

This transcript was exported on Feb 08, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Kari Robideau: Thank you for joining the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development podcast. My name is Kari Robideau and I'm an extension educator. Now in this podcast, we are going to continue our series on youth and agriculture with a discussion on how rural and farm stress impacts young people. Joining me in this discussion are Aly Kloeckner and Samantha Lahman, both extension educators with the Center for Youth Development. Thank you both for being a part of this series.

Samantha Lahman: Thanks for having us, Kari. It's nice to be back again.

Aly Kloeckner: Yes, thank you. I'm really excited to be able to cover this topic with you guys.

Kari Robideau: Samantha has been a part of this series as we've covered topics around generation Z working on the farm, we've discussed how generational differences impact work styles, and now Aly is going to move us into youth and farm stress topic. She's done extensive work in how rural and farm stress impacts young people and how those of us who work with them can support them and their families.

So will you two please take a moment to introduce yourselves and Aly, I'll have you specifically talk about how this became a topic of interest for you. But Samantha, let's start with you. We've had you on the last couple podcast, I've gotten you back on another one to help me talk with Aly through this conversation.

Samantha Lahman: Sure thing. So as Kari had introduced me, I'm Samantha Lahman. I grew up in central Minnesota in a very rural strong community, very focused in agriculture, a very common thing for us. And then I went on to study agriculture further in college, and now back here at the U of M where I get to work on the youth side that are involved in agriculture.

Aly Kloeckner: And I'm Aly Kloeckner. I'm a local extension educator working in Goodhue County and how it became an interest to me and my background are very intertwined. I grew up here in Goodhue County. I grew up on a dairy farm and went to the University of Minnesota for my undergrad, got a degree in animal science, and then I actually went to work in the agricultural industry as a dairy nutritionist for a few years.

Life changes quickly, and I took a leap of faith a few years ago and decided to work with youth. And now that I'm back in Goodhue County as the 4H extension educator, I'm really seeing how the impact of our farm economy and family situations are affecting youth off the farm, whether it be in school or at their after school programs. And it really drove home the point for me when my family due to some economic reasons, decided to sell the cows a few years back.

And I saw how I was reacting as a young adult, someone who's very stable in my position and in my job, but how that decision and how that impacted my family long term and how I was choosing to cope with that stress. And really thinking about that if my family had gone through this and made the decision to sell these cows when I was 16 or 17, how much more dramatically it would've impacted my upbringing.

Kari Robideau: Thank you for sharing that, Aly. I appreciate both the professional and personal view that you bring to this topic. Give us more background than as you had your personal experience as an adult, what are you seeing in the rural youth that you're working with? How are you seeing stress play out in their lives?

Aly Kloeckner: Well, youth in our rural communities have grown up in families that are very ... Tradition is a strong piece in their lives, and that tradition of farming and that rural culture and the values that come with growing up in a rural community can really complicate your family and that rural stress piece. Youth just generally have a lot of stress. They're growing up, they're being asked what they want to do with their lives. They're having friendship issues, hormonal, puberty, everything is coming at them at once. And then you throw on the family dynamic of the farm and the family farm and the family business, it can really complicate things.

And when we're thinking about how our rural economy and our farm stress are affecting the community, we can't forget about the young people who are immersed in it because they're more aware of it and impacted by it than most people would imagine. They see it in their families, but they're also living it with their families. They're in the barn, they're helping with field work. They're very immersed in their family businesses. And when they hear the whispers on the other side of the wall about finances, or how are we going to make this next payment, they're less likely to speak to that and they'll just internalize. And so I think it's really important that we as educators, as adults in the community, are prepared and ready to help address these internalized frustrations and concerns that these youth have.

Kari Robideau: So then Aly, you've done a great job explaining for us how this is impacting young people and especially maybe even more so in our rural areas. So why do you see ... As youth workers, why do we need to understand the stress that rural youth are experiencing?

