

Mental Health in Canadian Farmers: Cultivating Wellness for a Strong Future

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markets

work load

regulations

rarely off-farm

need to be tough

social isolation

financial burdens

succession planning

family run business

supply management

public scrutiny

animal disease

stigma

outbreaks

weather

activism

National Survey of Farmer Mental Health*

- Online survey
- September 2015 – February 2016
- > 1100 farmers, all commodities, across Canada
- Validated, standardized, psychometric scales

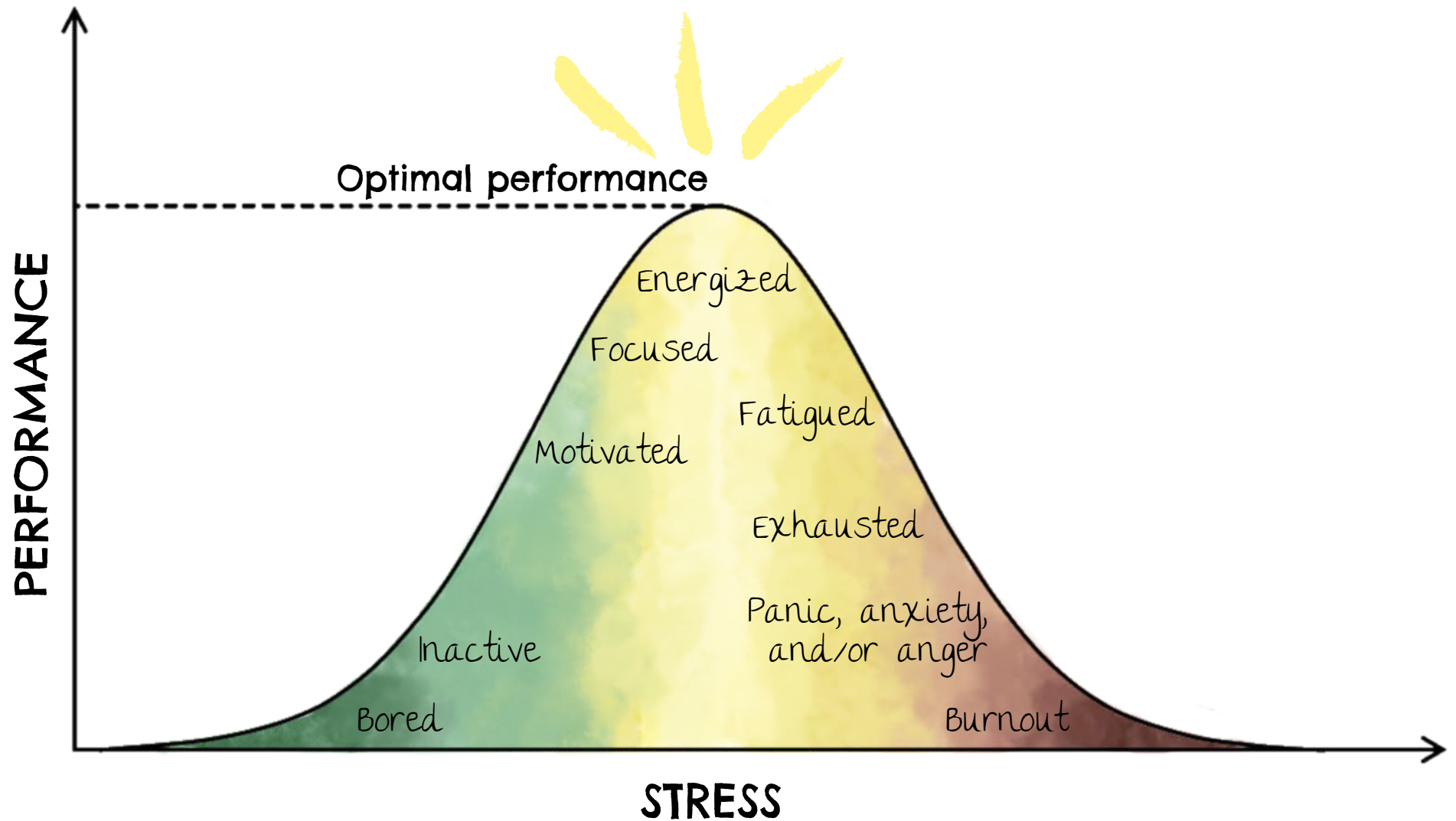
*Jones-Bitton et al., University of Guelph

We have a problem.

