

For immediate release

Support line for farmer wellness now live

Counsellors available 24/7 in French and English

GUELPH, ON [January 1, 2022] — A telehealth line to provide mental wellness support to all Ontario farmers and farm families is now live.

Through the Farmer Wellness Initiative, the provincial and federal governments are funding access for up to four free counselling sessions with a mental health professional for all farmers across Ontario including members of their family. The mental health professionals have received training to understand the unique needs of Ontario farmers.

Accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, in English and French, farmers can call 1-866-267-6255 to speak to a counsellor. Developed and launched by the Canadian Mental Health Association – Ontario Division in partnership with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, this service is provided by LifeWorks.

“The Government of Ontario is proud to fund the Farmer Wellness Initiative and to partner with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture to help deliver an important program to provincial farmers,” said Lisa Thompson, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. “This initiative will expand Ontario’s mental health supports for farm families to help them cope with the stresses of their work which will allow them to do what they do best; grow and produce some of the best food in the world.”

“The mental health of our farmers is a top priority for the Ontario Federation of Agriculture,” says Peggy Brekveld, President of the OFA. “Getting this phone line operational is a big first step in a larger, multi-year program that will facilitate easier access to much-needed mental health services for all farmers and their families.”

The program is a comprehensive, fully integrated mental health support package that includes:

- 24/7/365 Service intake handled by a designated and fully trained team who understand a day in the life of a farmer, available in English & French, creating a true partnership and unique care model.
- Access to ongoing mental health support services and resources, available up to 4 sessions per issue per year, for all farming families across Ontario through multiple modalities; the telephone line will soon be followed by a website and an app containing thousands of self-guided support resources.
- Integration with provincial and local level resources to provide members with the best level of support available to them, at the first request.

The support line will enter callers into an intake process to arrange counselling sessions with a mental health professional available by phone, virtually, or in-person subject to public health

restrictions. All information received through counselling sessions is confidential and in accordance with the Personal Health Information Protection Act (2004).

This initiative is funded by the Canadian Agricultural Partnership program in partnership with Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. “Providing farm families across the province with free counselling services and helping connect at-risk farmers with tailored support and resources is a greatly welcomed service in rural Ontario,” says Ms. Brekveld. “Availability of mental health services has been a big roadblock standing between farmers and their mental wellness. The telephone line is a first step in a process that will add more access points over the coming weeks and months for Ontario farmers and their families to take positive action to support their mental health.”

Ontario farmers looking for support can call 1-866-267-6255.

About the Ontario Federation of Agriculture:

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is the largest general farm organization in Ontario, representing 38,000 farm families across the province. As a dynamic farmer-led organization based in Guelph, the OFA works to represent and champion the interests of Ontario farmers through government relations, farm policy recommendations, research, lobby efforts, community representation, media relations and more. OFA is the leading advocate for Ontario’s farmers and is Ontario’s voice of the farmer. For more information, visit ofa.on.ca.

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