



One Welfare Recommendations Based on Consultation

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NFAHW 
COUNCIL

This document was prepared by the National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Council. The Council was formed in 2010 to advise governments and all other stakeholders in animal agriculture on matters of the health and welfare of farmed animals in Canada. The Council is funded jointly by non-government organizations with an interest in animal agriculture and federal, provincial and territorial governments. Council members are designated by their constituency because of broad expertise in animal health and welfare, public health and an interest in approaching topics and developing advice in the context of One Health. The National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Council would like thank the working group composed of Council members and advisors as well as the expert consultation group for their time and commitment to improving Canada's farmed animal health and welfare system.

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Table of Contents

1. ONE WELFARE CONSULTATION.....	4
SURVEY PARTICIPANTS	4
2. RECOMMENDED AGRICULTURAL WELL BEING NETWORK OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS:.....	5
CURRENT STATE	5
<i>Responses of the participants</i>	6
WHAT IS WORKING?	8
3. RECOMMENDED APPROACH TO NETWORK DEVELOPMENT:.....	9
CURRENT STATE:	9
<i>Responses of the participants</i>	9
WHAT IS WORKING?	10
4. RECOMMENDED APPROACH TO HOLISTIC MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT:.....	11
CURRENT STATE:	11
<i>Responses of the participants</i>	11
WHAT IS WORKING?	14
5. RECOMMENDED OUTREACH, EDUCATION AND TRAINING:	14
CURRENT STATE:	14
<i>Responses of the participants</i>	14
WHAT IS WORKING?	15
6. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTED CORE NETWORK ELEMENTS	15
NEXT STEPS	17

One Welfare Recommendations Based on Consultation

The purpose of this document is to provide information and propose recommendations for governments and industry in support of a national framework for agricultural mental health which includes the well-being of producers, animals, and all agricultural stakeholders. Stakeholders include farmers and ranchers, medical and veterinary practitioners, agricultural professionals, agricultural service providers, allied groups, mental health professionals and animal health and welfare regulators.

The National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare (NFAHW) Council welcomes the initiative of Parliament to study the issue of mental distress among farmers and ranchers, which can in turn have a direct impact on the welfare of their animals. This is consistent with the recommendation from the NFAHW Council advisory document paper titled “[A National Farm Animal Welfare System for Canada](#)”. This paper explored the need for appropriate and timely medical and social services in situations where there is serious breakdown of human/animal well-being. The NFAHW Council “[One Welfare Interim Report](#)” also identified a need for increased awareness, advocacy, and appropriate mental health resources for producers, farm staff, service providers and veterinary personnel within the agriculture industry.

As a concept, **One Welfare** is a framework that recognizes the many interconnections between human welfare, animal welfare and the integrity of the environment. It is a known fact that the health and welfare of farmed animals is closely linked to the well-being of agricultural producers and other animal care givers. As observed by animal welfare regulators, the managers of commodity animal welfare programs, and veterinarians, cases of animal neglect are often precipitated by the development of farmer mental health issues. Serious animal welfare incidents involving mental health issues require appropriate intervention not only to ensure the well-being of the affected animals, but to facilitate the recovery of the farmer, and provide support to family, staff, first responders and animal welfare regulators experiencing distress from the incident. Animal disease events requiring response and control activities (including depopulation) also have a significant impact on the well-being of producers, their staff, their families, veterinarians and responders. It is critical to ensure an effective mental health support system is in place for individuals experiencing distress working in the agriculture sector.

Working in the agricultural field is rewarding and challenging. Farming is a 24-hour a day, 7-day a week responsibility that requires a strong sense of commitment and dedication. A wide range of unique occupational stressors exist in the agricultural industry, and an effective mental health support system needs to recognize these unique and specialized stressors and engage professionals who have a strong understanding of farming realities.