High Stress: 45%

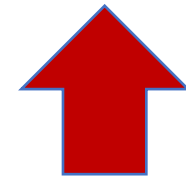
Survey of >1100 Canadian producers, September 2015 to February 2016

Stress \neq Badge of Honour

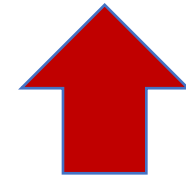


Factors Associated with Stress

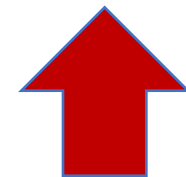
Financial stress



Lack of family support

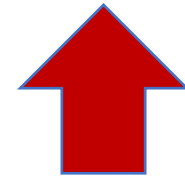


Lack of industry support

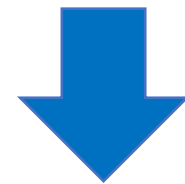


Factors Associated with Stress

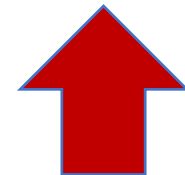
Farming pigs



Resilience



Anxiety and Depression



We have a problem.

Anxiety: 58%

- 25% 'mild'
- 25% 'moderate'
- 8% 'severe'

Depression: 35%

- 20% 'mild'
- 12% 'moderate'
- 3% 'severe'

