

Cultivating Resiliency for Women in Agriculture

 cultivatingresiliency.transistor.fm/episodes/6-increasing-joy-and-happiness-in

Megan Roberts: Welcome to this session of our Cultivating Resiliency for Women in Agriculture podcast, series one. The Cultivating Resiliency project develops tools for women in agriculture to recognize, adapt to, and develop positive coping strategies to life stresses. This podcast series is developed from our Cultivating Resiliency webinar sessions. I'm Megan Roberts and I co-lead this project along with Doris Mold. In this podcast, we feature Shauna Reitmeier and Brenda Mack as our session hosts. Shauna and Brenda are professionals in behavioral health with family ties to farming. In this session, we talk about focusing on increasing joy and happiness, even in the midst of stressful times in agriculture. First, we hear from Shauna and then you hear Brenda join in.

Shauna Reitmeier: As we go into this conversation today about joy and happiness we all, as farmers, I remember growing up on my farm and I have to think back why did my grandparents go into farming? Why did my dad decide to farm? And I'm sure all of you listening that are in farming, ranching, agriculture industry went into this because it brought you joy and it brought you some happiness. It's that question of what drew me into this that made me happy when things may seem really out of control, or stressful, or that positive stress turns negative? Is how do you take this happiness and take that memory lane back to why didn't we do this? So remember that. Keep that in the back of your mind, as we talk about joy and happiness. When things get stressful, why did you start going into agriculture and farming and ranching?

Brenda Mack: All right. So we just want you to think a little bit about these sayings that are out there. Happiness is not defined by obtaining everything you want, but by appreciating everything you have. And happiness is not out there. It's in you. Be happy not because everything is good, but because you see the good in everything. It really reminds me, Shauna, I think about what do I have control over in my life? I don't have control over farm commodities. I don't have control over the weather. I don't have control over my husband's reaction to things. I have control over me. You have the ability to alter or change your thoughts. When we look at the happiness and joy and gratitude research, that is foundational, is modifying your negative or self-defeating thoughts to more optimistic or positive or hopeful thoughts. I know that's really easy to say. I would encourage you to practice that. On a couple of earlier seminars, we provided a worksheet that's a self-care

self-talk worksheet of taking your old patterns, your negative patterns of talking and changing those old patterns to new patterns that have a direct impact on how you feel and then how you behave.

Shauna Reitmeier: That's that thought the feeling and then the behavior or the action that you do based on that. When you have one that's negative, how do you use that framework to flip it?

Brenda Mack: Yeah.

Shauna Reitmeier: Right? That's the one you're talking about, Brenda.

Brenda Mack: So I think about this. I read a study one time that as women, we are often most critical about our body image and how we look. So I think about something like, "I hate how my stomach looks. I have too many rolls," and how can I reframe that? Because you don't feel good when you say that to yourself. That probably one makes you want to stay home and not go out to coffee with your friend because maybe your jeans are a little too tight. But if you can think about or reframe to say, "I'm really proud of myself that I walked three times outside this week and I'm feeling stronger and healthier, and maybe I'm going to wear my yoga pants out to have coffee with my friend." So again, it's not taking a self-defeating statement and being untruthful to yourself, but it's finding the honest way, an honest answer about something more positive or hopeful or optimistic that you can give yourself that message instead.

In talking about research, there's been many studies on what specifically can increase your happiness level. Happiness, the definition of happiness is different for everyone. Happiness for you may be, or for me, may be just a sense of peace, a sense of overall wellbeing. Although, time to time, you may see an escalation in your happiness level because maybe your child got a scholarship to go to college, or you had an afternoon of hanging out with your dog and your kids and your husband, and you played football in the farm yard. You may see a spike in happiness. But my point is, is that happiness and what that definition is, is just a little bit different for everyone. Some of the studies show, many studies show that expressing gratitude leads to an increase in happiness.

Megan Roberts: Let's talk more about a simple way to show gratitude. You can write a so-called gratitude letter. To do this, think of someone who did something for you that you were very thankful for, but you have not yet expressed your gratitude to. Get a piece of paper and write out a letter expressing your thanks and send it to them, or if possible, read it to them. The Greater Good Science Center at University of California Berkeley showed this simple act of gratitude, writing a gratitude letter, scientifically increased happiness a month later in participants.

Shauna Reitmeier: Here are, just again, are some more ways that you can consider in boosting your happiness. What I really like is with Brenda tying in the science and the research behind this because some of these things are really writing a letter as science, but we can see what the data of what people were feeling before and their levels of happiness and what their levels of happiness were afterwards. That research on even people that just kept a gratitude journal, people that had been on antidepressants because they were feeling so depressed and were not able to find happiness, once implementing just completing a gratitude journal of writing down their three good things in a day and why that was something that they were grateful for were able to reduce the use of their antidepressants over 30 day period of time.