1. One welfare consultation

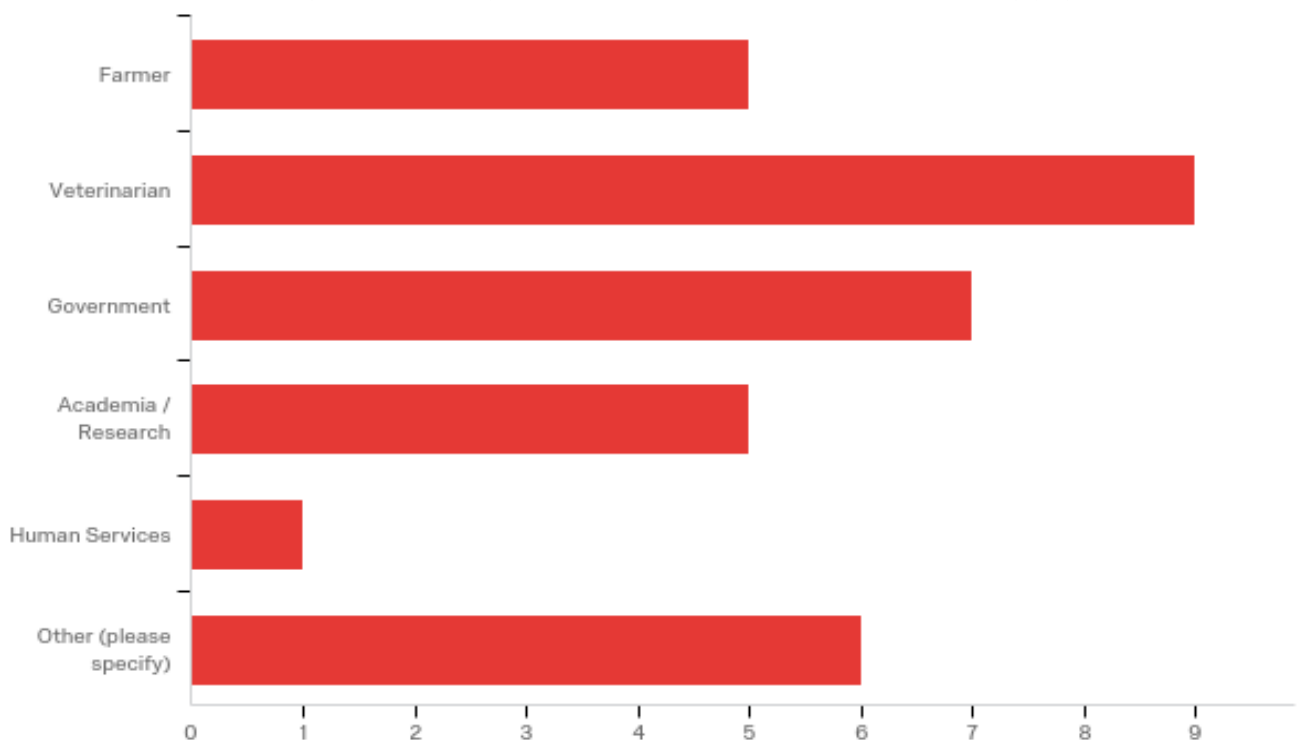
In November 2018, the NFAHW Council hosted a consultation to develop recommendations for a national program to help the agriculture community cope with mental health issues, and to raise awareness of the benefits of involving medical and social services both proactively and in response to human and animal health and welfare situations. The NFAHW consultation explored the concept of a national program that would focus on prevention, build resilience, and respond not only to the impact of daily stressors on the farm, but also to critical incidents such as disease outbreaks and disaster. The consultation studied the current situation, identified current program gaps, and proposed desired outcomes and recommendations. Drawing on the input received from the consultation, and a pre-consultation survey the NFAHW Council has made [eight recommendations](#) which can be supported by stakeholders and governments to enhance the support network for farmer and first responder mental health in Canada. For each group of recommendations, the current state is described and solutions are proposed to improve the situation.

Survey participants

As presented in Figure 1, the professional occupation of the participants was broad and reflective of the diversity of stakeholders involved in mental health as it pertains to animal agriculture. Although no statistics were collected on the province of origin of the participants, the participants were representative of the Canadian agricultural industry.