And, there's burnout

Low professional efficacy:
18%

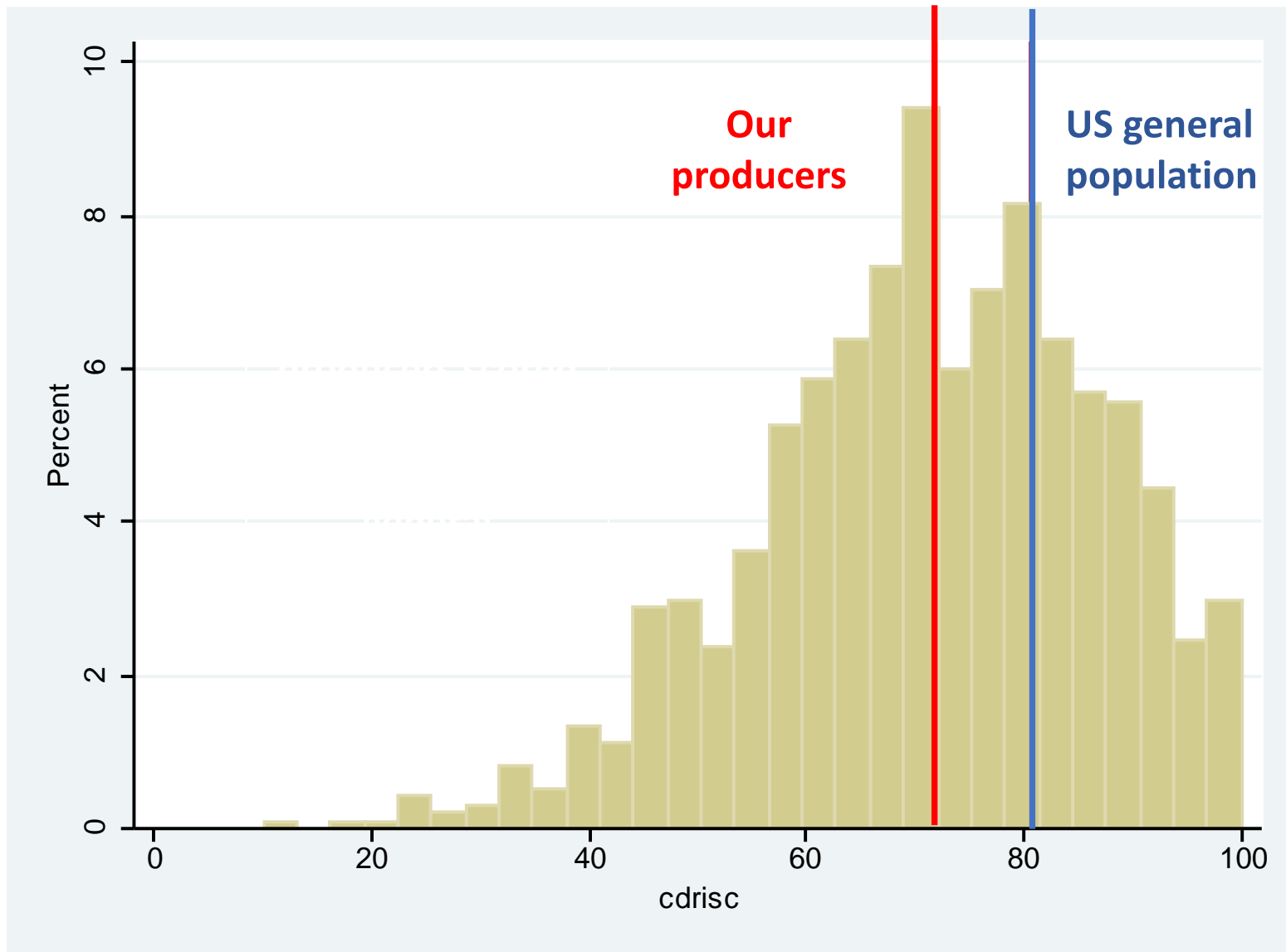
High emotional
exhaustion: 38%

High cynicism: 43%

What if there were skills that could help?

Resilience = a state of being that promotes wellness and decreases the impact of stress

But, not as resilient as we may think



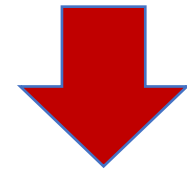
Survey of >1100 Canadian producers, September 2015 to February 2016

Factors Associated with Resilience

Self-rated health



Depression



Support of friends



Age



Survey of >1100 Canadian producers, September 2015 to February 2016

We need to increase resilience.

"I'm pulled in multiple directions and unable to maintain work-life balance, being exhausted but unable to take a break ."

"The main stress in my life... feeling ignored and marginalized by our government and our society."

"What makes me the most upset is I have everything I dreamed of - love, family and a farm - and all I feel is overwhelmed, out of control and sad."

"[I'm] destroying myself to make sure others are cared for."

"I just try to keep plugging along until death."

"It is a wonder we don't off ourselves more often."

So, we have a problem in Canadian ag.

- Many farmers are **struggling** in terms of their mental health
- High occupational stresses, most beyond their control
- Low resilience → more susceptible to the effects of chronic stress:
 - Physical illness, poor quality of life, depression, anxiety, suicide...

Potential Fallout?

- We don't know much about the specific impacts of poor mental health in farming (yet)...
- Based on the research in other occupations, we can expect negative impacts on:
 - Farmers
 - Their families
 - Their animals (farmer & animal wellbeing linked)
 - Production & profit
 - Retention in farming

There's some good news

76% said mental health professional = helpful

67% would seek professional help

63% said getting help ≠ weak

More good news...

- Resilience is a skill that **can be learned**
- **Practical** wellness strategies can be adopted

We need to help each other build strategies for wellness.

What is wellness anyway?

- Being aware of ourselves as “whole people”
- Satisfying work and play
- Relationships that give joy
- Healthy body
- Healthy living environment
- Happiness
- Managing problems and stress
- Purpose in life

The kicker...

