seeds of Hope project offers a voucher program so families without insurance or with inadequate coverage can get the counseling services they need. The project also created a database of almost 1,000 mental health and substance abuse counselors who are familiar with the farm culture and who want to work with farm families in distress. Counseling services are available in most Wisconsin counties. You can access the database and the counseling vouchers by contacting the Wisconsin Farm Center at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection; call: 800-942-2474.

## **Accessing Services**

For more information about any of the services offered through the Sowing the Seeds of Hope Project, please contact:

Kathy Schmitt  
Wisconsin Farm Center  
Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection  
P. O. Box 8911  
Madison, WI 53708-8911  
608-224-5048 or 800-942-2474 [Kathy.Schmitt@wi.gov](mailto:Kathy.Schmitt@wi.gov)

Sowing The Seeds of Hope project is a seven-state, grant-funded project in the Midwest where each state has developed support services for farm families in need. Leaders from the seven states learn from each other through monthly teleconferences and occasional face-to-face meetings. The Wisconsin Farm Center at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is the lead agency for Wisconsin's project. Other partners in the project are STAR Outreach, Wisconsin Rural Women's Initiative, Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation, Child and Family Therapeutic Systems, Harvest of Hope Fund, Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Wisconsin's Cooperative Extension Service, and the following individuals: Jeff Court, Mary Pribbernow, Lori Walsh and Roger Williams.

To access more information and/or tools to help analyze your situation, link to the Extension Responds web page at: [www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/farmingindifficulttimes.html](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/farmingindifficulttimes.html)

For assistance in making these tough decisions, contact your UW-Extension county agent, your Farm Business and Production Management Instructor in the Technical College or the DATCP Farm Center at 1-800-942-2474.

###

File: risk management, farming in difficult times