Figure 1 The occupation of the participants

Which of the following describes your work? Please select all that apply:



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Farmer	15.15%	5
2	Veterinarian	27.27%	9
3	Government	21.21%	7
4	Academia / Research	15.15%	5
5	Human Services	3.03%	1
6	Other (please specify)	18.18%	6
	Total	100%	33

Other:

- Agriculture
- Veterinary Social Work
- Consulting in research and extension services
- Association
- Industry association
- Grower Organization

2. Recommended Agricultural Well-Being Network Operational Requirements:

- **A national network should include a combination of direct and indirect services such as:**
 - **A fully accessible help line which includes telephone, chat, and text functions as well as other emerging technologies,**
 - **Peer-support programming,**
 - **Community-based support systems**
 - **On-farm support, such as access to respite care in order to addresses human recovery needs and animal care and welfare issues on the farm**
 - **Resilience and well-being training programs**
- **The funding of the network should be sustainable and diverse to ensure long term viability. Support from federal and provincial governments, industry groups, and the public is critical for its success.**
- **The network should be accessible through one point of contact nationally, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, bilingual, and delivered by professionals with knowledge of farming realities.**

Current State

Canada’s current support system for farmer mental health is fragmented due to regional program delivery with no national co-ordination, collaboration or sustainable funding. Support is often limited by human and financial resource availability. These challenges are further

compounded by the fact that there are few programs available that are specific to agriculture, and accessibility to programming can be limited based on the geographic location, hours of work, and complex health systems and processes. These challenges further deter affected individuals who are already struggling with the stigma of seeking help for mental health from acquiring assistance. Most service providers in rural areas lack an agricultural foundation and are unable to speak the language of farmers and ranchers limiting their ability to build proper connections with affected individuals.

Responses of the participants

Table 1 presents the perception of the survey participants regarding the factors that result in limitations in mental health support to farmers and ranchers. Although the perception scale is not showing a large variation among the various factors, some general conclusions can be drawn. According to the survey, the respondents identify insufficient funding as the most important limiting factor in the current support of farmer's mental health. Conversely, the government engagement is considered as the least important factor. In both factors, the low standard deviation exhibits a general agreement of the level of importance of both of these issues. The larger standard deviation about the regional variability of the services supports the heterogeneity of the quality of the support services between regions.

Among the factors that were mentioned under Other (question 5) issues associated with the lack of national coordination, research support, and availability of trained resources were raised.

Table 1. Likert scale of the perception of the participants regarding their agreement with the factors that influence the limitation in the current mental health support to farmers and ranchers in Canada.

Question: To what extent do you agree that each of the following items are limitations in the current supports made available for farmer mental health? (0=strongly disagree, 10=strongly agree)

Field	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
Other (please specify):	9.17	8	10	0.9	0.81	6
Insufficient funding	8.71	5	10	1.55	2.39	21
Support for farmers and ranchers varies from region to region	8.36	0	10	2.33	5.41	22
Too little recognition of need for farmer supports	8.32	4	10	1.74	3.04	22
Too little government engagement	8.29	6	10	1.16	1.35	21

Other:

availability of fully trained resources is limited

availability of support to suit farming timeline

I'm not sure; I don't have a lot of experience in this area but am keen to gain more information

Lack of research and statistics

no national plan

Negative stigma associated with mental health disease prevents people from seeking help.

Lack of national coordination in research and support provision

Question: What Canadian programs are you aware of that provide support to farmers and ranchers to manage stress and/or emotional distress in the day-to-day or in times of agricultural crisis? Please provide the specific program name and a weblink, if possible.

- PEI Farmer Assistance Program:
www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/agriculture-and-fisheries/farmer-assistance-program
- Association québécoise de prévention du suicide:
www.agps.info/se-former/sentinelle-agricole.html
- UPA Farmer Assistance Program:

www.upa.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/filebase/en/Depliant-PAPA-EN.pdf

www.acfareseaux.qc.ca/fr/maison-acfa

- Saskatchewan Farm Stress Line:
www.mobilecrisis.ca/farm-stress-line-rural-sask
- Manitoba Farm, Rural and Northern Support Services:
www.supportline.ca
- Canadian Mental Health Association:
www.cmha.ca/
- Do More Agricultural Foundation:
www.domore.ag/
- Prairie Mountain Interagency Hoarding Coalition
www.prairiemountainhealth.ca/images/PublicHealth/PMIHC_Guide1.pdf
- Prince Edward Island Farmer Assistance Program:
www.peifa.ca/farmer-assistance-program-2/
- Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture Mental Health Support
www.nsfa-fane.ca/members/farmer-resources/
- Crisis Services Canada (National Suicide Prevention Service)
www.crisisservicescanada.ca/
- Le Travailleur de rang:
www.acfareseaux.qc.ca/fr/le-travailleur-de-rang

What is Working?