- Wellness is:

**“a conscious, deliberate process
that requires being aware of and making
choices**

for a more satisfying lifestyle”

- Swarbrick, 2006

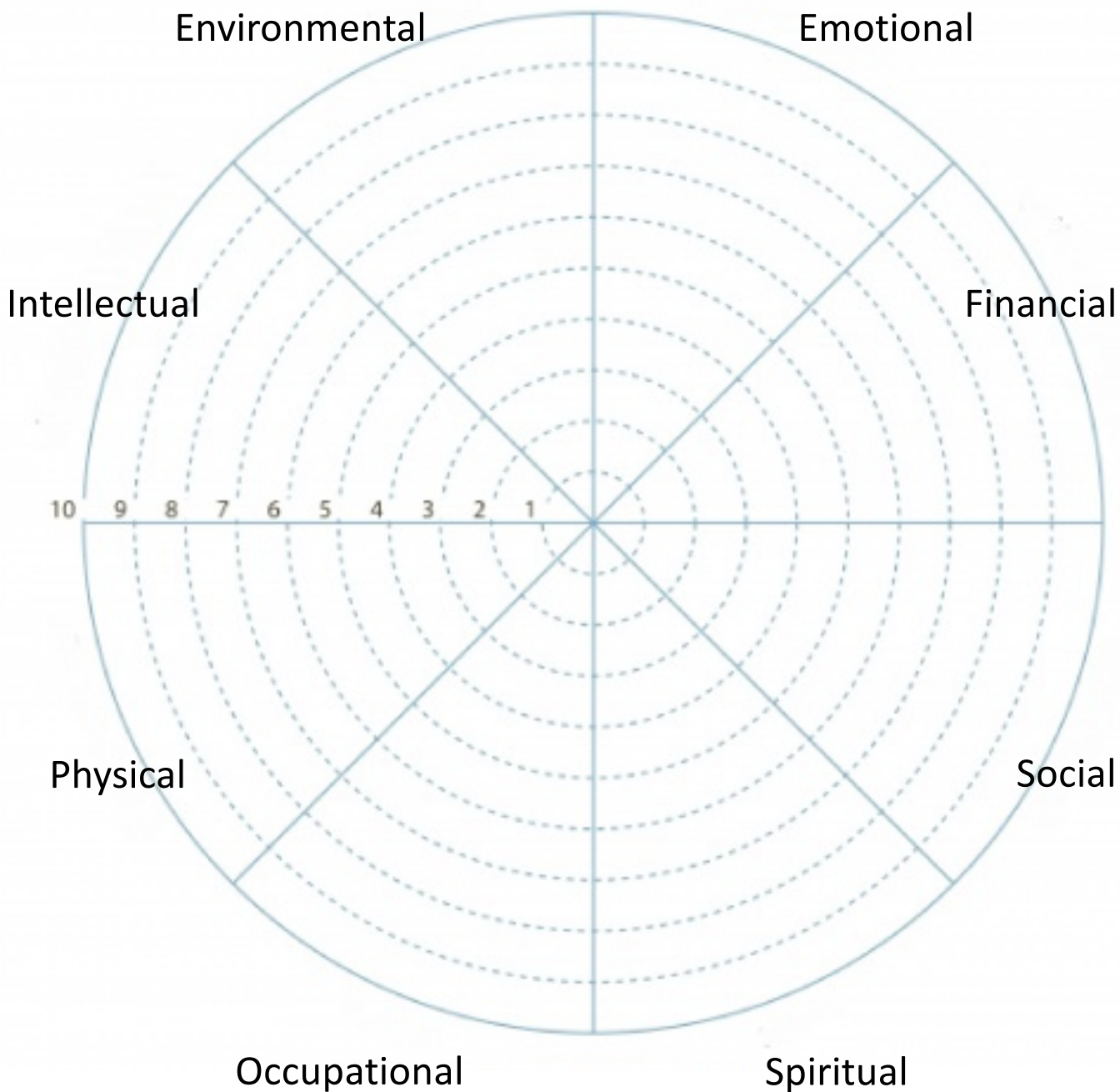
- i.e. It is up to us. No one else.
- It requires some work.

Who cares about wellness? What's the point?

