



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #181

Farmer Mental Health Assistance (Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection – Agricultural Assistance)

[LFB 2023-25 Budget Summary: Page 65, #6]

CURRENT LAW

The Wisconsin Farm Center, housed in DATCP's Division of Agricultural Development, administers the Farmer Wellness Program, which offers services supporting farmers and their families. 2019 Wisconsin Act 9 and 2021 Wisconsin Act 58 each provided \$100,000 annually for farmer mental health assistance through the Farmer Wellness Program on a one-time basis. Funding supports: (a) a 24-hour Wisconsin farmer wellness helpline for providing immediate support; (b) tele-counseling sessions that can be administered online by a licensed mental health professional; and (c) counseling vouchers that farmers and their family members can redeem for free in-person care at participating mental health providers in their area.

In addition to counseling services, the Farmer Wellness Program offers: (a) free virtual courses for agricultural service providers such as lenders and agribusiness firms in understanding and managing the stresses of farming; (b) online farmer and farm couple support groups for bringing farmers together to discuss their shared challenges; and (c) a podcast on farm-related challenges. Funding also supports DATCP limited-term employees administering the program components.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Research ¹ published in January, 2020, by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that the suicide rate for men in the "Farming, Fishing, and Forestry"

¹ Peterson C, Sussell A, Li J, Schumacher PK, Yeoman K, Stone DM. Suicide Rates by Industry and Occupation — National Violent Death Reporting System, 32 States, 2016. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6903a1>

occupational category was 31.4 per 100,000 civilian non-institutionalized working persons in 2016. Further, it estimated the suicide rate for men in the "Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agriculture Managers" subcategory was 43.2 per 100,000 civilian non-institutionalized working persons in 2016. For comparison, across all industries in the dataset, the suicide rate for working men was estimated at 27.4 per 100,000 in 2016, and the suicide rate among all working-age adults (age 16 to 64) was estimated at 18.0 per 100,000 in 2017. Thus, data suggest that men working in the farming, fishing, and forestry industries face suicide rates 15% higher than other working men and 75% higher than the national average. Similarly, men working as farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers face suicide rates 58% higher than other working men and 140% higher than the national average. Researchers report insufficient data was available for women in these categories to develop statistical estimates with sufficient confidence. Further, a separate 2017 report ² from CDC showed that suicide rates are higher in nonmetropolitan/rural areas (19.74 per 100,000 in 2013-2015), as opposed to medium/small metropolitan (16.77) and large metropolitan areas (12.72).

2. Table 1 shows 2021-22 allocations amongst the program activities described earlier, as well as limited-term staff costs supporting these initiatives. Figures for 2022-23 are combined year-to-date expenditures, and DATCP estimated allocations for the remainder of the biennium.

TABLE 1
2021-23 Farmer Mental Health Funding Allocation

<u>Expenditure Category</u>	<u>2021-22 (Actual)</u>	<u>2022-23 (Estimated)</u>
Tele-Counseling Services	\$30,251	\$24,050
Counseling Vouchers	17,600	21,000
Farmer Support Groups	6,150	6,600
Job Hunting and Support Resources	854	2,600
Rural Realities Podcast	1,916	500
Targeted Outreach and Education	11,710	15,250
Limited Term Employee (LTE) Staff	<u>31,519</u>	<u>30,000</u>
Total	\$100,000	\$100,000

3. Farmers calling DATCP's Farm Center hotline or the Wisconsin Farmer Wellness counseling hotline are screened regarding their current mental health and need for counseling. Staff are trained to identify signs of high stress and suicidal ideation, talk with farmers to reduce their feeling of isolation, and refer them to professional help. Callers are offered an initial allocation of three vouchers that may be used to receive counseling sessions from providers recruited by DATCP. Currently, DATCP reports 240 providers in 67 of 72 Wisconsin counties accept its counseling vouchers. Table 2 shows counseling voucher allocations since 2011. Through fiscal year 2022, DATCP reimbursed providers \$100 per counseling session, and in certain circumstances up to \$200 to cover travel costs for counselors traveling to provide on-farm services to families when more than

² Ivey-Stephenson AZ, Crosby AE, Jack SP, Haileyesus T, Kresnow-Sedacca M. Suicide Trends Among and Within Urbanization Levels, 2001–2015. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.ss6618a1>

one family member required assistance. Beginning in 2022-2023, vouchers are reimbursed starting at \$125.

TABLE 2
Counseling Voucher Allocations

<u>Year</u>	<u>Issued</u>	<u>Redeemed</u>	<u>Percent Redeemed</u>	<u>Cost</u>
2011	49	36	73%	\$2,700
2012	38	14	37	1,050
2013	48	40	83	3,000
2014	26	13	50	975
2015	76	34	45	2,550
2016	31	2	6	150
2017	29	11	38	1,100
2018	89	22	25	2,200
2019	181	74	41	7,400
2020	255	142	56	14,200
2021	229	176	77	17,820
2022	197	159	81	17,600
2023	<u>147</u>	<u>118</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>11,100</u>
Total	1395	841	48%	\$81,845

4. Assembly Bill 43/Senate Bill 70 would provide DATCP \$100,000 GPR each year on an ongoing basis to continue DATCP farmer mental health assistance programming. DATCP reports funding would continue to support: (a) the Farmer Wellness hotline and tele-counseling services; (b) counseling vouchers; (c) twice-monthly virtual support group meetings for farmers and farm couples; (d) eight to 10 podcast episodes per year on farm-related challenges; and (e) limited-term staff to support mental health programming. DATCP also intends to increase its outreach and education related to Farm Center services and mental health assistance, and increase its efforts to provide support to farmers seeking retraining and employment as they transition out of farming or add off-farm income. Table 3 shows DATCP's proposed allocation of funding amongst these categories.