Brenda Mack: Yeah. I want to add to that a little bit because in the therapy that I used to do with individuals and families and this farm community, as well as when I teach about stress and burnout and self-care to students in the classroom, and when I'm doing presentation on these topics, I often talk about the three good things activity because it is something that is pretty quick and easy to do in a busy and overwhelming farm life. So the idea is that before you go to bed at night, you should have a piece of paper or a journal or your phone with a way to type in what are three separate and distinct? And maybe a little bit of detail about what that was during the day. Every night, you should change it up so that you're not saying, "Oh, I got up and worked outside today," but that you try to change those three good things so that it doesn't become repetitive or monotonous. It sort of loses its value in doing that. What the studies show about this is after a 30 day period of time, individuals see their happiness level increase.

Brenda Mack: Additionally, I just wanted to talk a little bit about the science and studies regarding random acts of kindness. It's another specific particular activity that you can do, and you can do random acts of kindness that don't cost any money. You hear about those random acts of kindness of going through the Starbucks or Caribou Coffee, pay it forward, the drive through on buying, the coffee for the person behind you, but you can also do things like shoveling your next door neighbor's sidewalk. Or if we're in the farm community, we've

had so much snow this winter, especially in our region, clearing snow for your neighbor next to you. So those random acts of kindness not only increase the happiness level of the person who's been the recipient of that, but it increases your own happiness level. I thought this was kind of an interesting activity to do. Focus on doing five nice things for someone all in the same day. Then write down how that makes you feel. Part of what Shauna and I want you to walk away with today is some practical, tangible, but grounded in research activities that you can do to increase your joy and happiness. One other thing that I do is because I do quite a bit of driving is I will download books on audible or some other site that is connected to joy and happiness. When I have a hot, steaming delicious cup of coffee and the sun is rising and I'm listening to the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu talk about joy and kindness and compassion, it just warms my heart. So these are just a few of our lessons learned based on science that you might want to consider what works for you. Maybe some of these works and others don't, but that's what we hope to offer today.

The power of exercise and going out and doing something physical. So walk yourself out of that bad mood. Studies show that even a 10 minute walk will immediately boost your brain chemistry that increases your happiness. Gratitude increases happiness. Happiness spontaneously rises from gratitude and becomes a continuous feedback loop. Again, so if you're expressing your gratitude, say you expressed your gratitude to your mentor and your mentor reached out to you, which again then fed your happiness. Really, what the overarching theme of this series is, it's about how do we build our resilience as women connected to farming and ranching and agriculture? Remember ways to build your resilience are things like exercising, eating right, getting a good amount of sleep, connecting with a friend, a pastor, or a counselor. But those are some tangible types of activities that can increase our resilience and help us to find ways to bounce back from adverse experiences.

Shauna Reitmeier: Yeah, I think the whole intention is to be able to take these pieces of information through this series is going to help you bounce back. It is giving you tools to be resilient. So sometimes you'll read that. It's like, "Okay, great. I'll find ways to bounce back. Well, how do I do that?" Well, it's this continuum of pieces around building self-care, keeping ourselves physically active, building those connections, active listening, dealing with conflict. All of those together can help you bounce back.

Brenda Mack: Shauna, we've also talked about how oftentimes, we are our harshest critic. And I would say another activity to build your happiness and increase your self-compassion is write yourself a gratitude letter. Write yourself a gratitude letter and file it away somewhere or put it away somewhere. Every once in a while, if you're having a difficult day and you're being really hard on yourself, go to that drawer and pick up that letter. So again, in coming to a close here, here's just five additional tips to happiness.

Set your alarm and wake up to a song or music that you like. Music can also be very uplifting. I don't love to clean the house, but if I put on some music and my favorite artists, it makes it a little easier to do. Again, maybe not only look at writing about the three good things that happened at night, but you could start your morning by identifying three things that you're thankful for. Being clear about your intentions and then having a schedule for a day is a tip to happiness. Eating healthy, being prepared, not eating on the run, but maybe having a healthy lunch packed can influence your happiness levels. Then get exercise and bask in the sun like you just said. Get that vitamin D to increase your well-being and how you feel.

Megan Roberts: Thanks for joining us on this Cultivating Resiliency for Women in Agriculture podcast, series one. In this session, we learned about the science of joy and happiness. What don't we have control over? What do we have control over? We do have the ability to focus on modifying our negative thoughts and actions into positive thoughts and actions. Focusing on why we chose agriculture, what we are grateful for, and ways we can be kind to others can help increase our joy and happiness in the midst of our agricultural lives. All of these tools and tips are meant to help us bounce back in the face of adversity and be more resilient through the ups and downs of farming. This project is a collaboration of American Agri-Women, District 11 Agri-Women, University of Minnesota Extension, Women and Ag Network, and the Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center, or UMASH. You may find the recordings for our entire webinars series on the UMASH or American Agri-Women websites under Cultivating Resiliency. Our next podcast will focus on tips for building healthy relationships in stressful times.