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Family Living Education

Agriculture and Marketing Programs

**COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE ! MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY**

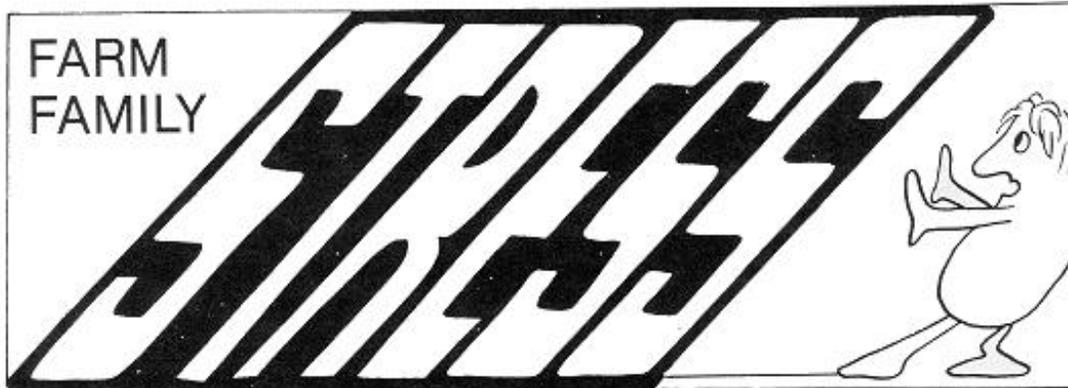


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## Introduction

Stress is hardly a new discovery. The human response to feeling threatened has been with us since prehistoric time and visions of dinosaurs chasing cave dwellers. Stress to the pioneer farmer hinged primarily on cooperating weather, physical strength and wilderness survival. Stress felt today is also in response to perceived threat, but the threats have multiplied and intensified significantly. The complexity of the agricultural industry today has little comparison with years passed. The combined physical and mental pressures of technological development and economic uncertainty farm families face necessitates the ability to meet new challenges through increasing personal and professional skill.

Farm families are no more immune to the stresses and changes of living in today's world than other families. You experience many similar stresses, yet at the same time distinctly different challenges by virtue of the interaction between farm and family life.

Though change is a constant life process, it is not always readily acceptable. As change can be a significant source of stress, it can also become an effective resource in managing its effect on our lives.

Stress can become a disruptive force. It may lead to ineffective management and operational decisions, health complications, lowered productivity, dissatisfaction in personal and family relationships.

Farm Family Stress will help you develop an increased awareness of stress in your lives, how it affects family relationships and how it affects the farm operation. You will become familiar with management approaches which can improve your ability to effectively handle stress.

The following materials are not meant to be all inclusive. Examples, ideas and suggestions are to stimulate your thinking, to apply your own experiences to the basic concepts of stress. We know what stress is. We realize everyone experiences it. There is potential danger in simply knowing and accepting. There is a distinct difference between knowing and accepting and doing something about it. The key to managing stress and our lives more effectively is to personalize our awareness—the causes, symptoms, impact and means of handling the stress we experience. Only then can we or will we begin to manage and live our lives differently.

# Stress in Agriculture

Though farming has always required the ability to deal with unknowns, the differences from past to present are vast in comparison.

Farming, the agricultural industry, has been influenced over the years by overt and underlying change. In moving from the relatively small owner/operator farm we see progressively complex, highly mechanized operations. Today's farms are multifaceted business enterprises necessitating well-developed intellectual, managerial and technological skill.

Many of the independently made choices and decisions open to the farmer have been removed through governmental intervention, replaced with a dependence on national and international determinants. Instead of plans for expansion we look to cost cutting measures, reductions in overall production to deal with the uncertainties of economic times.

Today's unknowns may seem far less controllable than our past, becoming further removed from the individual's influence. These sources of pressure are increasingly demanding and diverse in degree.

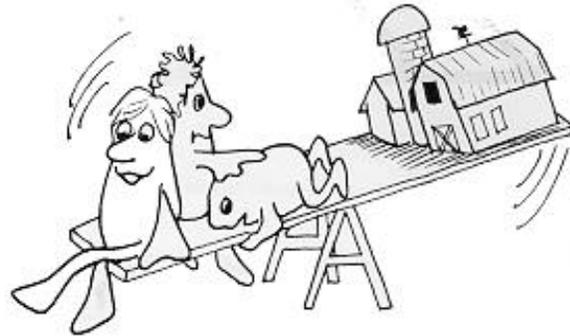
The stereotypical sense of the country as a pressure free and slow paced way of life is a long gone illusion. As a part of the constantly changing industry of agriculture, farm families must become increasingly aware of the impact and resultant stress these changes have on the farm and the family.

## Your Family AND Your Farm

In addition to facing many of the same problems other families face-budgeting, housing, child care -farm families experience distinctly unique challenges. Farming as a business cannot be completely separated from farming as a lifestyle. The farm exists as a part of the farm family, because of the family. The family lives and is sustained through operation of the farm.

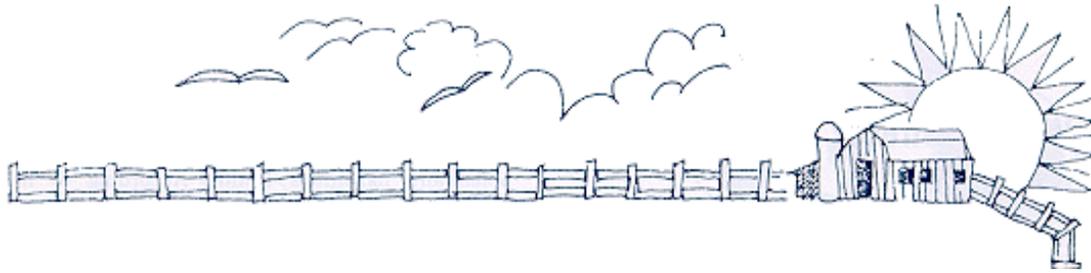
Farming as a business and occupation directly affects the relationship and lifestyle of its family members. Time commitments, financial involvements, shared responsibilities and personal investment ... all have an impact on family life.

FAMILY VS FARM



When the market price for corn is down, but you must sell in order to fulfill financial obligations; when barn or equipment maintenance comes before needed home insulation; when you must be in the field rather than attend your child's honor banquet or the child is there with you instead of at the banquet; when you must stop in the middle of waxing the floor to run for a part-the farm affects family and personal life in many ways.

Family relationships, in turn, influence farm operations and responsibilities. Family member interaction- how decisions are handled, problems solved, goals set which are mutually satisfying to family and business-all necessitate open communication channels and family member cooperation. Power struggles in family partnerships disrupt operational direction and overall effectiveness. Division of time between family and business may create pressure which affects work and strains family well being. Off-farm employment shifts on-farm role responsibilities.