In Québec, in difficult circumstances that could result in distress, the “travailleur de rang” network (currently 7 to cover Québec) intervenes to support farmers and ranchers. More severe cases that require medical attention are referred to available resources in that area (doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists). In order to identify and direct farmers and ranchers who are in distress, or who are dealing with a mental illness, a group of 600 sentinels, agricultural professionals such as inseminators, agronomists, veterinarians, and accountants, who meet farmers and ranchers in the course of their activities has been trained to identify individuals in distress and how to access support. This approach allows all farmers and ranchers, in all areas of Québec, to have access to support. The sentinel training consists of a 7-hour session and a follow-up is given every year to these individuals. The training is the responsibility of Québec’s suicide prevention association (AQPS) and the suicide prevention centres (CPS).

The Manitoba Farm Rural & Northern Support Services is a stress support line in Manitoba that provides telephone and online counselling to farmers and ranchers, rural and northern Manitobans. This program also offers public education, a volunteer training program, and a monthly Suicide Bereavement Support group. The MFRNSS houses a Rural Mental Health Resource Centre with books, videos and articles related to rural, northern, Indigenous, and agricultural mental health. PEI has a farm assistance program; Nova Scotia has a farm family support centre and Saskatchewan has a mobile crisis line available. There are also crisis lines in every province or territory and national Suicide Prevention Services (Crisis Services Canada), but they are not necessarily farmer-specific.

3. Recommended Approach to Network Development:

- **The network programs should be evidence based and integrated directly with farmers and ranchers' input. The program should evolve according to a gap analysis that is informed by scientific research, validated data, and national and international best practices.**
- **The network programs should consider current available services and structures and focus on improving national coordination, facilitating collaboration with health departments, and strengthening response policies.**

Current State:

The awareness of the importance of supporting mental health in the Agriculture sector is steadily increasing, and with that there has been an increase in research in Canada and internationally to gain a better understanding of the needs and gaps with respect to mental wellness programming in the Agriculture sector.

Exceptional examples of regional success stories do exist in Canada and should be considered and built upon in order to establish a robust approach to providing mental health services to producers, farm staff, service providers and veterinary personnel within the agriculture industry.

Responses of the participants

Table 2 presents the perception of the importance of the participation of stakeholders in the establishment of a national farmer's mental health program. The respondents considered that the mental health experts, farmers and ranchers, provincial, and federal governments were the most important stakeholders while the regulators were considered the least important. However, the respondents expressed the importance of a collaborative approach, not only by the closeness in the Likert scale values but also by the comments expressed throughout the questionnaire.

Table 2. Perception of the importance of the participation of stakeholders in the establishment of a national farmer’s mental health program.

Question: How important do you think it is to include each of the following stakeholders in building a national program for farmer mental health in Canada? (1=Not at all important, 10=Extremely important)

Field	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
Farmer mental health experts	9.6	8	10	0.58	0.34	20
Provincial / territorial government - agriculture	9.3	8	10	0.71	0.51	20
Farmer / commodity groups	9.2	8	10	0.75	0.56	20
Federal government - agriculture	9	6	10	1.05	1.1	20
Provincial / territorial government - human health	8.95	7	10	1.02	1.05	20
Mental health service professionals	8.95	8	10	0.74	0.55	20
Federal government - human health	8.65	5	10	1.31	1.73	20
Veterinarians	8.65	5	10	1.28	1.63	20
Animal welfare regulators	8.25	5	10	1.3	1.69	20
Academia / universities	8.25	2	10	1.81	3.29	20
Animal health regulators	8.2	5	10	1.29	1.66	20

What is Working?

