

## Farmers and Stress

After disasters farmers and their families often benefit from mental health counseling. However, it is frequently erroneously assumed that farmers and their families do not want or need stress relief.

A study conducted during the 1980s, when many farmers were facing serious financial difficulties, indicated that stress was common in farm communities (Table 30-6). It is apparently difficult for many farming families to separate what happens to the farm from what happens to the family. Many farmers do not treat their farms as businesses, but rather consider the farm a livelihood.

Identifying families who may benefit from professional advice is an important role for volunteer groups, such as clergy, Cooperative Extension, and the American Red Cross.

**Table 30-6** Summary of signs of stress and depression reported in farmers during the 1980s financial crises and floods

Signs reported in men	Signs reported in women
Increased muscle aches	Increased muscular aches
Feelings of fatigue, hopelessness, anxiety, and dissatisfaction about farming	Feelings of fatigue Tendency to overeat Sleep disturbances
Depression	Feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, anger, confusion, and depression
Moodiness	Moodiness
Sleep disturbances	Disruption in the family
Confusion	Increased number of arguments between parents and children
Loss of motivation	Increased number of conflicts with their spouse
Thoughts of leaving farming	Amount of expressed anger
Loss of optimism about the future of agriculture, and the desire to have children remain in farming	Overall bickering in the family Arguments over money

From Soderman AK, Brown JE: *Farm family stress: report to the Michigan legislature—the impact of the farm financial crisis and the 1986 flooding on Michigan agriculture and rural counties*, East Lansing, 1988, Michigan State University Agricultural Experiment Station.