

Farmer Wellness Initiative focuses on helping farmers in need

Help for Ontario farmers and their families is just a phone call away

GUELPH, ON [September 13, 2022] — A telehealth line that makes mental wellness support available to all Ontario farmers and farm families is now live. It is part of the Farmer Wellness Initiative (FWI), which addresses growing mental health concerns in the agricultural sector by offering more accessible mental health and wellness support to farm families across the province.

“The mental health crisis in the agricultural community has been well documented in recent years and the Farmer Wellness Initiative fills a critical gap for farmers and their families across Ontario,” says Peggy Brekveld, farmer and President of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA). “Bottom line – if you’re part of a farm family in Ontario and need mental health support for any reason, this telehealth line is available to you.”

OFA has partnered with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) – Ontario Division and Telus Health to develop and launch this initiative. It is the first step of a multi-year, province-wide program that provides free counselling services virtually, in-person or on the phone by professional counsellors with agricultural backgrounds and training.

The confidential helpline is accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year in English and French, as well as up to 30 other languages, and the new [FWI website](#) explains how to use the free service.

To raise awareness, OFA has launched the [Farmer Wellness Initiative – Fields to Forks campaign](#) with different Bell Media outlets across the province that includes TV, radio, print and online ads. A [mental health focused one-minute film](#), specific to FWI, will be widely shared across social media platforms and FWI will have a booth alongside CMHA Ontario at Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show in Woodstock on September 13 to 15. Additionally, there will be materials and giveaways available at the International Plowing Match in Kemptville from September 20 to 24, and future displays at various other farm and rural events this fall and winter.

As well, several *Ask the Expert* shows on 1290 CJBK AM radio station in London will focus on mental health in agriculture, including a segment on September 17 featuring Brekveld and fellow farmer Joe Dickenson, discussing the mental health struggles of farm families, and one on October 1 with Kristin Wheatcroft from CMHA that will address available support programs. Both segments will run 1:00 to 1:30 pm.

“We want to make as many farmers and their families as possible aware of this new service and that help is available if someone needs it, regardless of their farm organization membership or affiliation,” says Bruce Buttar, OFA director and Chair of the Farmer Wellness Initiative Advisory Committee. “We’ve been developing many resources to help break the silence around mental health, including the new FWI website that helps people identify when they might need help and what happens once they pick up the phone to make that first call.”

Other advisory committee members represent the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario, L'Union des Cultivateurs Franco-Ontariens, National Farmers' Union, Canadian Mental Health Association – Ontario, University of Guelph, and the Rural Ontario Institute.

The mental health helpline for farmers can be reached at 1-866-267-6255; additional resources are available on the [Farmer Wellness Initiative website](#).

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