

# When stress hits: Focus on that which you can control

John Goeser for *Progressive Dairy*

Stress is a powerful, and at times inevitable, force within our lives. Stress affects our minds, personal energy levels and ultimately health. The emotional impact is so powerful that it's known to suppress the immune system's ability to fight off viral or bacterial infections.

Having unexpectedly lost a loved one, I've personally experienced these effects and unfortunately joined the many of you who lost a loved one and experienced life-changing events. Stress knows no bounds or conditions, and is more often induced by factors in our professional lives. The impact on health and emotions can be nearly equivalent to that described above.

Both environmental and economic conditions in our field are common factors that contribute to anxiety and emotional stress. From the drought conditions experienced in the West, to unprecedented flooding conditions within the east in the past few years, we have experienced more turbulent environmental conditions. Coupling environmental swings with challenging economic times has brought some in our industry to a brink. This subject is not to be taken lightly; mental health and suicide are real issues in agriculture.

*If you're suffering from or experiencing extreme stress and thoughts, please reach out and talk with your trusted friends and seek support from trusted professionals. There is no shame in recognizing stress and emotions.*

I write from the heart, having just passed another anniversary of losing my father unexpectedly in a tragic accident, but I do not claim to be a professional in this realm. Having experienced tough times and life-changing events within the family, it became apparent that we needed to focus on that which we could control and bring forward even the tiniest positive thoughts and emotions. I feel that directing our energy and

minds to that which we can control and opening up for support will help manage the stress and health issues we may experience. To describe how this can be done, I'll offer a couple of professionally challenging examples that you can likely relate to, in order to demonstrate how taking control and some optimism can come into play for forage growers.

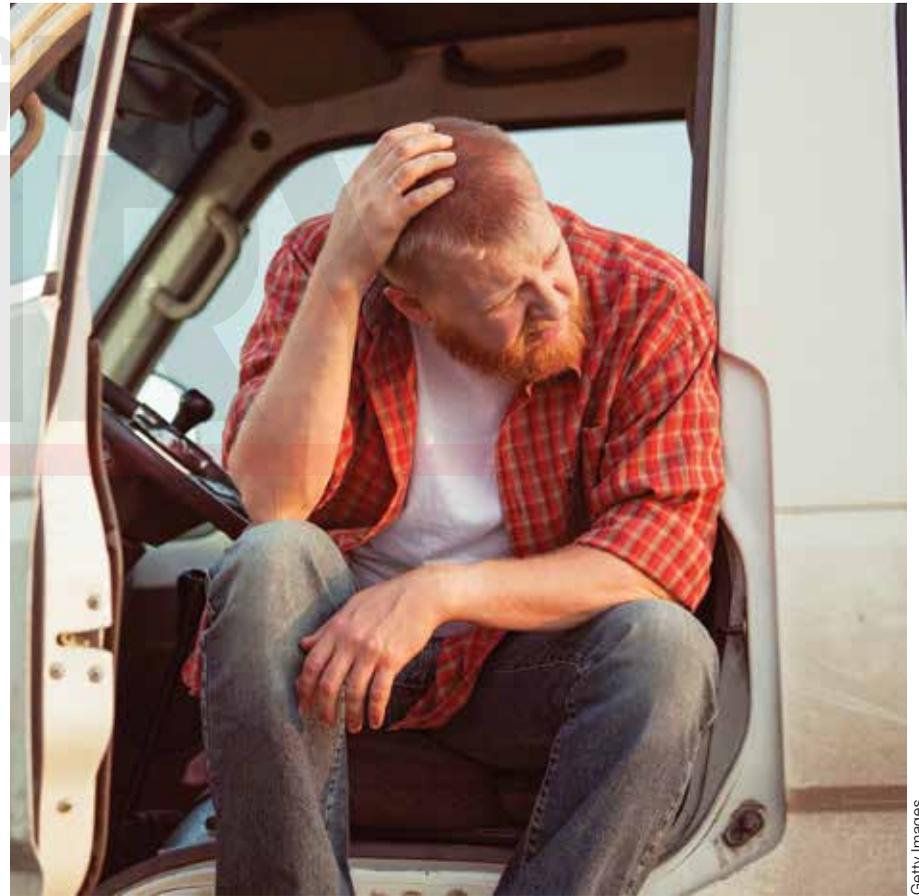
## Commodity market uncertainty

With new information in crop reports or global trade comes swings in futures markets and economic conditions in production agriculture. These swings result in substantial profit or loss if hedging or trading options. If truly hedging risk, then the aim is to mitigate risk in future months, and emotions should be relatively calm during these volatile trading times. However, it's nearly impossible to exclude all emotion and stress when markets swing wildly, despite the fact that the influencing factors are well beyond our control.

In these moments, try to take a step back and focus on that which you and your farm can control. Stepping away from the stressful information (computer or your phone) and heading to the fields or barns can prove therapeutic. Or consider taking the day for yourself and visiting with family or friends proactively in these unexpected market change situations. It's OK.

## Unanticipated harvest conditions

Another situation that frequently challenges growers and farmers is volatile environmental conditions around harvest. Unfortunately, at times we may be unable to get out into fields to harvest hay or corn crops for forage, or we may find our fields damaged following flooding, hail or frost. In frost or storm damage conditions, an excellent crop could turn from outstanding to average (or worse) in a matter of hours.



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We can't control these situations; however, we can control our response. Seek out others' help and opinions. Arm yourself with information and make educated "best-case" decisions. Change the focus to making the best decisions you can in the moment and set near-term goals. Focus on tasks each day, rather than thinking about the crop season as a whole. Hopefully, the satisfaction of achieving the near-term objectives helps lessen the pain associated with potentially catastrophic weather events.

## The power of positive thought

These two examples are just a couple of any number of challenges your farm could face. Regardless of the challenge at hand, avoid negative conversations and energy – not much good can come from these. Consider each challenge an opportunity to



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grow and learn. When thinking of challenges as opportunities, the negativity and stress can lessen.

Positive thoughts and energy are incredibly powerful; thus, seek them out. Recognize that optimism and strength are also contagious. Spread optimism and positive thoughts actively with your family, friends, colleagues or even industry professionals. Hold the door open for an extra someone, say hello to one more person in your day, or even ask a stranger how their day is going to take control with positivity. ☺