- Better health
- Better productivity & profitability
- Less absenteeism
- Better job retention / lower turnover
- Higher life satisfaction

A model: 8 Dimensions of Wellness





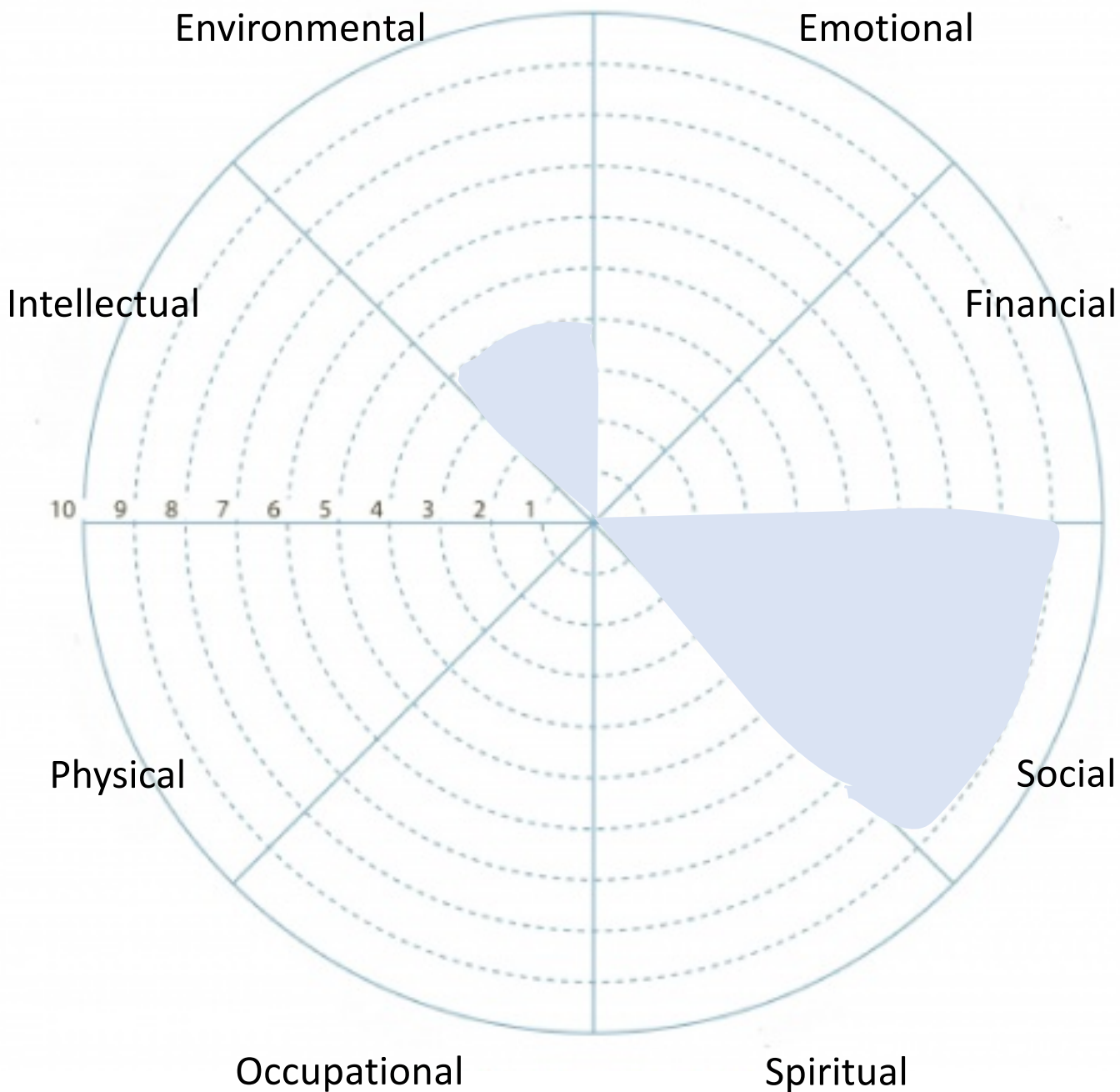
What is your level of satisfaction with each of the 8 dimensions of wellness in your life?

1 = Low

5 = Moderate

10 = Very High

Colour in each segment of the wheel according to your level of satisfaction for that wellness dimension



What is your level of satisfaction with each of the 8 dimensions of wellness in your life?