## **Farm Family Stress**

FINANCIAL BURDEN - HIGH DEBT LOAD

CASH FLOW UNCERTAINTY

FLUCTUATING MARKETS

INFLATIONARY OPERATING AND FAMILY LIVING COSTS

TAXATION

GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES AND CONTROLS

THE 'PILE-UPS' - MACHINERY BREAKDOWN; UNCOOPERATIVE WEATHER; DISEASE;

A 'BAD' DAY WHEN NOTHING SEEMED TO GO WELL

FATIGUE - LONG HOURS OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL LABOR COMBINED WITH  
IMPROPER REST, EATING HABITS, EXERCISE

DIVISION OF TIME - TIME FOR FAMILY AND FARM

WORKING AND LIVING TOGETHER

POWER CONTROLS IN FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

COMMUNICATION RELATED TENSION:

- RESULTING IN POORLY MADE OR CONFLICTING DECISIONS
- ALIENATION OF FAMILY MEMBERS
- RESENTMENT OF FARM BY SPOUSE OR CHILDREN
- POSSIBLE MISUNDERSTANDINGS BETWEEN IN-LAWS AND NON-FARM DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AND/OR SON-IN-LAW
- LACK OF "WORKING TOGETHER" RATHER THAN "AGAINST EACH OTHER"
- OVERALL DECREASED FARM PRODUCTIVITY
- DISRUPTION OF FAMILY HARMONY

SEPARATION OF INDIVIDUAL LIVES - PRIVACY

ATTITUDE - IS FARMING WORTHWHILE?

FARM AND FAMILY GOALS - MUTUALLY WORKING IN THE SAME DIRECTION

OFF FARM EMPLOYMENT - SHARING RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROLES

# Understanding Stress

## What Is Stress?

Stress is our body's physical and psychological response to anything we perceive as threatening. This threat may be viewed as a result of life's demands, pleasant or unpleasant, and our lack of resources to meet them.

When threatened, our body creates extra energy to protect" itself. This additional energy cannot be destroyed. If not utilized, it creates an imbalance within our system. Somehow the energy must be channeled into responses to regain a balance.

Stress is a natural part of our lives. We thrive on certain amounts, yet decrease our level of effectiveness with too much or too little. We do not want to eliminate stress from our lives-we need it. Without some stress we would lose our energy for living. Ideally, we look for our individual optimal level of stress, the balance at which we are most motivated.

## Why A Concern For Stress?

### HEALTH

Medical research estimates as high as 90% of today's illness and disease is stress related.



Stress can interfere with our physical functioning and bodily processes. It can kill, under some circumstances. High blood pressure, cardiovascular and heart disease have been linked to stress factors. Other afflictions include ulcers, allergies, colitis, asthma and migraine headaches.

Most health professionals agree stress can be a contributing factor in making existing medical problems worse relative to patient symptoms and recovery.

Environmental and societal pressures-our competitive, success oriented way of life-may lead us to potentially hazardous health. According to the United States Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia: -83% of all deaths for adults between the ages of 21 and 65 are related to lifestyle."

Unmanaged stress is an increasing characteristic of many Americans today.

As farmers, especially during peak activity periods do you: Rest adequately? Eat well-balanced meals? Take relief breaks? Rebuild energy resources with time off the tractor or out of the barn?

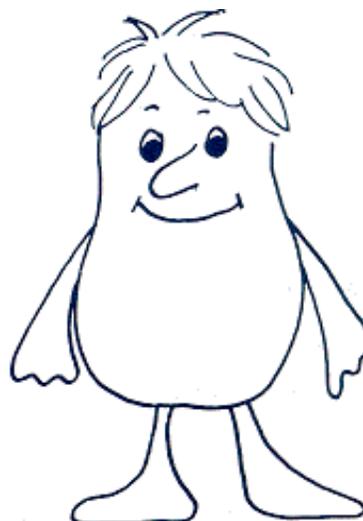
Health is often taken for granted until it is lost. Preventative health care can make a difference.

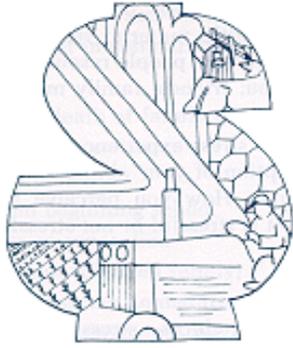
## LIFE SATISFACTION

Excessive stress in our lives interferes with our interpersonal relationships at home, while working and socially. It can make us exert most of our efforts toward not being unhappy rather than in being happy. Stress can waste our vitality and deplete personal energy resources which could be used for enjoyment. We become negatively influenced in our attitudes and feelings about ourselves more easily.

Feeling stressed is uncomfortable, sometimes painful. It is not self-exclusive, it affects the lives of those around us.

The question seems to be, "Is this really worth it?"





FEAR



**PRODUCTIVITY**

Stress can be an energy killer, an immobilizer. In affecting our cognitive and emotional functioning, stress influences:

- ability to make clear, effective decisions
- fatigue
- incidence of accidents
- illness, reducing ability to work
- disruption of interpersonal relationships which strain work relations and home life
- efficient use of time
- use of personal energy
- ability to complete tasks

**Physical Fears**

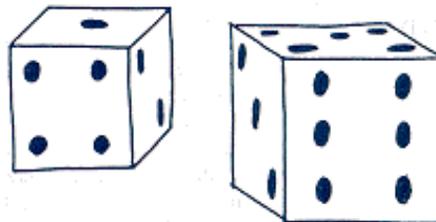
- working with dangerous machinery
- exposure to toxic chemicals
- exposure to extreme environmental con
- contact with diseased livestock

**Psychological Fears**

- fear of failure
- not being able to get the crops in
- inability to manage debts
- loss of love
- loss of acceptance or respect
- children will not want the farm



THE GAMBLE



**Causes Of Stress**

The significant factors which cause stress are referred to as stressors. Each of us differs in what we find stressful or potentially stressful. What for one farmer may seem a catastrophic event, for another may be a minor setback.

**UNCERTAINTY**

Since the first seed was sewn, farming has involved many risks "The Gamble" you make your most logical and informed predictions but you just won't know what the market price will land come January until January.

Life is filled with uncertainties, with unpredictable It is discomfoting not to know what is going to happen

and particularly if your control of the situation is removed.

- government policies and controls
- weather
- market fluctuations
- disease outbreak
- interest rates
- mechanical breakdown
- accidents

Uncertainty may cause feelings of an internal loss of control. External influences or uncontrollables can lessen a person's internal locus of control by causing a person to feel he/she cannot affect the outcome.



The "PILE-UP" effect--a day when everything seems to go wrong or it all hits at once, will cause us to experience higher degrees of stress.

## ATTITUDES

A positive or negative orientation influences a person's reaction to stressful situations. For example, if you feel farming is worthwhile, you may see some of the problems you encounter as a challenge. Seen as pluses, the problem or potential problem becomes a motivation. However, if you resent your situation or feel "stuck" on the farm, similar experiences create stress, a higher degree of stress which instead of motivates, frustrates the individual.

## PERCEPTIONS

Past experiences and the resources you feel you have available to meet life's demands will affect the degrees of stress you may experience today.

