

The Center Spotlight

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Weigel Offers Advice to Help Farm Families Cope with Stress

Editor's Note: This is part of a monthly series of timely articles and information from the Center for Dairy Excellence, a non-profit organization focused on strengthening Pennsylvania's dairy industry.

HARRISBURG, Pa. — If you notice a neighbor break from his weekly coffee shop routine or who suddenly goes missing from his favorite church pew, it may signal more than just a change in his routine.

Sometimes these can be the early warning signs that the stress of falling milk prices and mounting bills is becoming too much to handle. Dr. Randolph Weigel knows first hand the impact that stress can have on farmers and their families in times of crises.

Farming and Stress

Farmers were among the top 12 occupations with a significant incidence of stress-related illnesses.

People with primary employment in agriculture have the highest risk for disabling injuries and fatalities.

A professor at the University of Wyoming, he taught stress management techniques to farmers during the farm crisis of the 1980s.

Dr. Weigel says that farmers have a lot of personal skills to pull them through a crisis situation. “They’re optimists and they rely heavily on their faith,” he says. “But you can’t stick your head in the sand. Getting help beats the heck out of what happens to the family if someone [under stress] commits violence or self abuse.”

Look for the early warning signs

Whether it is on a personal level, with our family members or in our neighbors, we all need to understand what could signal the early warning signs of overwhelming stress. “An increase in colds and illnesses or a change in disposition — someone who is more lethargic, despondent or angry — can signal

mounting stress,” Weigel says. “Another sign could be in the appearance of the farmstead — they stop doing maintenance or taking care of their cattle.

“Sometimes you can see it through the kids,” he says. “They have behavior problems at school or their academics suffer. You can also notice things personally — an inability to concentrate or feelings of being a failure.”

Weigel says the number one thing farmers under stress did to cope during the farm crisis of the 1980s was to rely heavily on their faith.

“Farming is more than a job — it is almost a ministry,” he says. “But it is also important to take care of yourself — physically, mentally and spiritually. If you are feeling under lots of pressure, you need to talk to someone.”

Learn stress coping strategies

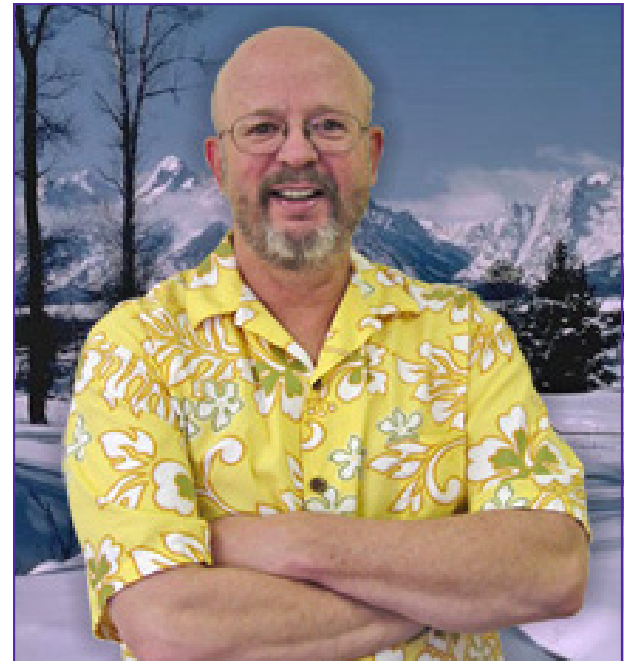
The Center for Dairy Excellence will host a special conference call with Dr. Weigel on Wednesday, April 8, from 12—1 p.m. to help dairy farm

families work through the mounting stress that comes with negative profit margins.

During the call, Dr. Weigel will share techniques that producers can use to better manage their stress levels. He will also identify the early warning signs that can signal overwhelming stress.

“One thing we will talk about is the effects stress has on the family and on children,” Weigel says. “We will discuss the things we need to look for in our kids. Stress can have serious effects on children.”

Weigel says the most important thing to do is find someone to talk to. Several dairy cooperatives have established hotlines for their members to call for help in times of crises. There are also national and local hotlines that provide family counseling and crisis intervention. For more information, contact the center at 717-346-0849 or by e-mailing info@centerfordairyexcellence.org.