Dr. Andria Jones-Bitton and her team conducted a national survey of Canadian farmer mental health (from Sept. 2015-Feb. 2016) to address the gap in knowledge related to farmer mental health outcomes. The survey was completed by over 1100 farmers and ranchers across Canada and provided baseline statistics on a number of mental health outcomes (stress, anxiety, depression, burnout, resilience) and help-seeking attitudes. The second phase of this process involved: (i) a scoping review of the mental health research and farmer-specific mental health supports worldwide, (ii) 75 research interviews with farmers and ranchers, vets, government, industry to characterize the lived experience of mental health in farming, as well as help-seeking behaviours and input on what supports should be in place for farmer mental health in Canada. The increasing recognition of the importance of farmer mental health, and appropriate mental health support systems for the Agricultural sector has resulted in support for further research and analysis to identify needs and gaps in the current mental health system.

4. Recommended Approach to Holistic Mental Health Support:

- **The network should be effective in providing mental health support in the face of general daily stressors, as well as in crisis intervention. Effective prevention, intervention and postvention services should be available and provided by qualified individuals.**

Current State:

Resources are most often invested in glaring problems rather than on solutions to prevent them. There is a lack of available services for agricultural stakeholders to receive tailored assistance in coping with daily stressors, as well as robust and consistent support services in the face of critical agricultural incidents such as animal disease events, animal welfare incidents or natural disasters. There is limited programming in place to support recovery in the aftermath of a critical incident.

Responses of the participants

Table 3 presents the characteristics considered important by the consultation participants. Tailoring the program to agriculture is considered the most important factor followed by sustainable funding. These two program characteristics showed a low standard deviation expressing the consensus of the participants about their importance. The 24-7 availability of support is also mentioned as important characteristic. The participants expressed that among the three potential program leaders mentioned, i.e. Government, industry, and farmers and ranchers, the participants were considering that farmers and ranchers were the best candidates to lead the program.

Table 3. Characteristics that are considered by the respondents to be important for a mental health program in Canada

Question: How important do you think each of the following are for a farmer mental health program in Canada? (1=Not at all important, 10=Extremely important)

Field	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
Tailored to agriculture	9.45	7	10	0.89	0.79	22
Sustainably funded	9.43	7	10	0.85	0.72	21
Available 24-hours a day, 7 days a week	9.38	5	10	1.13	1.28	21
Other (please specify):	8.67	3	10	2.56	6.56	6
Farmer-led	8.52	6	10	1.26	1.58	21
National in scope	8.1	3	10	2.18	4.75	21
Industry-led	8.1	6	10	1.27	1.61	21
Government-led	6.62	2	10	2.03	4.14	21

Other:

Evidence based

Human Health - led

Government-supported

Ideally a partnership between farmer, industry and government-led

Joint effort but the farm voice is prominent

Table 4 presents the perception of the respondents regarding the source of support that are best suited to farmer’s mental health support. When questioned about the best source of mental health support that could be provided to farmers and ranchers, the respondents clearly expressed the importance that the support be delivered by mental health services who are aware of the farming reality and are specially trained for this purpose. In addition, there is a strong importance of the respondents that is given to support programs in time of crisis. Conversely, the respondents are expressing their disagreement with a service provided with professionals who are not familiar with farming or come from outside of the farming community.

Table 4. Source of support that are considered by the respondents to be important to provide mental health support to farmers and ranchers

Question: How important do you think each of the following are in providing farmers and ranchers with mental health support? (1=Not at all important, 10=Extremely important)

Field	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
Support from mental health services experts who are in or familiar with farming	9.75	9	10	0.43	0.19	20
Agriculture-specific crisis support programs	9.48	7	10	0.79	0.63	21
Support from friends in farming	8.8	6	10	1.17	1.36	20
Anonymous call line (telephone)	8.57	5	10	1.47	2.15	21
Other (please specify):	8.5	8	9	0.5	0.25	2
Access to emergency funds	8.48	3	10	1.76	3.11	21
Support from farmer / commodity associations	8.45	4	10	1.63	2.65	20
Anonymous text line (cell phone text)	8.43	6	10	1.37	1.86	21
Support from other farmers and ranchers (not necessarily friends)	8.35	3	10	1.68	2.83	20
Relief farm workers	7.86	0	10	2.77	7.66	22
Support from friends outside of farming	7.55	3	10	1.86	3.45	20
Support from mental health services experts NOT in or familiar with farming	5.8	1	9	1.91	3.66	20

Other:

Development of a respite house network to allow farmers and ranchers in difficulty to take a step back before returning to the farm, after a hospital stay

Co-ordinated offers of service among groups of professionals

Animals- both dogs and cats but others that might be a part of your business as well

What Is Working?