### Perception of:

**Self-Your** sense of competency; self-esteem; value system; interests; needs

**Resources**-Personal skills: past experience in

handling stress; health; material resources: finances; equipment; storage; people resources: others who can assist you; friends; family members; professionals

The degree of stress experienced will be affected by your perception of your ability to meet the particular demands. How you perceive the situation determines if it is stressful or not stressful.

## CHANGE

All change produces stress-positive, happy changes and negative or unhappy changes. Marriage is a happy change which is also a period in the couple's lives when adjustment is necessary. For some, this adjustment can be stressful. A vacation while thought to be time for relaxation may also be stressful: completing arrangements for farm chores; preparing to go; perhaps trying to put two weeks of visiting and activity into one.

The negative changes are not as difficult for us to see as stress producing. These are situations we don't like or don't want to occur: children leaving the farm for other occupations; economic recession causing financial crisis; loss of a valuable animal.

Change demands our adjustment to the particular situation whether we desire the change or not. Developmental changes which we are able to plan for -pregnancy, children, growing up, adult aging processes-we know they're coming yet adjustments may be stressful none-the-less.

## Work/Business

- Operational changes due to technological advancement or inefficiency (breakdown)
- Major change in responsibility or work load due to shift in partnership
- Expansion or reduction in production
- Increasing skills to increase efficiency
- Market fluctuations affecting commodity prices
- Government policies
- Inflationary operating costs

## Personal

- Illness or injury
- Geographic relocation
- Personal achievement or disappointment
- Vacation
- Retirement

## Social

- Illness or death of close friend
- Begin or end formal education

- Change in social activities
- Involvement in community service

### **Family**

- Illness or death of family member(s)
- Marriage
- Birth of child
- Children beginning school
- Divorce or separation
- Remarriage (blended family)
- Children leaving home/farm
- Off-farm employment (role changes)

### **Financial**

- Major change in financial state
- Major purchase (home, equipment, land)
- Additional family expenses (education, insurance, illness)

**What changes have you and family members experienced in the past several years which have affected:**

#### **Family Relationships?**

Positive

Negative

#### **Farm Operation?**

Positive

Negative

### **STRESS UNDERLOAD**

A certain degree of stress is essential to our wellbeing. The absence of stress is stressful in itself.

Underload OF hypostress occurs when there are not enough demands in our lives, our resources outnumber our use for them. We may feel bored, dull and listless when experiencing underload. An injury may prevent you from being active; you're shut indoors. A parent retires having no hobbies or interests to fill now inactive days.



### **STRESS OVERLOAD**

Too much stress can disrupt our lives as much as an absence of stress. Overload or hyperstress is caused when our available resources fail to meet current demands.

When overwhelmed by stress, the anxious feelings an individual experiences can become immobilizing. There seems to be too much stress to handle, it becomes a disruptive presence.

### **BALANCE**

Again, the optimal level of stress is a delicate "balance" of underload and overload for maximal energy and productivity.

### **Group Exercise**

1 . Divide into small groups of 3-5.

2. Identify and discuss examples of causes of stress in the following:

- |                                    |               |
|------------------------------------|---------------|
| Fear                               | Overload      |
| Uncertainty                        | Underload     |
| Attitudes                          | Optimal Level |
| Perceptions                        |               |
| Change (discuss previous exercise) |               |

# Stress Symptoms

Loss of hair

Dry mouth

Grind Teeth

Lump in throat

Skin rashes

Nail biting

Others \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Headaches

Dizziness

Face feels hot, flushed

Appetite loss

Appetite increase

Neck, shoulders tight, ache

Heart beats faster

Heartburn

Backache, pain

Upset stomach

Cramps

Diarrhea

Increased urination/defecation

Hands/feet cold, clammy

Trembling legs

Tapping feet/fingers

**PHYSICAL CHANGES**

# How Do We Respond To Stress?

We develop patterns of physical, behavioral and emotional responses which can indicate to us the presence of stress or the existence of a stressful situation. We may also be able to identify specific feelings or thoughts which seem to accompany stress we experience. These changes can be obvious to us and others, held at an unconscious level of awareness or ignored.

1. Beginning on page 10, with physical changes, complete all four sections of the "STRESS SYMPTOMS" checklist ending on page 11 (with "thoughts/feelings related to stress"). Place a - before symptoms which frequently occur, an X for occasional occurrence.
2. When completed, divide into small groups (3-5). Discuss your feelings.
3. Discuss as total group.

## Behavioral Changes:

- crying
- withdrawal from others
- aggression substance (drug, alcohol, food) misuse - agitation
- exhaustion
- restlessness
- disruptive
- sleep
- patterns
- other

## Emotional Changes:

- sadness
- guilt
- depression
- anxiety
- anger
- mood
- swings
- tension
- irritability
- fear
- fatigue
- other

## Thoughts/feelings related to stress:

- thinking I cannot cope
- feeling frightened for no known reason
- worrying about everything, big or small
- afraid something "bad" is going to happen
- feeling I am "falling apart"
- having the same worrisome thought over and over again
- negative self concept
- negative view of the world
- boredom
- unable to concentrate
- having nightmares
- helplessness
- hopelessness
- worthlessness
- indecisiveness
- inability to separate thoughts
- self-blame
- other



## Responses To Stress

We know stress produces excess energy, energy which we must somehow use. Our excess energy is usually channeled in one of the following ways (or in combination):

### AGGRESSION

Aggression is a relatively quick means of releasing excess energy:

**Physical**-Hitting someone or something; throwing; kicking; slamming a door; breaking an object.

**Verbal**-Scream; shout; speak loudly, defensively or with intent to belittle or hurt.

**Displaced**-Stored up aggression is released in a manner unrelated to its source.

## **WITHDRAWAL**

We withdraw to slow down the excess energy building up or in order to hide it from ourselves and others.

**Physical**-Withdraw from contact with others, particularly from the source of the stress.

**Psychological**-Escape mentally from the feelings of stress. Deny; fantasize; become depressed.

## **ADAPTATION**

There are three ways of adapting:

1. Change the situation

2. Redefine our involvement, interpretation

3. Utilize temporary respites

In adapting to the stress we are experiencing we take action to eliminate the source of stress, if possible. If it is not possible to change the situation, we attempt to redefine its effect to lessen our intensity of involvement. Lastly, if we cannot change or redefine the situation satisfactorily, we utilize temporary ways to cope such as physically or psychologically changing our state for a short time to reduce impact.

Our reactions or responses to stress are rarely hidden. We simply choose to ignore the signals visible in ourselves and those around us. Any changes, particularly abrupt or unusual changes in a person's emotional and/or physical behavior, should tell us stress in some form, is being experienced.

## **Managing Stress**

Dr. Jerry Robinson, author of "Stress and how to live with it," has developed a useful guide for managing stress:

### **Be Aware of Stress**

What do you find stressful? How do you respond? Can you identify stress feelings when experienced?

### **Admit Stress**

You will not do anything to help yourself until you admit you are experiencing stress.

### **Identify Stress Sources**

Why do I feel under stress? Where is the stress coming from? What is causing this stress?

### **Utilize Adaptive Approaches to Stress**

#### **Reduction**

You are aware of your strengths, skills and weaknesses. Your lifestyle reflects a facilitation of adaptive stress-reducing approaches.

