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DairyEXCELLENCE

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NEW PODCAST EPISODE FEATURES MENTAL HEALTH CONVERSATION WITH PA DAIRY FARMER

Chuck Carr Shared Mental Health Journey in Podcast During Mental Health Awareness Month

Harrisburg, Pa. – In the most recent episode of the Center for Dairy Excellence’s [“Cow-Side Conversations” podcast](#), Chuck Carr, a dairy farmer and author from Lone Oak Farm in Western Pennsylvania, shared his journey with mental health after a barn fire and traumatic brain injury. With May being Mental Health Awareness Month, Carr described his suggestions and personal experiences with mental health challenges that are unique to dairy farmers.

Carr began the podcast by describing a barn fire that happened in 2008 and sharing how difficult this type of unexpected tragedy can be for dairy farmers.

“I looked at the barn, I looked at all the work, I looked at all the heritage that had been going on for so many years, and it looked like a skeleton in the midst of the fire. You can’t prepare yourself to look at your barn on fire,” he shared in the podcast. “Tragedy and unexpected hardships are never something you brace yourself for. Farmers do everything themselves ... so when that kind of tragedy happens, farmers just aren’t quite sure what to do or who to turn to. We’re so used to being self-reliant.”

Carr credited the farming community and their neighbors for helping his family during such a challenging time. He went on to describe a near fatal accident that occurred in 2018 when he found himself between a gate and an oncoming skidloader. Carr fractured his skull in two places and was left with a traumatic brain injury that sent him on a long road to recovery, both physically and mentally.

“It was a rough ride and a tragedy nobody expected. Part of what made it hard was that it happened on our own farm,” he said. “Family members had to process that and heal. The ‘what-ifs’ and ‘I should have’ run through your mind. In the blink of an eye, it all happened and that’s the way accidents happen.”

As Carr recovered from his traumatic brain injury, he described feeling a deep sense of isolation. When he was eventually able to read again, the simple act of reading and writing transformed his outlook and helped him find strategies for navigating his depression. In the podcast, Carr described the moment he decided to seize the opportunity and write his first book, *All That the Locusts Have Eaten*.

“I went from being somebody who was irrelevant and just a lump sitting there to somebody who said, ‘I can still do something with my life. I can still contribute. I can still make a mark and speak my voice,’” he said. “Nobody is ever going to talk you out of a depressive hole. You need to have that light bulb go off on your own. My epiphany was realizing that even after my accident, I could still make a difference in somebody else’s life.”

During the podcast, Chuck shared several strategies he used to navigate his mental health journey:

- **Avoid getting stuck in the past.** “Don’t reach back into the things you can’t do. So many times we get hung up, stuck in the past, or angry about things that have been taken away from us. But I started to see things differently. I started to see a new bucket, and I was going to fill it with the things I could still do. I started to see a thousand opportunities.”
- **Get down in the trenches with your family and neighbors.** “For the friend or neighbor who is trying to help and says ‘You shouldn’t think like that,’ that could send someone who’s depressed further down into the hole. I’ve really learned that even though it can be tremendously hard, rolling up your sleeves and getting down into the trench that person facing depression is in [really helps]. Someone who isn’t afraid to meet the person eye to eye, heart to heart—that’s the biggest thing you can do.”
- **Don’t let pride stop you from asking for help.** “A farmer’s ‘everything’ is truly dependent on what they do. They milk the cows, they feed the cows, they grow the food for the cows, they wire the lights, and they plumb the water. When something needs fixed, they fix it. But when depression hits someone, especially a farmer, it’s not something they can fix themselves. There is a healthy amount of pride in everything a farmer does, but it’s also the limiting factor as to why they won’t reach out when things go sour. You’re not going to get help unless you lower your walls down to let somebody in.”
- **Work with counselors who are uniquely qualified to help you.** “I would highly suggest someone in my shoes, or another person who is battling depression, to find a counselor who is uniquely qualified. For me, mine was uniquely qualified in traumatic brain injuries. She gave me strategies to learn how to remember, strategies for having positive and quality time with our kids, and strategies for me to have a conversation with my wife about something that needs addressed.”
- **Find hope in the hopeless.** “[In my book] I tried to get others to see that, even as awful as my life was, your life can turn around. Even when locusts come and strip the plant clean, new growth can come up from the roots and the ashes. Your life is not done yet. The sun is going to shine again. There is always hope even in the midst of a situation that looks hopeless.”
- **Look for the positives and use them as opportunities.** “There is always something positive if you’re willing to look deep enough and far enough. For me, I’m hurt. I can’t drive a tractor and I can’t do the things I used to, but I’m helping people way more now than I used to. You might have a barn fire, but build the barn back better than it was. Make it modern and usable. Find the light in the situation that can turn things around, and use it as an opportunity.”
- **Be kind.** “Acts of kindness transform people. When you don’t have the words or the know-how, you can still do something nice for somebody and meet them where they are. That could be the defining moment that speaks just enough to get that person to see things differently.”
- **Find simple pleasures to bolster your spirits.** “I love to drive up and look at the countryside that I farmed for so many years. Right now, the corn is getting in the ground in one field and the wheat is growing in another. You see the sky change every day. I like to get out and see the beauty around me.”

To listen to the full podcast interview, visit www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/podcast. The podcast is also available on [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), and [Amazon Music](#). With a new episode released each month, Carr’s interview is the seventh in the series. The podcast was designed to share real-time farmer insight, tricks of the trade, and inspiring stories from dairies across Pennsylvania.

For more mental health resources, visit www.centerfordairyexcellence.org/stress-wellness-resources. Dairy farmers can access a list of hotlines, articles from psychologists who have experience working with farmers, and a recording of a mental health conversation between two dairy farmers.

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The Center for Dairy Excellence is a non-profit organization initiated by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture in 2004. Bringing together people from more than 40 different dairy organizations in Pennsylvania, the Center's mission is to enhance the profitability of the dairy industry by empowering people, creating partnerships, and increasing the availability and use of resources. Learn more at centerfordairyexcellence.org.

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