



Working Together on Mental Health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 26, 2022

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A commentary by Secretary Randy Romanski of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP)

MADISON, Wis. – Throughout May Mental Health Month, DATCP has been highlighting the importance of taking care of yourself. Mental health is central to our overall health, and ignoring mental health needs can impact our quality of life – similar to how ignoring a broken leg can impact our ability to sit or walk comfortably. The past few years have added new and unique stress to everyone’s already-full plate.

At DATCP, our team works to ensure we educate as we regulate so consumers can have confidence in their food and fuel, businesses have access to a fair marketplace, and the people we interact with on a daily basis feel supported. Since the mid-1980s, thousands of farm families have turned to DATCP’s [Wisconsin Farm Center](#) for financial and business consultations, succession planning, veteran farmer assistance, and the Farmer Wellness Program. The Wisconsin Farm Center is just one tool that DATCP uses to support Wisconsinites, but it’s crucial.

Since Governor Evers took office, we have built more effective and impactful relationships with mental health and community partners, have consistently issued more mental health vouchers to farmers, and have seen an increase in the amount of mental health vouchers redeemed by farmers. DATCP has also implemented a 24/7 Wisconsin Farmer Wellness Hotline so that farmers struggling with suicidal thoughts, depression, anxiety, or other issues can obtain assistance at any hour.

In 2020, the [Veterinary Professional Assistance Program](#) (VPAP) was created by the [Veterinarian Examining Board](#) (VEB) and [Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association](#), providing 24/7 confidential services to veterinarians. The VEB assumes the costs for the VPAP program and supports veterinarians who may not be able to afford access to care. Through the work of the VEB, VPAP, Wisconsin Farm Center, and DATCP field staff, we are able to support the agriculture community and those who may need support.

Governor Evers’ recent budget allocated additional funding for the farmer mental health voucher program at the Wisconsin Farm Center, allowing free and reduced counselling sessions to those who otherwise wouldn’t be able to access this lifesaving and affirming healthcare. DATCP has also been fortunate to receive federal funding, including funds from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), to help reduce the stigma of seeking assistance and increase access to mental health resources. Although our consistent work to support those in need is showing positive results, we can’t stop here.

The Wisconsin Farm Center will continue to serve farmers as long as there is capacity to do so, and state funding makes that much more accessible to farmers from all backgrounds and financial status. As we enter the state budget session next year, we look forward to continue working with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, stakeholders, and legislators to support a long term investment in farmer mental health programming. Together, we can ensure our communities are welcoming, stigma-free, and supportive to those in need.

If you or someone you know is experiencing anxiety, chronic stress, or depression, have them reach out to DATCP’s 24/7 Wisconsin Farmer Wellness Helpline at (888) 901-2558 or the VPAP at (866)440-6556. If you or someone you know is experiencing suicidal thoughts, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1 (800) 273-8255.

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