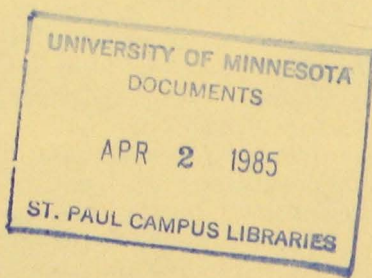


Project Support

Educational Aid to Minnesota's Farm Families



AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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Current information available from University of Minnesota Extension: <http://www.extension.umn.edu>.

Helping distressed farm families is a goal of an intensified program coordinated by the University of Minnesota's Agricultural Extension Service.

Project Support is a program for farm families who need financial planning, stress management, and support. It is designed for farm families in three categories:

1. Families who have recently left farming, or will do so shortly. Help will be offered in transition to non-farming careers and coping with stress associated with leaving farming.
2. Farm families who need help analyzing their short term financial situation. Some of these families may be leaving farming; others may be able to continue farming if they receive help with financial planning.
3. Farm families who will continue to farm. The program offers longer-term family financial planning to help farm businesses remain financially healthy in the future. The goal is prevention – which means trying hard to reach farm families before they become distressed financially and emotionally.

Who Needs Help?

The farm financial crisis is widespread in Minnesota. It affects older, established farmers as well as younger ones. The one thing they have in common is they're deeply in debt. Some, but not all, lack financial and production management skills. Estimates put the number of "commercial" farms at 40,000, or 40% of the state's roughly 100,000 farms. As many as one-fourth of the commercial farms – 10,000 farm families – may be having severe emotional and financial problems.

The entire family experiences stress and needs support in communication and coping skills. Family members need to know where to turn for support within the community.

Some farm families having financial trouble are excellent producers who use the latest production technology. They are people who would be in a strong economic position today if the economic trends of the 1970's had continued.

Project Support is intended largely for farm families. But other small business people who face many of the same problems as farmers can also use it.

Community Networks

Project Support will be coordinated by the County Extension Office in each county. A network of local organizations will be in place to offer individual counseling. Examples of groups involved include agricultural lenders, farm organizations, ministerial associations, mental health services, employment security and job service agencies, adult vocational agriculture instructors, and the county medical association or leading doctors. School counselors may also be involved to help identify and deal with stress symptoms in school children.

In some counties, key agencies and individuals may form ad hoc councils to coordinate the program and find additional local resources.

Some communities may prepare directories of community resources. Many rural communities don't have information and referral services and crisis intervention hotlines. Farmers and other citizens often don't know about counseling and legal services that are available – or where to call to get them.

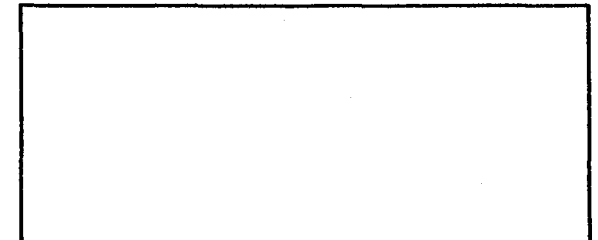
Civic groups may develop these directories as a community service. Local businesses may help fund them; or the local newspaper may be willing to print and distribute them.

Support Groups

As the number of consultations grows, small support groups of 4-6 couples in similar situations can be formed. This is important for socialization as well as education. Families in financial difficulty often feel isolated.

Support groups will help people as they work through hard decisions like possibly liquidating the business, seeking alternative employment or even relocating geographically. As these groups develop they can be linked to other resources and educational programs. Examples include local job service offices, employment counseling, AVTI programs on job searches, and identifying marketable skills.

Project Support is designed to be proactive – to seek people who need help. And it is intended to respond quickly and with care to those who request help. Contact your County Extension Office for more information.



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