Aly Kloeckner: Well, farm youth are often raised in the mindset of the agrarian imperative, and I know that that's not a term that's widely used so I'd like to explain it a little bit. It's a term that Michael Rossman has used extensively and really it helps explain why people engaged in agriculture, take the loss of the family farm or a large change in the family business more devastatingly. The significance of the values in agriculture so important because when that ambiguous ... There's a very real

physical loss when something happens on the family farm, but there's also a very real ambiguous loss that they've let down their grandfather, they've let down the people who've come before them who've worked so hard to sustain that business, that family farm, and now they feel a disappointment to these people that may have been long gone.

That piece of it really makes it more devastating to the families, and so with that agrarian imperative piece, it's really important to see the opportunity in this and that we can build old resilience in our youth and the ability to recover or adapt to these changing stressors, changing situations is really where youth development professionals can help. And why everybody working with youth in rural settings needs to understand that background information in what that rural culture is.

Kari Robideau: All three of us on this call grew up on a farm, and I think we all can feel that you don't just change jobs when you grow up on a farm, as you might experience, if you are in more of an urban or any other profession. That when you're on a farm, you're living it, it's a way of life, that you are living where you work, but I don't even know that all families consider it their job, right? Or I mean, it's a way of life. It's their family business, and I appreciate, Aly, how you were bringing up the so generational aspect of this and that feeling of perhaps disappointment that you might be causing that older generation when there are challenges on the farm, that they were able to keep it going and you weren't.

You also mentioned resilience and that is absolutely a place where we as youth workers can try to make a difference, right? So what do these effective practices look like that we can do as youth workers as we're working with young people to help facilitate resilience, to help alleviate some stress, and be a part of working through difficult situations on the farm?

Aly Kloeckner: It's really important to engage with our youth in conversations one on one. A lot of times youth are not going to bring up stressors or big family events in front of a group, and so finding that way to engage with them in a more private setting is really probably going to be the quickest way for you to be able to assist the youth. But another thing that I think we've learned and particularly through the pandemic is that our kids need a space to just be kids, to be youth, to come and forget about the very adult challenges in their lives. Participation in activities that they enjoy and where they can build a support network, whether it be with other community members, youth, extension educators, those youth programs where they can do those things can be a relief from our outside stressors and give them that opportunity to let it go for a few hours.

And then as youth workers, it's really important for us to watch out for signs of stress in our youth. Now this is across the board a list of things that when youth are stressed they're going to exhibit being extra moody or withdrawing from activities. They can express worries repeatedly. And I think often this one is one

that we don't read enough into. Youth are going to express that worried about things that seem so small and minor as adults, but if you hear that same concern over and over again, it's probably just the tip of the iceberg and you should engage on that conversation to get to the root of what's truly worrying them.

Sleeping and eating too much or too little. I always laugh at that one because I know as a teenager, my sleep schedule was everywhere anyways. But making sure if it's not normal for a youth, if they're falling asleep in class for and they hadn't done that before, it's really important to lock onto those changes in behavior and making sure that you're acknowledging that you see them and asking that youth what they need and really building in coping skills in your activities, mindfulness exercises, guided meditation, even something as simple as creating art. It really helps our youth to express themselves and to get their feelings out, to reduce stress when they're able to physically relieve that stress.

Kari Robideau: So Aly, I love that you mentioned that mindfulness, those kind of aspects of dealing with stress, of finding ways to either breathe through it or work through those minor inconveniences that help with those big issues, those underlying problems. And I think one of the things I really think about is having worked with producers in the past of the stress that they feel as adults and very commonly, they don't know how to handle that stress either. They really don't think about mindfulness or that mental health aspect, so I think there's amazing work that we can do here as youth development professionals in helping facilitate and teach them those skills now that will so much benefit them in just a few years if they're stepping into that role of continuing the farming operation or moving into another stressful type job, that they're able to process those feelings and process their emotions in a really safe and helpful way.