Dr. Randolph Weigel, University of Wyoming

To join the conference call on April 8, producers must have call-in information and a pass code, so pre-registration is required. A producer can receive the call-in information anonymously by calling the Center for Dairy Excellence at 717-346-0849 or e-mailing info@centerfordairyexcellence.org.

As part of the Center’s “Mastering the Dairy Business” conference call series, the stress management call with Dr. Weigel is limited to 35 participants. Participation is on a first-come, first-served basis.

More information about the “Mastering the Dairy Business” conference calls and other resources from the center can be found at www.centerfordairyexcellence.org. For details on the conference calls, click on “Upcoming Events,” then on “Mastering the Dairy Business.”

Expanded Scorecard Shows Progress in Key Performance Areas

HARRISBURG, Pa. — The February issue of the Center for Dairy Excellence’s expanded Pennsylvania Dairy Industry Performance Scorecard shows no significant change in either cow numbers or milk production per cow per day from last year to this year. However, hidden behind those numbers is steady progress in key herd performance areas.

Somatic Cell Counts for Pennsylvania’s dairy herds on test are 20,000 lower than last year at this time, while Days-in-Milk dropped nearly a percent from last year. Both the Average Age to First Calving and the Average Days to First Service dropped slightly, while average pregnancy and culling rates were on target with industry benchmarks.

Improving these key herd performance areas can benefit a dairy farm’s bottom line by having a long-term positive impact on its milk flow and efficiency. Cows that calve at a younger age, breed back faster, have lower SCC levels and better conception rates are more profitable cows in any dairy herd and at any given milk price.

Pennsylvania Dairy Industry Performance Scorecard Summary	February 2008 Report	February 2009 Report	Change from last year	Target range
Milk Cows	551,000 cows	551,000 cows	No Chge.	
Rolling 12-Mo. State Milk Production	10.709 bill. lbs.	10.544 bill. lbs.	-1.5%	10.8 bill. lbs.
Wholesale Milk Price	\$21.00/cwt.	\$13.40/cwt.	-36.2%	
PA Daily Feed Costs (cost of corn, soybean & hay at 65 lbs. milk)	\$5.44/cwt.	\$4.22/cwt.	-22.5%	
Milk Production/Cow/Day	61 lbs.	61 lbs.	No Chge.	80 lbs.
% of Herds with 80+ lbs./cow/day	17%	13%	-21.9%	
Rolling 12-mo. Herd Production Average	20,961 lbs.	21,005 lbs.	+0.2%	25,000 lbs.
Average Somatic Cell Count	291,000	279,200	+4.1%	200,000
% of Herds below 200,000 SCC	33 %	37%	+10.7%	
Average Days In Milk	187 Days	185 Days	+0.9%	185 Days
Average Age to First Calving	25 .6 months	25.5 months	+0.4%	21—24 mo.
Average Days to First Service	91 Days	90 Days	+1.1%	< 80 Days
Average Cull Rate (% left herd)	32%	33%	-3.9%	20—35%
Average Pregnancy Rate	18.08%	18.81%	+4.0%	> 20%
To view complete scorecard, visit:	www.centerfordairyexcellence.org			

The Center for Dairy Excellence encourages producers to use this scorecard to compare their own herd’s performance against the state averages and target levels identified in the scorecard. Your herd’s data can be found on your DHI 202 Herd Report that accompanies your monthly test reports.

Increasing daily milk output per cow is the most significant way to strengthen a farm’s bottom line. In fact, the difference between 60 and 80 pounds per cow per day could result in \$40,000 additional income per year. Each performance area listed on this scorecard influences a herd’s ability to maximize milk production.

VIEW SCORECARD ONLINE:

You can learn more about trends in Pennsylvania’s dairy industry by viewing the complete Pennsylvania Dairy Industry Performance Scorecard online. The scorecard shows how the trends have changed over the past 25 months.

Visit the center’s Web site at www.centerfordairyexcellence.org and click on the “Scorecard” icon on the bottom right.