Stress management can be two very different aspects of the same basic concept:

1. Temporary stress reduction which provides a short-term, "for-the-time-being" release for the individual.

2. Long-term change as a result of examining the underlying sources of stress. Meaningful change in overall perception or lifestyle.

Usually our search of temporary release brings us in contact with the underlying causes and issues producing our stress.



**It is integrally important that we realize the difference between temporary change or relief from stress and actual change overall.**

## **POSITIVE VERSUS NEGATIVE STRESS REDUCTION**

Negative means of coping may include the misuse of potentially harmful substances such as alcohol, prescribed drugs, illegal drugs, cigarettes or caffeine.

Misuse of any substance only masks the underlying causes and symptoms of stress. Thus, in the pretense of relieving stress, a person may in reality produce greater and longer lasting stress than warranted by the original situation.

The use of any coping mechanism in extreme or excess is potentially maladaptive. A person, for example, who found running a helpful way to

reduce stress, initially ran each morning before work. The running eventually increased from morning to any spare time the person had. Instead of a temporary release, this coping mechanism becomes a means of withdrawal. Instead of coping, it becomes an escape.

Excessive behavior disturbs our balance, our equilibrium. It can become an unhealthy means of escape. From workaholics to sportsaholics, eataholics to sleep aholics-the drive is consuming and habitual. We deplete our energy resources by denying ourselves variety-of-life experiences. The habit, addiction if you will, can become a major source of stress rather than a release.

## Self Assessment for Stress Reduction

List examples of ways you have used to reduce stress.

\_\_\_ Sometimes when needed

\_\_\_ Rarely

\_\_\_ I don't utilize coping mechanisms

\_\_\_ Only if convenient

\_\_\_ I have difficulty recognizing when I need to use them.

List any "negative" ways you may use in coping with stress.

\_\_\_ I know what helps me. I simply don't use them.

\_\_\_ I don't have any coping mechanisms which work for me.

\_\_\_ Other

Do they actually help? Why or why not?

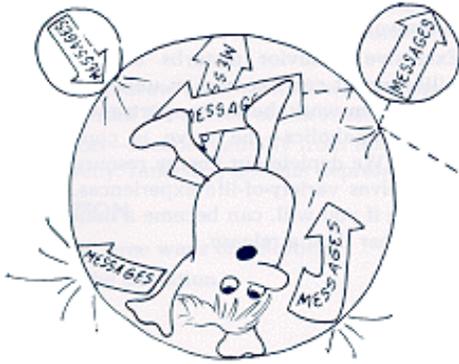
What do your answers tell you about your present use of stress reduction?

How consistently do you make use of these ways to reduce stress? (Check appropriate items. You may check more than one).

\_\_\_ Always when needed

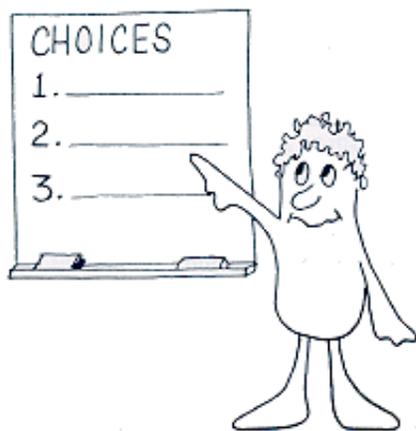
\_\_\_ Usually when needed

# STRESS Reducers



## COMMUNICATION

Open your communication lines. Communication can be the number 1 strength or problem both within the family and on the farm. Communication problems can lead to mismanagement, partnership disputes, marital disharmony-even parent/child alienation. Do not close yourself off or be the only one who knows what's going on or the right way to do things. Spend time talking to each other, listening. Discuss ideas, problems, concerns. You are not the only person involved. Others don't know what you think or how you feel unless you express yourself. You are not aware of those around you unless you take the time to listen. See pages 21-22 for more on farm family communication.

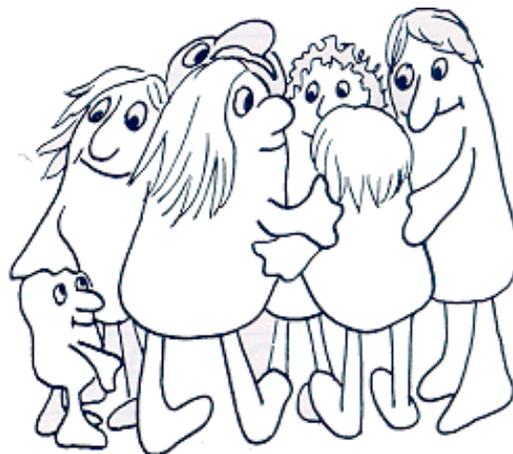


## CHOICE

You have a choice. Just as any business, farming has its share of uncertainty. Life itself is rarely predictable. You may not be able to change circumstances to your liking all the time or make things turn out the way you'd like. You do, however, control your actions and reactions to any given stimulus. You determine to what degree a situation affects you, positively or negatively. You choose the outcome in the end for better or for worse. The internal locus of control is a personal strength in the face of uncertainty.

## ATTITUDE

A commitment in what you do and who you are can make the bad times easier and the good times better. A positive "work-it-through" attitude is not as stressful or defeating as "we'll-never-make-it". View challenge as a plus, a motivation rather than as an immobilizer. Farming can be partly sunny or mostly cloudy. An accident may be disruptive for a farm family yet life-giving rather than life-taking. A period of inactivity is not convenient, but you are fortunately still alive. Mistakes can be a matter of time or energy lost today but a learning experience for the future.



SUPPORT TEAM . . .

You are not alone. Your support team is your "team of experts", those people and resources which are available to you in times of need. "They" can help you determine what can assist you in overcoming a stressful experience.

Sometimes you need to talk, to be listened to. Who can you talk with comfortably, who will be nonjudgemental, respect your feelings and concerns?





Weight is a reflection of who we are and sometimes a reflection of frustration. Today it seems to be an indication of society's overt and covert pressures to be "slim, trim and beautiful". We see increased eating disorders in young women particularly, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

Although some weight extremes are recognized as medical problems in physical dysfunction, most are not. We make our own excuses. Each individual has an average weight range appropriate to age, height, sex, etc. Our weight should reflect a point at which we are comfortable and not at health risk. (See appendix A for more information.)

## REST

Make an effort to maintain regular sleep patterns. You know how many hours you need to operate at your best. Peak times mean long hours of activity, but sixteen hours a day may get no more accomplished than eight if fatigue causes slow or poor decision-making, accidents or daydreaming.

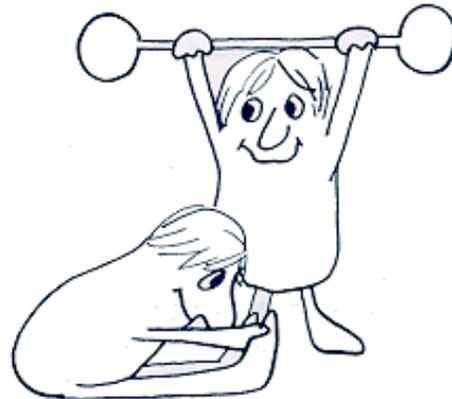
Utilize the sound business management strategy practiced by most successful businesses: take breaks. Rest those rattling bodies, stretch those aching joints. You can spare fifteen minutes. Family members can help by making sure you do break: take a snack out to the barn, a drink to the field. If you have trouble sleeping, unwind before you retire.