TABLE 3
2023-25 Proposed Farmer Mental Health Funding Allocation

<u>Expenditure Category</u>	<u>Amount</u>	
	<u>2023-24</u>	<u>2024-25</u>
Tele-Counseling Services	\$25,000	\$25,000
Counseling Vouchers	25,000	25,000
Farmer Support Groups	7,000	7,000
Outreach and Education*	18,000	18,000
Limited-Term Employee (LTE) Staff	<u>25,000</u>	<u>25,000</u>
Total	\$100,000	\$100,000

*Outreach and education includes operation of the Rural Realities podcast and provision of job-hunting resources.

5. The federal Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 (CAA), signed into law on December 27, 2020, provided \$28 million in funding for state departments of agriculture, up to \$500,000 per state, to expand or sustain their farmer stress assistance programs under the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm and Ranch Stress Support Assistance Network. The CAA required USDA to disburse funding to states no later than 60 days after enactment of the bill. DATCP received a grant of \$500,000 in October, 2021. USDA provided DATCP an additional \$59,605 in June, 2022. The grant funding must be fully spent by August 31, 2023.

6. Upon receiving the grant, DATCP reported funding would be used for: (a) promoting stress management and mental health programming for Wisconsin farmers by creating, printing, and distributing outreach materials; (b) developing a series of videos on stress identification, prevention, and management for farmers; and (c) adapting existing farm management, financial, and mental health resources into formats that are more easily accessible by Hmong and Latinx farmers. As of May, 2023, DATCP reports that the print, video, and social media advertisements created with grant funding reached approximately 864,800 Wisconsinites and increased engagement with the farmer mental health program. DATCP reports that following promotional efforts: (a) Farmer Wellness Hotline calls increased 52%; (b) tele-counseling sessions increased 3%; and (c) farmer support group participation increased 150%. In addition to promotion, DATCP also administered six outreach meetings in historically disadvantaged farming communities, including one listening session and two workshops conducted in Hmong and providing support to 50 Hmong farmers.

7. In addition to promotional and outreach activities, DATCP used federal funding to support two programs for improving farmer health. The WeCOPE stress management program, a UW-Madison Division of Extension program for helping adults cope with life stress, was customized and adapted to farmers. The program operated in two independent seven-week pilot sessions, one of which served 10 agricultural community leaders and educators and one of which served 17 women involved in farming. The other program funded was the Wisconsin Peer Specialists program, administered by Marbleseed, a Wisconsin nonprofit organization promoting farmer peer support in farming practices and farm management. The program is designed to coordinate peer support training for 18 farmers. DATCP reports that in 2022, 15 farmers participated in the program and were trained as certified peer specialists. Table 4 shows how USDA grant funding has been budgeted and expended. DATCP expects that remaining funds will be spent by August 31, 2023.

TABLE 4

Federal Grant Funding Allocation

<u>Project</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Expended</u>	<u>Remaining</u>
Outreach, Promotion, and Videos	\$186,951	\$121,674	\$65,277
Increasing Access to Farmer Resources	39,621	5,100	34,521
Additional Costs and Salary	138,231	74,399	63,832
WeCOPE (UW Madison-Extension)	123,415	47,763	75,652
Peer Support (Marbleseed)	<u>71,387</u>	<u>23,358</u>	<u>48,029</u>
Total	\$559,605	\$272,294	\$287,311

8. The federal grant was used to increase awareness for the farmer mental health program and provide complementary program support. DATCP is not anticipating any additional federal funding and will not continue any of the efforts pursued under the federal grant. Given the increase in participation in the program since promotional efforts and the provision of one-time funding in each of 2019-21 and 2021-23, it could be considered appropriate to provide ongoing funding for the program. The Committee could consider providing \$100,000 GPR in ongoing funding to support the farmer mental health program [Alternative 1]. The Committee could also provide funding on a one-time basis, as was done in the previous two biennia [Alternative 2].

9. The Committee could take no action [Alternative 3]. DATCP would retain general operations base funding for the Division of Agricultural Development, which houses the Wisconsin Farm Center. From 2017-18 through 2021-22, state accounting data show DATCP expended an average of \$523,600 each year for the Farm Center, which also includes such services as farm business planning and farm transitions, mediation and arbitration, and beginning and veteran farmer assistance services. Agricultural Development general operations would be authorized \$2.4 million GPR each year in the 2023-25 biennium.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Provide \$100,000 GPR each year in 2023-25 to support farmer mental health assistance programming at DATCP.

ALT 1	Change to Base
GPR	\$200,000

2. Specify that funding be provided on a one-time basis during the 2023-25 biennium. (This alternative could be selected in addition to Alternative 1).

3. Take no action. (No state funding would be specifically appropriated for farmer mental health programming, although other Wisconsin Farm Center programming would continue with existing funding).

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