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Colour in each segment of the wheel according to your level of satisfaction for that wellness dimension

1. Emotional Wellness

- Awareness and expression of feelings
 - Coping skills
 - Self-esteem / self-acceptance
- Help others
 - Journaling
 - Gratitude
 - Friends, loved ones, counsellors

2. Environmental Wellness

- Satisfaction with one's surroundings
- Pleasant environments:
 - Micro- (where we live and work)
 - Macro- (communities, country, planet)
- Enjoyable work or home space
- "Green" activities

3. Financial Wellness

- Can meet basic needs
- Feel a sense of control and knowledge over financial situation

- Budgeting
- Tracking spending
- Needs vs. Wants vs. Impulses
- Financial advisors

4. Intellectual Wellness

- Stimulating the mind
- Learning, applying learning, sharing learning
- Creative mental activities; curiosity; novelty

- Hobbies
- Taking a class
- Reading / podcasts
- New recipes
- Travel

5. Occupational Wellness

- Sense of meaning and purpose through work (paid or unpaid)
- Personal enrichment, satisfaction, pleasure in life
- Good “fit” between the individual and the job

- Work
- Volunteer

6. Physical Wellness

- Healthy body
- Good nutrition
- Exercise
- Sleep
- Smoking / alcohol / drugs
- Appropriate health care

Psst... a lot of these relate to our lifestyle choices

- More good choices in diet
- Sleep
- Turning off electronics
- Walking

7. Spiritual Wellness

- Having meaning and purpose in life
- Sense of balance and peace

- Church or community groups
- Prayer, meditation, or reflection
- Nature

8. Social Wellness

- Connection with friends, family, community
- Ability to give and receive support from others
- Sense of belonging

- Getting off the farm!
- Time with friends or family
- Sports or clubs
- Community events
- Volunteering

Wellness is a
conscious, deliberate process
that requires
being aware of and making
choices for
a more satisfying lifestyle.

*" Riiiiight, Andria...
So how do I do all that?!"*

- It's not about tackling it all at once! Or even all domains all at once!
- Small changes add up
- **Becomes self-fulfilling:** start to feel better → more inclined to do a bit more → feel better → do a bit more...

What choices can you make that are **realistic** for your life? What choices can you talk to other farmers about?

EMOTIONAL
Coping effectively with life and
creating satisfying relationships.

FINANCIAL
Satisfaction with current and
future financial situations.

ENVIRONMENTAL
Good health by occupying pleasant,
stimulating environments that
support well-being.

SOCIAL
Developing a sense of
connection, belonging, and a
well-developed support system.

INTELLECTUAL
Recognizing creative abilities
and finding ways to expand
knowledge and skills.

SPIRITUAL
Expanding our sense of
purpose and meaning in life.

PHYSICAL
Recognizing the need
for physical activity, diet,
sleep, and nutrition.

OCCUPATIONAL
Personal satisfaction and enrichment
derived from one's work.



