

# The AgriWellness Voice

Dedicated to the behavioral health of agricultural people

Issue 02 May 2011



## Your Behavioral Health Impacts Your Herd Health

Have you ever thought how your behavioral health affects the animals you raise? Practitioners of artificial insemination of livestock have long known their own stress level affects the conception rate in the animals they are breeding. Animals detect the tension of the people working with them and reproductive success diminishes when the AI technician is stressed out. Animals sense when the technician is fatigued, angry or feels the need to hurry.

Research has long confirmed that stress, especially financial difficulties, increases the likelihood of farmers experiencing work-related injuries and fatalities (Geller, Ludtke and Stratton, 1990; Thu, Lasley, Whitten, Lewis, Donham, Zwering and Scarth, 1997). Now there is research evidence which implicates psychosocial conditions in the development of behavioral symptoms in agricultural workers and in the dairy cows they cared for (Kolstrup and Hultgren, 2011).

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## Online Food Environment Atlas

The Economic Research Service (ERS) is the research arm of the USDA. The ERS has recently published an online interactive food atlas.

The food atlas allows the user to collect state or county level data about many food availability and health related topics including: residents' access and proximity to grocery stores, food eaten at home, food insecurity, physical activity and outlets and socioeconomic characteristics.

This tool is available at [www.ers.usda.gov](http://www.ers.usda.gov)

## Behavioral Health (continued from page 1)

Having to work very fast, having little influence over decisions and one's workload, low sense of meaningfulness of the work and low sense of staff coherence were associated with symptoms of irritation, fatigue, insomnia, headaches, nervousness and abdominal pain.

The findings were reported in the April 2011 issue of the Journal of Agricultural Safety and Health, based on a sample of forty-one farm owners or managers and twenty workers employed on Swedish dairy farms. Generally, the workers reported more physical symptoms than the dairy owners or managers, which seems to suggest that having control over working conditions was an important factor in the development of behavioral health symptoms. Workers who felt their contributions to the dairy farm operation were valued by the owners/managers reported fewer physical symptoms and greater pleasure from their work.

Perhaps the most interesting finding in this study was that the incidence of mastitis in cows and the total number of cow diseases were correlated with stressful psychosocial working conditions among workers and their behavioral health symptoms. It should be emphasized that the results are correlations, not cause-effect outcomes.

Of importance, there is a positive correlation between happy workers and happy cows. While it is likely that other livestock species such as beef cattle, swine and sheep, also enjoy happy caretakers, it is also likely that healthy animals make their caretakers feel better too. It is important that livestock producers maintain positive communication with their workers and demonstrate leadership in maintaining a behaviorally healthy working environment. It is good behavior management when we as owners and managers, minimize our own fatigue, obtain sufficient recreation and exercise, participate in positive social interactions with our families and communities, obtain adequate sleep and keep the business organized and running smoothly. It's particularly tough for dairy producers currently because of the dairy price squeeze, and all the more important that we review our own behavioral health.

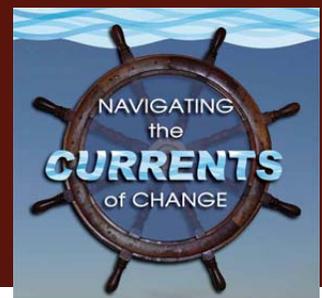
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### References:

Geller, J. M., Ludtke, R. L., and Stratton, T. (1990). Non-fatal farm injuries in North Dakota: A sociological analysis. Journal of Rural Health, 6(2), 185-196.

Kolstrup, C.L. and Hultgren, J. (2011). Perceived physical and psychosocial exposure and health symptoms of dairy farm staff and possible associations with dairy cow health. Journal of Agricultural Safety and Health, 17(2), 111-125.

Thu, K., Lasley, P., Whitten, P., Lewis, M., Donham, K. J., Zwerling, C., and Scarth, R. (1997). Stress as a risk factor for agricultural injuries: comparative data from the Iowa farm family health and hazard survey (1994) and the Iowa farm and rural life poll (1989). Journal of AgroMedicine, 4(3-4), 181-191.



## Navigating the Currents of Change Conference

June 22-25, 2011

**Grand River Conference Center and Grand Harbor Resort, Dubuque, Iowa.**

Register now for this important conference, convened jointly by the National Association for Rural Mental Health (NARMH) and AgriWellness, Inc.

Conference planners have prepared an outstanding array of plenary speakers, workshops, paper presentations and discussion topics.

Themes for the conference include: 1) Increasing diversity for rural communities and people involved in agriculture; 2) Growing disparities in the ability to deliver behavioral health care services in rural America; 3) Supporting disaster recovery through services designed for rural areas; 4) Special deployment issues affecting returning soldiers and their families; and 5) Domestic violence in rural communities.

Registration materials are now available. Please visit [www.narmh.org](http://www.narmh.org) for the all the information and plan to attend!



## Building Hope & Health in the Rural Agricultural Community Awards

This year's upcoming "Navigating the Currents of Change" conference will include an AgriWellness award luncheon on June 22. The AgriWellness board will be honoring two recipients with the "Building Hope and Health in the Rural Agricultural Community" award.

Mr. Mark Little Owl will be receiving the lay person award. Mr. Little Owl is the Mental Health Department Director for the Mandan, Hidatsa & Arikara (MHA) Nation based in New Town, North Dakota. Mr. Little Owl has been a strong collaborative partner in the development of a structured North Dakota Rural Behavioral Health Network. He also played a significant role when he partnered with Mental Health America of North Dakota in the creation of *Resolana: Voice of the People*, a documentary that features real people telling their stories about the disparities in the delivery of behavioral health services in rural North Dakota communities. Mr. Little Owl has also partnered with Dr. Michael Rosmann in the development of the Native American Cultural Competency guidelines for the Rural Behavioral Health Curriculum, that he will help deliver to primary and mid-level health care providers in rural North Dakota.

Dr. J. Patrick Hart will be receiving the professional award. Dr. Hart is the President/Senior Consultant of Hart & Associates, Rural2Rural Consulting in Pisgah, IA. Dr. Hart has dedicated his career to rural health issues including time as associate professor at the University of Nebraska and associate director of the Center for Rural Health Policy Analysis. Dr. Hart has also served as Executive Director of the Northcentral Wisconsin Office of Rural Health/Northern Wisconsin AHEC. Dr. Hart has served as the independent evaluator of the Sowing the Seeds of Hope program and AgriWellness, Inc. since 2005.

We congratulate both of these award recipients and are pleased to honor them at the AgriWellness awards luncheon on June 22.

### AgriWellness, Inc.

AgriWellness, Inc., a nonprofit organization, was founded in 2001 to provide counseling for farmers and ranchers, consultations, public education and provider training in agricultural behavioral health to a seven state area of the Midwest: Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin.

The AgriWellness organization now offers its assistance to all the United States, Canada and other countries, all media outlets, universities and other agricultural related organizations.

**Our services are included as model programs for the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health and the Office of Rural Health Policy.**

Membership information:

[www.agriwellness.org](http://www.agriwellness.org)

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