Take a hot bath, read something "mindless", go for a walk, listen to music. Get your mind off your worries. (See appendix B for relaxation exercises.)

## EXERCISE

Because you are working all day long-on the tractor or outdoors-you may feel you are getting enough exercise. Stop and think! What kind of exercise are you getting? Many farmers go from relatively inactive periods to overly active ones, i.e., winter to planting season with little or no preparation physically. This can be extremely hard on your system and consequently may create additional stress. Prepare yourself for these periods and increased overall health through keeping in shape. Exercise regularly. Exercise can release tension through physically "working-it-out". It can be a source of relaxation, a time spent for you when involved in something other than work-related tasks. Most importantly it is (again), for your own personal health, an asset, a strength-builder.



No matter what our age, we can find our own personal exercise program to fit our interests and abilities. If you have been inactive for a long period of time, a physical exam might be a good starting point after which a step-by-step (building gradually) approach is suggested.

Walking, running, swimming, aerobic dance, exercise routines, a social dance class, interest sports-alone, with others-if it's not of your choice it will be a chore, not an enjoyment. To clarify, for some who have not been active, it may initially seem a chore. Attitude can be a determining factor. (See appendix C for short exercises to use while working.)

NOTE: For more technical information on nutrition, weight, and exercise, you may wish to utilize specific

reference books.

## **WORK TIME AND FAMILY TIME**

Living where we work and working with those we live with can sometimes bring feelings of too much togetherness and also make it difficult to separate farm time from family time. Not taking time away from the farm can create much tension in family relationships. Resenting the farm may be a result -alienation from family members. You will never make up for time lost enjoying your children or sharing special events. You may drive those you care about away from the farm which you wish them to be a part of, by not making the separation. Spend time with your family enjoying one another, seeing another side of your life.

In many family partnerships, families live relatively close to one another. It is essential that each family have their privacy. Grandparents or parents just dropping in unannounced for example, can make young families feel constantly under inspection and make it difficult to separate their own lives.



## **ECONOMIZE**

Financial pressures are realities, particularly in economic times such as these. Re-evaluate farm management, operation and production expenditures for efficiency. Look at cost-cutting options, both farm and household. Making concrete efforts to cope with increasing financial burdens beforehand and during, helps us to feel we have some control in our outcome. Doing more with less is certainly no new concept to farming!

## **INCREASE YOUR AWARENESS**

Be aware of the "signals" which tell you you're experiencing stress. Know how you respond. Admit you're experiencing stress and identify causes. Only then can you begin to lessen or alleviate effects.

Be aware of those around you. Working together, living together-sometimes we simply don't take the time to notice others. When one member of a family is experiencing stress all family members are affected in some way. Be aware of behavioral changes, attitudinal swings or outbursts as possible stress responses and offer support. Offering understanding can itself lessen stress- "someone cares and supports me".

## **INCREASE PERSONAL SKILLS**

The more confident in your abilities and skills, the less stressful changes and challenge may be. Know your strengths, skills and weaknesses. Certain stresses may be a result of your need for increased skills in specified areas.

## **APPRECIATION**

Life can become so hectic, too much to do, on the run. You've been on the tractor almost nonstop since sunrise and there's too much on your mind to notice the stunning sunset. Farming is full of the best in life. Probably many of the reasons you wanted to be a farmer or live on a farm are the very things you don't pay much attention to anymore. It's more than machinery or livestock, bills or market fluctuations -it's a way of life which in itself holds much to be desired and appreciated.

## **ENERGIZE!**

You need a variety of life experiences. Doing things you enjoy rebuilds spent energy resources and adds spark to your life. What makes you feel good when, after you've done it, you feel like you could and want to do more? Swim, take a walk, listen to music, paint, ride bikes, dance, play an instrument, play a game, etc.

## **HUMOR**

As the ancient proverb tells us "A merry heart doeth good like medicine". Laughter, a smile, making lighter a situation which needn't be so dark -humor is one of the most effective means of reducing stress.

## **'QUICK TIPS'**

- Work off your anger.
- Give in occasionally.
- Do something for someone else.
- Forgive and forget.
- Learn to say no.
- Try relaxation exercises.
- Take one thing at a time.
- Go easy on the criticism.

- Schedule recreation, time for you.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help.
- Talk to someone.
- Be a "good worrier" by learning from your mistakes and saying "I'll do this next time".
- Use what works best for you!

**Other Alternatives**

We can't always manage our stress alone or with the help of others close to us. Sometimes our circumstances warrant seeking professional assistance to guide us through the "crisis" no matter how temporary it may be. It scares people sometimes to think their problem is that serious. It is more than scary to think of what unresolved, prolonged stress will eventually do to an individual and to all those who care about him or her. Admitting to oneself the need is a strength, not a weakness. Desiring to improve the situation by lessening the stress is a healthy, life giving response. Be aware of available community services, professionals and agencies who can assist when needed.

**Plan of Action for Stress Reduction**

1. Determine and rank your three strongest sources of stress in terms of importance and degree of stress you feel regarding each.

1.

3.

2.

Aggressive Response	Withdrawal Response	Adaptive Response
1 .		

3.

2.

3.

II. How do you respond to each source of stress?

Physical            Behavioral            Emotional

1.

III. Why are you dissatisfied or unhappy with each of the three stressors?

2.

1 .

2. Personal Skills 1. Material Resources

3. 2.

IV. How have you tried to adjust to each situation thus far? 3.

1.

2. B. Actions 1.

3. 2.

V. What would you like to change in each of the three situations? 3.

1.

2.

3.

VI. Identify resources available to you which Could help in effecting change.

A. Your Support Team

Farm/Business Family/Social

1.

2.

C. Perceptions (change interpretation of situation).

1 .

3.

2.

3.

VII. If you cannot realistically change the situation, what immediate action can be taken to lessen stress experienced, temporarily'?

1 .

2.

3.

VIII. Develop a plan of action. Describe each step you will take to reduce the level of stress and solve the situation.

1.

2.

3.

XI. What results do you anticipate and when (approximate time span)?

1.

2.

3.

X. Act on your plans.

XI. Evaluate your results and determine benefits and/or weaknesses of each strategy. If necessary, adjust action plan and carry through.

Positive

Negative

1.

2.

3.

(Adapted from Jerry Robinson's "Stress and how to live with it", pgs. 80, 81.)

# Farm Family Communication



A farm wife employed off the farm, frequently came home to have lunch with her husband. He usually wasn't on time anyway, but lately he neglected to come in at all. On her way to the house, she saw the combine out in the field. Her husband was not in the house. Angry because of his recent lack of consideration, she decided she would not go track him down and lunched alone. Several hours after returning to work, the State Police came to her office. Her husband had been discovered with his arm caught in the combine. The accident occurred mid-morning ...