Aly Kloeckner: Absolutely. And with that as youth development professionals, we need to be modeling those healthy coping mechanisms. How are we responding to situations in front of youth? Are we rushing into it or are we taking the moment for deep breath? Are we saying, "I don't have the answer right now, but I'll get back to you." In a calm way. And as adults, we need to be very verbal when we are stressed and say, "I'm having a bad day, I need to go for a walk. Or I'm having a bad day, I need to go call my mom. Or call a close friend." Talk it out and really modeling those coping mechanisms, those healthy coping mechanisms for our youth, will help them build their toolbox for later in life, which long term should help the rural stress issue on a larger scale.

Kari Robideau: Aly, do you have any examples of your work with rural youth and how you've been able to use these tips in your work?

Aly Kloeckner: With the pandemic, it's obviously, in the last year been a whole different animal with trying to engage and work with youth, but what I've really found is being open and being accessible to the youth is really important. And so whether it's a text message or a phone call, or I've even had some youth reach out to me on

social media and say, "Hey, I know you don't friend us but I need to talk to somebody." Those are important access points for our youth, and making sure that we're accessible to our youth is one of the most important things I think I've learned in the last year.

When it comes to in person programs, when you're physically with a, a youth, another thing I've learned is you need to make sure that you're approaching the topic at an appropriate time after the program has ended. Usually you don't want to ask the, a youth to delve deep into their emotions and, and in, into their mind before and all a differently different scheduled program, making sure that you're not adding stress instead of helping relieve it.

Kari Robideau: I think you bring up a really great point there. How do we know as youth professionals, when to bring in the parents or guardians to have those conversations with other caring adults in their lives?

Aly Kloeckner: I think it's always important that if you've got a concern or you've had a conversation with the youth, that you are also speaking with the other appropriate adult else in their lives, if you know that mom and dad, maybe aren't as involved and you're speaking with grandma, but just clueing in those caring adults in their lives and saying, "Listen, we've noticed this. I'd like you to keep an eye on it. Let me know if there's anything I can do to support your family." And leave it at that. And if you feel like things are escalating or as you get further down the line into the conversation and you feel like you need to bring in more professionals, then it's time to do that. But I think it's always important that you're talking with the parent or guardian or someone very close to the family almost immediately.

Kari Robideau: Aly, I want to thank you for joining Samantha and I today for talking us through how we are seeing stress in our rural youth. You've talked us through why it's so important that we as youth workers are aware of this, especially when we're working in those rural settings and what those effective practices can look like. Two things that stand out for me that we need to be an example, we need to be a role model of how we handle stress is really important for young people to see.

And then also, a really ... Just a keyword that stood out for me is support, that we are providing kids with that space to be kids. That we are helping them build that support system, that we are a part of that, and that we're recognizing who else is in that support system and we're making sure that everyone is aware and everyone is a part of, again, supporting that young person in what they're going through. And that we're watching for changes and being willing to acknowledge it and talk it through with them.

So I just want to thank you so much for sharing your experience, for sharing your tips, and for being a part of the podcast today.

This transcript was exported on Feb 08, 2022 - view latest version [here](#).

Aly Kloeckner: Thank you very much. It's a heavy topic and it's a hard topic, but I'm so glad that we're all ready to have these conversations now.

Kari Robideau: And as we come to a conclusion in this podcast, I would like to encourage all of you to go to our website at [www.extension.umn.edu/youth](http://www.extension.umn.edu/youth). We have research based information and training opportunities for youth development professionals and volunteers there. We also have a webpage that I'm going to insert into the description of this podcast specifically on rural youth stress. And Aly is a lead author of that information, and I know that she would be willing to discuss this further with you and even help you find more resources if you would like.

Thank you both again for joining me in this podcast.

Aly Kloeckner: Thanks for having us, Kari.

Samantha Lahman: Thank you.

Kari Robideau: This is Kari Robideau from the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development. Please tune in again soon.