In Québec, there are currently 7 “travailleur de rang” whose mission is to intervene with farmers and ranchers. Their actions are financed in part by the health network and in part by the private sector. The sentinels are also formed to work on prevention. Their activities are funded by the “community bodies support Programme”. Monetary distribution is regionalised; in many regions of Québec, it is the integrated university health and social services centres (CIUSSS) who administer this contribution.

One of the challenges for a producer in times of stress is securing respite services that can provide on farm animal care so they are able to take a break from the farm while knowing the animals are being provided with appropriate care. Quebec has "[Maison ACFA- Respite House](#)" which facilitates this process.

British Columbia Regional Health has established support programming in times of agricultural crisis, which has been incorporated into the British Columbia Foreign Animal Disease Emergency Support plan.

5. Recommended Outreach, Education and Training:

- Educational tools and training should be developed to raise awareness and lift the stigma of mental health and well-being issues and promote among producers the importance of work life balance. These educational tools should also enhance mental health literacy to support all agriculture stakeholders in recognizing signs of stress or distress and identifying where to access available resources. Mental health and well-being educational programs should engage with Ag in the Classroom, 4H, commodity groups, and veterinary and agriculture programs at universities and colleges to distribute these tools and provide training. Efforts also need to be focused on developing a communication strategy to better understand the problems troubling farmers and ranchers, raise awareness and provide information on the resources that are available.

Current State:

The only national education services available at this time are those that are designed for the general public such as the Red Cross Mental Health First Aid program. This program has many benefits however Canada needs to work towards a more specific approach tailored to the agriculture community which would be more relevant to Agricultural stakeholders.

Responses of the participants

The respondents were asked about other clientele who may have similar needs to the farming population. The responses are presented in table 5. The two groups that are considered to have the most similar needs to farmers and ranchers are veterinarians and animal health and welfare responders. However, the respondents were not considering that the needs of aquaculture producers or fishers were similar. This articulates that tools and training in agriculture and

related fields in the area of mental health are needed across Canada and this includes to regulators and service providers.

Table 5. Respondents’ perception about the similarity in the need of mental health services for larger clientele than farmers and ranchers.

Question: The following sectors/stakeholders may have needs similar to the agricultural sector. How useful do you think each could be in helping build a national program for farmer mental health? (0=Extremely useless, 10=Extremely useful)

Field	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
Other (please specify):	10	10	10	0	0	1
Animal health and welfare responders	8.63	5	10	1.46	2.13	19
Veterinary associations	8.42	5	10	1.46	2.14	19
Aquaculture	7.11	2	10	2.26	5.1	18
Fishery	6.83	2	10	2.24	5.03	18

What is Working?

The development of a mental health literacy training program specific for agriculture is underway in Ontario. This training program was developed with a team of stakeholders including farmers and ranchers, veterinarians, government, industry, social workers, counselling, and adult education specialists. Research is underway on the effectiveness of the training with assessments conducted in advance of, immediately following, 3-months and 6-months after the training.

Do More Ag is a not for profit organization that champions for the mental wellbeing of all Canadian producers and advocates for changing the culture of Agriculture to one where all producers are encouraged, supported and empowered to take care of their mental wellbeing.

6. Summary of Recommendations and Suggested Core Network Elements

Establish a nationally funded and coordinated network that has consistent core services and nationally developed resources. This program should be delivered at the provincial and territorial level and should be flexible in order to adapt to regional differences.

