

Kayla Copus Farmer and Rancher Suicide Prevention Poster Project

A Senior Project

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Introduction

Farmer and rancher suicide is a prevalent problem yet rarely acknowledged. According to the National Farmers Union, farmers and ranchers are five times more likely to commit suicide than the general population (National Farmers Union, 2018). Whether it is due to decreasing net farm income, unpredictable weather, changing markets, increasing regulations, isolation of the rural lifestyle, or the grueling amount of manual labor that is required, farmers and ranchers are struggling with mental illness now more than ever. As a result, farmers and ranchers are taking their own lives at the highest rate of any occupation, at 84.5 suicides per 100,000 (Rosmann, 2016). Despite this alarming number of suicides in the agricultural industry, there is a lack of knowledge about prevention resources and methods directed at the industry most impacted. This project will develop suicide prevention materials in the form of posters and social media graphics to be distributed through farm organizations to reach the targeted agriculture population to increase awareness for this issue.

Background

Farmers and ranchers are twice as likely to take their own lives as military veterans, a group that often receives much more awareness and funding for suicide prevention (Collins, 2018). The actual number of farmers and ranchers who take their own lives is thought to be higher because many are “disguised or reported as accidents” on the farm (Collins, 2018). The most prevalent reason for the high rate of depression and suicide among farmers and ranchers is the economic volatility that inevitably comes in the agriculture industry. During the farm crisis of the 1980s, most states had crisis hotlines for farmers and ranchers to call and speak to someone with an agricultural background (Bennett, 2018). The severity of suicides rates today is thought to be higher than during the farm crisis, which is a shocking comparison (Janssen, 2016).

According to Successful Farming, the suicide rate for male farmers today is 50% higher than during the farm crisis of the 1980’s (Scott, 2018). Yet, there are only five states today with farm crisis hotlines, including Nebraska, Wisconsin, Iowa, New York, and Vermont (Bennett, 2018). This combined with no federal funding for farmer and rancher suicide prevention means this problem could continue at an alarming rate. National resources for farmer and rancher suicide prevention are in the process of creation through the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network in the 2018 Farm Bill, however, current resources include the Farm Aid Hotline available through the National Farmers Union and the National Suicide Prevention Hotline.

Methodology

To develop a poster for farmer and rancher suicide awareness, the author first researched general suicide prevention and awareness posters to analyze examples and to get ideas for potential themes, colors, and content. The ideas generated in this process needed to be methodically applied to make the content relevant and relatable for those in the agricultural industry. In this process, the author chose to incorporate a word cloud filled with words that represent agricultural issues and influence farmer and rancher suicide. The phrase “Suicide does not solve agricultural issues,” was chosen to use as the title at the top of the poster. This phrase is relevant when distributed through agricultural organizations because those organizations are responsible for working with farmers and ranchers to develop solutions for agricultural issues, including the issues listed in the word cloud. For the background of the poster, the author chose a photo of a farmer standing in a field. The photo was selected and purchased from Adobe Stock images.

The bottom of the poster displays the Farm Aid Hotline phone number with the phrase “Call someone who understands” to conclude the poster with a resource to help prevent farmer and rancher suicide.

After completing the initial farmer and rancher suicide prevention poster, the author felt an additional poster was necessary to include information about resources available to farmers and ranchers who need to solve specific operation issues that may be the answer rather than taking their life. On the second poster, the author chose a similar photograph to the suicide prevention poster to create a cohesive idea. The top of the poster reads “Struggling? There’s help.” There are two lists of resources available on the poster. The first list is from the USDA Disaster Assistance Program and the second list is of National Disaster Resources available to farmers and ranchers.

Results

The results of this project are two completed posters of 11x17 inches each to bring awareness to farmer and rancher suicide, as well as resources for suicide prevention. The first poster identifies many of the reasons for farmer and rancher suicide to bring public awareness and to target the general agriculture community. The Farm Crisis Hotline on this poster phone number is targeted toward farmers and ranchers that are struggling with thoughts of suicide. The second poster gives resources that are specific to many different types of farming operations as an alternative to suicide but is also broader to help farmers who are struggling in general. The posters use different images and verbiage to evoke different responses from future viewers.

Moving Forward

This poster will be emailed to the National Farm Crisis Center, American Farm Bureau Federation, and California Farm Bureau Federation to encourage distribution directly to members, as well as to other organizations including American Agri-Women. In the future, these posters should be distributed through farm organizations such as Farm Bureau and commodity associations or organizations such as American Agri-Women. If distributed through these organizations, the posters will have the maximum ability to reach all two million farmers and ranchers in the United States whether they view them via social media, or in person. The more farm organizations participate in this campaign, the more likely struggling farmers will be in seeking help through the resources presented.

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