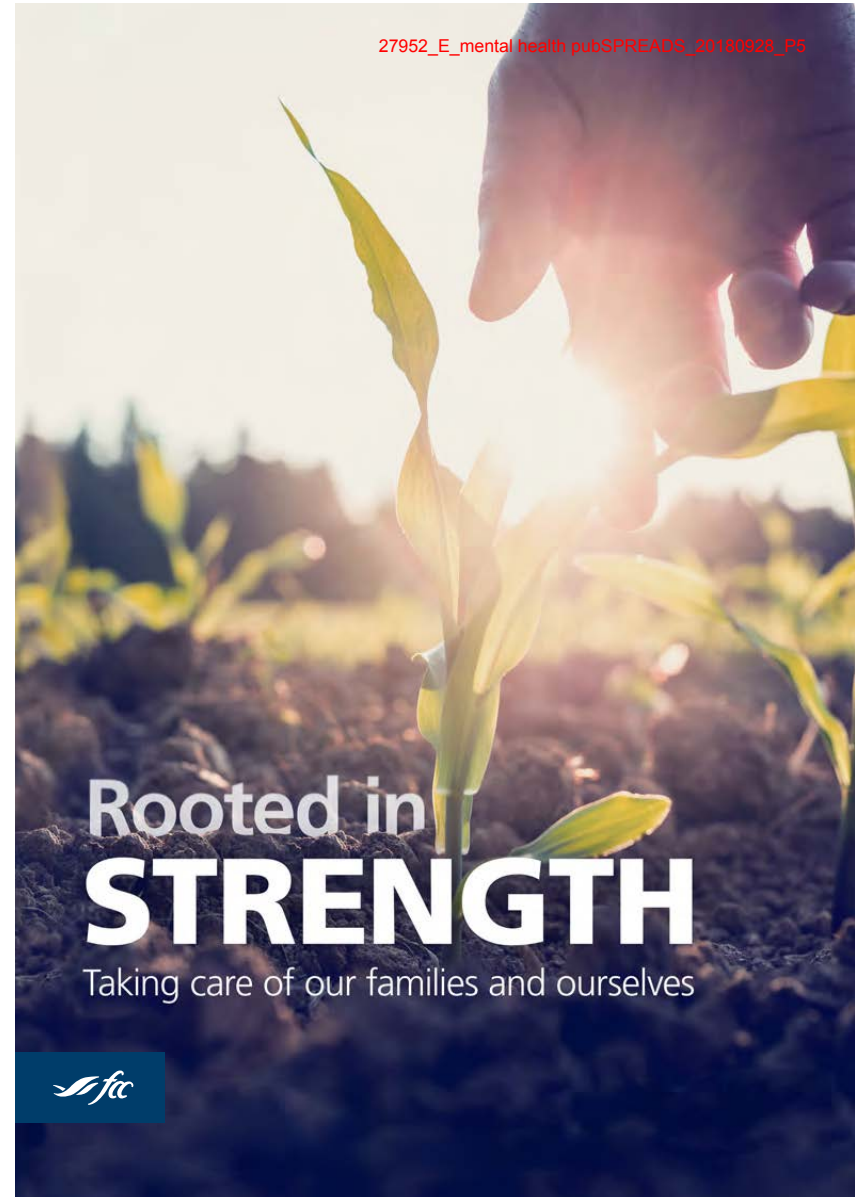
Breakout time!

- In small groups:
- Jot down 1-2 ideas for **realistic, practical activities** for each of the 8 wellness dimensions
 - i.e. stuff you (+/or farmers) are *actually likely* to do!

Why? Because wellness means:

- Better productivity
- Better health
- Better ability to cope with stress (& thrive!)
- More enjoyable life

Other resources for you





Resources.

Check below for Resources, Crisis Lines and
Websites across Canada.

VOIR EN FRANÇAIS

**The
Do More
Agriculture
Foundation**

www.domore.ag/resources

What are we doing for farmer
mental health
at the University of Guelph?

1. Scoping Review & Environmental Scan

Agriculture-specific:

- Mental health research
- Mental health supports and services
- Anticipated release: Winter 2019



Briana Hagen, PhD Candidate
(Jones-Bitton Lab, University of Guelph)

2. Lived Experience

- Farmers, vets, industry, government
- Their lived experience of mental health – during times of calm, and times of crisis
- Help-seeking
- Ideas for (good) mental health programming
- 75 interviews!

3. Mental Health Literacy Program

- Issues with low mental health literacy in agriculture
- Amazing team of stakeholders
- We developed an agriculture-specific mental health literacy program
- 4-hour version being piloted
- Expect release in summer 2019



4. Advocacy & Lobbying

- We need a **national strategy** for farmer mental health in Canada
- We need to provide farmers with **better access** to support
- We need more **research** and development of evidence-informed **training programs** for agriculture
 - Build resilience, help farmers thrive

Phase 2 Funding



ONTARIO PORK



OntarioSheep
FARMERS



Ontario Federation of Agriculture



Summary

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- Mental health and wellbeing is an issue in agriculture
- Resilience helps, and it can be learned
- Wellness can be strengthened,
 - But you do have to work it!
 - 8 Dimensions of Wellness is a tool that can help
- We need to advocate for farmer mental health and help each other build strategies for wellness