John's father has been very busy farming two different operations. Eight-year-old John rarely sees his dad because of the long hours he works, and when he is home, he's so tired and irritable. John is afraid of him and feels rejected. Dad sees John as acting too timid and childish for his age. He relates to him by trying to make him a "little man" and frequently belittles his son's efforts.

Pat and Bart Owen operate a dairy partnership with Bart's parents. Bart's mother listens at breakfast as her husband complains about Bart's managing of the herd. Later in the morning, Bart asks his mother to try to get his father to think about a new idea for improving milk production. Mrs. Owen listens and thinks back to this morning's breakfast.

Pat Owen is new to farming since marrying Bart. She has little understanding of the business but is

eager to learn. She is uncomfortable knowing Bart always goes to talk to his mother to get through to his father as well as all the arguments between father and son. She's afraid to say anything, being so new to the family, and feels like she's purposely being kept on the sidelines.

With the current economic situation and Tom's youth, it would have been nearly impossible for Tom to have gotten started in farming without his parents' help and without forming their partnership. He's always been so active in the farm while the other children took different directions in life. Tom's parents felt good about his desire. Their other children, however, do not understand the situation. Why do their parents bend over backwards for Tom? What about them? What about the future?

Anne and Joe farm 600 acres with 40 head of cattle. They have two young preschoolers. Anne, aside from handling all household responsibilities and child care, manages the farm records and helps out on the farm when needed. It's been a rough day. Grandma has the kids, and Anne stretches out on the lounge with a book for an hour to herself. Joe pulls in the drive and jumps out of the truck in a hurry. He sees Anne and snarls "I'm glad you have time to read!" and rushes past. Anne is furious.

Jim, 16, is helping his father with chores after school. He's thinking about his friends all walking uptown together as he headed home. His father says something to him about how after high school, maybe after college if he goes, they'll buy some more land, expand in order to have a base substantial to support their partnership. Jim retorts, "You think I want to do this all my life? Come back here, never have any time to myself!"

These are not isolated examples or exaggerated situations. If anything, they are mild compared with some of the communication problems occurring every day without any recognition whatsoever.

## Group Exercise

Divide into small groups of 3-5 or into couples. Assign each "group" one of the preceding communication situations, answer the following questions, and report back to the group as a whole.

A. Where does the problem or conflict begin? Who is directly involved?

Who is peripherally involved?

What feelings are being expressed?

What feelings are being repressed?

How could the problem or conflict have been prevented?

What are some alternatives/solutions to the present situation?

What affect can the given situation have on other family members? On the farm operation?

B. Ask the group as a whole to share observations and additional examples of communication problems.



Communication can be your greatest asset and strength or it can become your greatest problem and strain within personal and family relationships and total farm operation. Obviously the preceding examples were preventable; they became stress producing situations because those involved were not expressing ideas and feelings directly, openly.

Open, honest communication is not belittling or a personal assault. Some people regard today's "gut

level" communication as being able to say whatever you feel. It is not so, not when it involves another person's worth. We are open about how other's actions may affect us, but not in the sense that we attack the person-only what the action was and its affect on us.

Through openly expressing our ideas and feelings, we can convey our sense of trust, of respect for others. We can build supportive relationships with mutual understanding, appreciation and responsiveness. We have a communicating role as we have a responding role. As we express to others we listen to and respond to their ideas and feelings, too.

Communication is a mutual process of giving, message and response. It is certainly a process which takes a great deal of work. It's easier sometimes to simply say nothing for fear of hurt or an argument. Our feelings often interfere with our ability to be objective, and the feelings are many times the cause of our stress. However, the below-the-surface irritations or hurt follow us each day until we either burst, we deny, or we work-them-out. The first two alternatives over time weaken and perhaps even destroy our relationship. The third is work and effort.

Take the time to:

- Talk to each other
- Listen to each other
- Discuss ideas, not dismissing them without regard (respect)
- Share feelings with each other, both positive and negative (trust)
- Make an effort to understand others
- Appreciate individual differences

## Farm Family Goals

Not unlike the test pilot who radioed back to air control "I'm lost, but I'm making record time!", if we do not make some choices in our lives-direction to follow-how do we know where we are, if we want to be there, or what we have accomplished?

We all have needs, hopes and dreams. Ultimately

we want to live our lives in such a manner that we are happier, more satisfied as a result of having done so. Thus, we make plans on how or when these hopes will become reality. They become a part of our lives, a motivating force for most people.

We usually take the time to think about what we really want for our family and our farm operation, now and in the future. Most of us do not, however,

take the time to determine any detailed account of how we will proceed, how we will accomplish these things. We know what we want to see happen, yet the process is not always clear.

Suppose in order to meet increased farm demands, you find it necessary to purchase new equipment. As a result, the long awaited and planned family vacation is postponed indefinitely.

How is this decision arrived at? Who is involved in making the decision? Is it discussed with family members prior to determining the final answer? How carefully were alternatives explored?

Unfortunately in many farm operations, the family tends to be overruled in favor of the farm. It is not a fair assumption to make, particularly when other people are involved-people you care about-to ignore feelings or concerns.

The farm cannot always be first. There are people involved in this farm operation who also have needs. just as the farm is not always first, neither can the family or personal desires always be first. After all, the farm is the sustaining economic well-being of the farm family.

Farm and business goals must be planned in conjunction with family and personal relationship goals. These goals must work together in mutually satisfying directions. If they fail to, if farm and family goals are working in opposite directions or against each other, we have trouble. One or the other, or possibly even both, will lose.

It is integrally important to know where we are headed-a simple statement of common sense. It is also a sound management principle in both business and in interpersonal relationships.

Farm family management involves setting goals, goal plans and the process of carrying them through for both farm and family

Together with your spouse and/or other family members as appropriate, use the following guide in determining family goals, then farm goals (or in whichever order you prefer).

- 1 .List five goals. (Should be in mutual agreement)
- 2.Prioritize the five goals from most to least important.
- 3.Beginning with goal number 1, look at the nature of each goal. Is it realistic, are your expectations within your projected means?
- 4.Determine a plan of action detailing step-by-step the procedure(s) you will use leading to the completion of each goal.

- With each completed step Von achieve a small success eventually leading to your end goal.
  - Starting small requires patience, but the small successes add up faster than one may initially believe.
- 5.A plan of action should include:

Present status.

Who will be involved.

What each step entails.

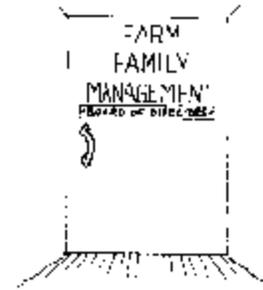
A time determined by which each step will be completed.

Why-a rationale for the goal and procedure.

Costs anticipated including time; resources (skills, money, energy); personal costs.

6 Re-evaluate. Cross check farm and family goals anticipating any potential conflict of interests or needs.

7.Put your plans into action. Begin to work toward farm and family goals.