- A national network should include a combination of direct and indirect services such as:
 - A fully accessible help line which includes telephone, chat, and text functions as well as other emerging technologies,
 - Peer-support programming,
 - Community-based support systems

- On-farm support, such as access to respite care in order to address human recovery needs and animal care and welfare issues on the farm
- Resilience and well-being training programs

The funding of the program should be sustainable and diverse to ensure long term viability. Creative thinking should be utilized to identify potential funding solutions including a check off system, Canadian Agricultural Policy Framework funding, and federal, provincial, and municipal funding partnerships. Support from provincial and federal government, industry groups, and the public is critical for its success and will demonstrate that stakeholders are making the best and most efficient use of funds to build successful programming.

The network must be accessible through one point of contact nationally, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, must be bilingual, and delivered by professionals with knowledge of farming realities.

- It is important that the national network is positioned to take advantage of existing structures and models, enhance co-ordination and collaboration between those that already exist and addresses identified gaps. A national network should utilize existing human medical and animal health and welfare response programs as well as other existing support systems to ensure the program is accessible and provides easy points of entry for those under stress to access necessary services. This should be coupled with a coordinated, network-based approach to research into agricultural mental health that is focused on provision of evidence-based services.

A national framework for mental health needs to utilize a three-pronged approach (prevention, intervention, and postvention) to be fully effective. Prevention activities including educational tools should be developed to raise awareness and lift the stigma of mental health and wellbeing issues. These tools should enhance mental health literacy to support agriculture stakeholders such as medical and veterinary practitioners, agricultural professionals, agricultural service providers, allied groups, animal health and welfare regulators, and farmers and ranchers in recognizing signs of stress or distress and enabling access to available resources. Mental health and well-being educational programs should engage organizations such as Ag in the Classroom, 4H, and Veterinary and Agriculture faculties at universities and colleges to distribute these tools and provide training. Education about mental health in educational institutions, promotion among producers of the importance of work-life balance, raising awareness and providing resilience training to producers to minimize the stigma of mental health is critical in supporting the wellbeing of the agricultural community.

To ensure timely intervention, effective response programs need to be available to the agricultural industry during periods of stress, as well as during critical animal health and welfare events. These programs must be timely, fully accessible, engage support teams with knowledge and experience of the agricultural industry, and should address the need for respite care and support to address human recovery and animal welfare issues. Crises occur, for example, when animal diseases outbreaks are identified and actions such as depopulation of the herd is

required. These events impact producers, family, staff, industry groups, and agricultural professionals and ensuring an easy to deploy and nationally consistent structure would significantly aid in the recovery process in the case of a major event.

The program should not only be effective in crisis intervention but should also ensure effective postvention services are available and provided by qualified individuals. All too often the notion of postvention is not considered when building mental health support programs. Follow up support is needed months and sometimes years after an event. There is a need for general support and in many cases, there is not a “cure” so access to ongoing follow up support is critical.

Next Steps

Significant progress has been made in raising awareness of the need for a national approach to supporting mental health in agriculture. Governments, industry, educators, agricultural organizations, professionals and first responders working in the field of agriculture all play a critical role in building a more robust approach to enhancing health and wellbeing in agriculture.

Farmers and ranchers are a small segment of the Canadian population; however, they are significant contributors to the economy. Governments and partners must invest in healthy farmers and ranchers in order to ensure a healthy and vibrant Canadian economy. It will be important to build on the current momentum by engaging government partners, mental health professionals, and the sector in the development of a fully funded national coordinated approach. Through collaborative partnerships we can learn from previous successes and build on lessons learned to establish a network that is informed by research, founded on prevention, but capable of successful and timely intervention with ongoing support for recovery.

This is a complex and multifactorial issue that requires a collaborative partnership to be successfully addressed. The National Farmed Animal Health and Welfare Council commits to sharing this document and raising awareness among agriculture and veterinary faculties, Regulatory Assistant Deputy Ministers, and stakeholder partners with a role in supporting mental health in agriculture in order to encourage the development of a cohesive and collaborative approach to enhancing health and well-being in agriculture. Furthermore, the Council will commit to forming a committee of all parties implicated in the recommendations made in this paper to discuss a strategy for reporting on recommendations that are in progress and alternatives for implementation of recommendations where progress is not being made. This committee will be targeted to convene by May 2020.