**NOTE:** Don't be too hard on yourself if something interrupts your schedule or plan. Be flexible enough to make minor changes when necessary. We cannot know what the future will bring, and a goal plan may need to be adapted dependent on circumstances. It's not necessary to give up or give in, only to reassess.

### Goals help you:

- Maintain direction
- Remain consistent
- Utilize time, money, efforts more effectively
- Be more productive
- Bring family members closer together by working toward the same end
- Build a family mutual support system

# Farm Family Management

Farm Goal

Family Goal

GOAL:

GOAL:

PRESENT  
STATUS:

PRESENT  
STATUS:

WHO:

WHO:

WHAT:

WHAT:

WHEN:

WHEN:

RATIONALE:

RATIONALE:

COSTS:

COSTS:

# Appendix A

## Recommended Daily Calorie Allowances

Adapted from: Food and Nutritional Board, National Academy of Sciences - National Research Council Recommended Daily Dietary Allowances, Revised 1968.

GROUP	PAGE	WEIGHT (years)	HEIGHT (lbs.)	CALORIES (in.)	kcal
Infants	0-1/6	9	22	kgx120	
	1/6-1/2	15	25	kgx110	
	1/2-1	20	28	kgx100	
Children	1-2	26	32	1,100	
	2-3	31	36	1,250	
	3-4	35	39	1,400	
	4-6	42	43	1,600	
	6-8	51	48	2,000	
	8-10	62	52	2,200	
Males	10-12	77	55	2,500	
	12-14	95	59	2,700	
	14-18	13	67	3,000	
	18-22	147	69	2,800	
	22-35	154	69	2,800	
	35-55	154	68	2,600	
	55-75+	154	67	2,400	
	Females	10-12	77	56	2,250
12-14		97	61	2,300	
14-16		114	62	2,400	
16-18		119	63	2,300	
18-22		128	64	2,000	
22-35		128	64	2,000	
35-55		128	63	1,850	
55-75+		128	62	1,700	

The allowance levels are intended to cover individual variables among most normal persons as they live in the United States under Usual environmental stresses. The recommended allowances can be attained with a variety of common foods, providing other nutrients for which human requirements have been less well defined.

Entries on lines for age range 22-25 years represent the reference man and woman at age 22. All other entries represent allowances for the midpoint of the specified age range.

## Appendix B Relaxation Exercises

Our conditioned responses to life experiences can be thought of as a type of unconscious learning process in the sense we never actually set out to learn how to be tense. A car pulls out in front of us, our muscles automatically tense, our heart beats faster; a loud noise sounds behind us, we jump, turn around. Is relaxation an unconscious, automatic response? No indeed, not for most of us.

We must learn how to relax. We have to teach ourselves how to relax. The process begins as a conscious effort, which only with consistent use can become a natural part of our lives.

Since relaxation may be foreign to our daily lives, it can seem very strange to us at first. New things can appear so: we are changing patterns we have grown up with. Some of the exercises may seem silly to you, and rightfully so. The point is to allow yourself to pursue a state of mindlessness or senselessness, a point at which you can stop thinking about all the things which cause tension.

The following exercises can be practiced alone. It is generally easier to begin learning to relax, particularly if there is initial discomfort or unsuredness with only yourself to "watch". Do not however, discount group relaxation activities. They can be an effective means in achieving relaxation when appropriate.

### DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION

#### Description

This technique involves tensing specific muscle groups and then relaxing them. For each muscle group, a method is described for creating tension and achieving relaxation.

#### Procedure

1. Assume position for relaxation (eyes closed, lying on floor, quiet, passive attitude).
2. Go through the following for each muscle group twice.

Muscle	Tensing Method
Forehead	Wrinkle your forehead. Try to make your eyebrows touch your hairline for five seconds. Relax.
Eyes and	Close your eyes as tightly as you can for five seconds. Relax.
Lips, cheeks	Draw the corners of your mouth back and jaw and grimace for five seconds. Relax..Feel the warmth and calmness in your face.
Hands	Extend your arms in front of you. Clench your fists tightly for five seconds. Relax. Feel the warmth and calmness in your hands.
Forearms	Extend your arms out against an invisible wall and push forward

	with your hands for five seconds. Relax.
Upper arms	Bend your elbows. Tense your biceps for five seconds. Relax. Feel the tension leave your arms.
Shoulders	Shrug your shoulders up to your ears for five seconds. Relax.
Back	Arch your back off the floor for five seconds. Relax. Feel the anxiety and tension disappearing.
Stomach	Tighten your stomach muscles for five seconds. Relax.
Hips and Buttocks	Tighten your hip and buttock muscles for five seconds. Relax.
Thighs	Tighten your thigh muscles by pressing your legs together as tightly as you can for five seconds. Relax.
Feet	Bend your ankles toward your body as far as you can for five seconds. Relax.
Toes	Curl your toes under as tightly as you can for five seconds. Relax.

### Conclusion

The subjective feelings that accompany relaxation vary among individuals. Most people feel a sense of calm and feel very relaxed. Other descriptions involve feelings of pleasure, refreshment, and wellbeing. (From *The Stress Connection* by Judy Ann Goth-Owens, Michigan State University.)

### REHEARSAL

#### Description

When you are anticipating an experience in which you may be nervous, prepare for it mentally by accepting that it is likely to happen, and then planning and imagining the way in which you will react positively to the event. The pre-rehearsal can help you cope with the event more effectively and with less stress.

#### Procedure

1. Close your eyes.
2. Imagine an experience in the future that may cause you to feel "uptight".
3. Mentally "walk through" that experience, all of the time projecting a positive, successful outcome.
4. Bask in your success!
5. Open your eyes.

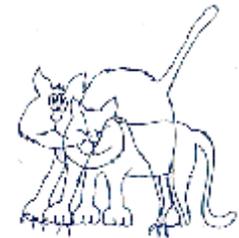
### TAKING A FANTASY VACATION

#### Description

There are times when it would help us relax if we could just get away to a calm, pleasant place that we enjoy. Unfortunately, we can't always take a vacation when we most need it. We can, however, take a mind vacation. Surprising as it may seem, the body reacts to a "fantasy vacation" with some of the same relaxation and pleasure that usually accompany a real vacation.

#### Procedure

1. Sit relaxed in a chair, both feet on the ground.
  2. Close your eyes.
  3. In your imagination for the next 5 to 10 minutes go away to a place you enjoy, a mountain meadow, a pleasant garden, a cabin by a lake, a sunny beach.
  4. Relax there. Enjoy the feel of the sun, the fresh breeze, the soft grass, or the sand under you. Enjoy the sound, the wind in the trees, the surf, the birds. Also, become aware of the fragrances.
  5. You may want to do something enjoyable on your "vacation": pick flowers, fish, read poetry, gather shells. Maybe someone you love will be with you.
  6. Enjoy your vacation. Maybe it will take 10 to 15 minutes.
  7. Now, slowly return from it.
- Some people find it helpful to create special places just for their mind vacations—a special beach or mountain area, for instance—and go there again and again in their imaginations when they need escape and replenishment.



### THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

#### Description

Probably one of the more dramatic and carefully studied techniques for relieving tension is some variation of the relaxation response. This is a term used by Dr. Herbert Benson, who has systematically studied this technique. This method is not new—the essence of the relaxation response has been practiced for centuries by various names such as meditation.

The relaxation response can be used simply as a technique for counteracting the harmful effects of stress-overload on the body.

## **MATERIALS**

Learning a new skill takes practice: learning to achieve relaxation response is no exception. Dr. Robert Benson suggests four prerequisites for bringing out the response:

1. Find a quiet place.
2. Concentrate effortlessly on a pleasing phrase or word such as "one" or "love".
3. Maintain a passive attitude. (Empty your mind of all thoughts. Disregard them if they do occur.)
4. Make yourself comfortable.

## **Procedure**

Dr. Benson recommends the following procedure:

1. Sit in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing LIP to your face. Keep them relaxed.
4. Breathe easily and naturally. Repeat the phrase or word effortlessly.
5. Continue for 10 to 20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes with your eyes closed, and later with your eyes open.
6. Do not worry about whether you are successful in achieving a deep level of relaxation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace.

## **Conclusion**

1. How do you feel now?
2. When might this exercise be useful?

With practice, the response should come with little effort. Practice the technique once or twice daily, but not within two hours after any meal, since the digestive process seems to interfere with eliciting the relaxation response.

(The preceding exercises are from "Stress: A Family Affair", Michigan State University.)

## **TIPS FOR INSOMNIA**

What do you do when you have trouble falling asleep? There are many things you can try when you are troubled by sleep problems:

1. Become aware of your sleep "prime-times." You have an individual "prime-time" for sleep-the time during your biological time cycle when you normally feel drowsy and at which point your body is naturally

geared for sleep. If you don't submit to your particular sleep "prime-time," it may be some time before your normal cycle comes back- to another sleep "prime-time".

2. Schedule your sleep times. Your body reacts particularly well to regular schedules and quickly falls into habitual patterns of functioning. Determine the amount of sleep you need to function best. Individual sleep needs vary, and you may not need eight full hours, or you may need more. Try to go to bed and get LIP at the same time every day. Naps could disrupt your body's habitual pattern.

3. Develop bedtime rituals-such as reading, drinking milk or herbal tea, or taking a bath help to reinforce your sleep pattern. Your body quickly learns to associate these rituals with sleep, and these cues trigger relaxation.

4. Exercise during the day. Regular exercise helps you sleep better at night. However, strenuous exercise before bedtime invigorates, rather than relaxes, your body.

5. Get out of bed if you can't sleep. Read, watch TV, or do some dull task until you begin to feel drowsy. Some people who have trouble falling asleep and stay in bed regardless of how awake they feel often begin to associate their frustration with their bed. Soon, just the sight of their bed may cause tension, thus setting up a vicious cycle

6. Make sure your bedroom is not too warm or too dry. You may have trouble resting if you are too hot because too many blankets or an overly warm room temperature may cause discomfort. Also, a room that is too dry can cause discomfort by making your throat and nose dry. A humidifier or vaporizer might help decrease dryness.

7. Prepare physically and mentally. Slow yourself down before retiring. You need the opportunity to unwind from active, alert consciousness to a relatively inactive, relaxed state.

We cannot expect to come in at the end of an active day, climb into bed and fall asleep immediately. We may have nights when we're asleep as our heads hit the pillow, but this is not the usual case especially if we're trouble sleepers. Pure exhaustion might lead to a "trance-like" sleep for some people, but it can also lead to a feeling of "I'm so tired I can't sleep" and complete wakefulness for others. Tensed bodies, thinking about the day's events or tomorrow's, need to be taken care of before bedtime if we wish to

sleep when we get there. (Excerpts from "Stress: A Family Affair")

8. Idea exercise. Utilize a natural pattern which occurs just as we drift into sleep. As the mind loses consciousness prior to falling asleep, our thoughts become scattered and jumbled. We can use this pattern to induce sleep. Teach yourself to "idea hop" go from one idea to another to another.

Begin with a pleasant thought, lying in the sun on the beach with high school friends. Bill was playing water football with Tom. The water was so cold and refreshing ... like the mountain water ... Lake Tahoe ... summer vacations as a child. The trees were such fantastic shades of green ... I like green ... Von are asleep. (Adapted from Randy Weigel, Iowa State University, Stress-on-the-Farm Fatigue materials.)

## Appendix C

### Quick Exercises-While You Work

"An Iowa State University study of accidents in farm families found that (1) most accidents occurred during mid-morning and mid-afternoon; (2) most accidents occurred during May and August; and (3) Saturday was a high accident day. These are periods when the most work is done and fatigue is more likely." (Stress-on-the-Farm, Fatigue, Randy Weigel, Iowa State University.) Taking rest breaks periodically during your working day could reduce the risk of an accident occurring. Breaks give you the chance to revitalize spent energies. Brief exercise breaks provide the opportunity to relax tensed muscles and joints, reducing the affects of possible fatigue.

- Before engaging in heavy or long periods of labor, try limbering up exercises to increase blood circulation and oxygen level, raising muscle temperature. Body bends, jumping jacks or alternate leg and arm shake outs are examples which can act as preventatives in delaying or reducing fatigue.
- Change positions while working. Sitting or standing too long can lead to poor circulation with resulting tired feelings.
- While on the tractor or any piece of equipment for extended periods of time, stop and do some shoulder shrugs to relieve shoulder and upper back tension. With hands on the steering wheel, raise your shoulders up toward your ears. Drop to their natural position and repeat as needed.
- At the end of every specific number of rows, stand

tip. stretch and breathe deeply before heading down the next row. When possible step off the machinery to do so.

(The preceding adapted from Stress-on-the-Farm, Fatigue.)

### Additional Suggestions ...

- Stand with feet shoulders' width apart and roll only your head in complete circles to the right five times and to the left five times. Keep eyes closed while doing so.
- For arm, shoulders, chest and back muscle tension release, try arm circles. Stand with feet shoulders' width apart and reach both arms outward to the side. Rotate both arms in big circles forward, then backward in rapid succession.
- For back muscles do a series of windmills alternately bending at the waist and touching opposite hand to foot. Return to standing position between alternate toe touches.
- Take in full breaths of air. Empty your lungs by exhaling fully. Gradually begin to inhale. Your sides of your ribs will move slightly outward as your chest begins expanding. Allow your upper chest to expand fully and your collarbone to rise slightly. Without pause, exhale slowly by lowering your collarbone, letting your chest come in slightly, then your belly. Without pausing, repeat three to seven times. (Adapted from "Vitality-Tap Your Resources", University of Kentucky, Cooperative Extension Service.)
- Tense every part of your body and hold the tension for as long as Von can without feeling pain. Slowly release the tension, feeling it slowly leave your body. Repeat several times.

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Cindy Campbell

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\*A slide/tape program "Our Farm Families ... are very special families" is available with this teaching packet.

NOTE: Teaching transparency masters to "Farm Family Stress" are available upon request from the MSU Department of Agricultural and Extension Education.

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