



**FarmFirst**



Assistance  
for  
Vermont's  
Agricultural  
Producers

1-877-493-6216

### What is Farm First?

- ◆ Free, Professional, Confidential Service
- ◆ Licensed Counselors, Resource Specialists
- ◆ Consultation, Support, Strategic Solutions
- ◆ Statewide Program in Vermont
- ◆ No Sign-Up Needed



### Who is Covered by Farm First?

- ◆ All VT Farm Owners and Family Members Grossing \$10K+/year From Agriculture



MEMBER CARD



- Confidential / free / 24/7
- Consultation on any concern
- Resource/referral info
- For VT farm owners & family grossing \$10K+/year in Ag
- No paperwork or co-pays

Call **1-877-493-6216 (day or night)**  
**[www.farmfirst.org](http://www.farmfirst.org)** (pw: *farm*)

A program of Invest EAP/ Voc Rehab VT in partnership with VCIL and the VT Agencies of Agriculture and Human Services



**Connecting you with the support and resources you need to succeed!**

- ◆ **Facilitated Family Discussions**
- ◆ **Support and Debriefing Following Critical Incidents**
- ◆ **On-Farm Assessments and Assistance for Farming with Disabling Conditions**
- ◆ **Technical Adaptations**
- ◆ **Farm Leadership Solutions**
- ◆ **Counseling or Consulting for Any Situation**



**Call Farm First at 1-877-493-6216**  
day or night



**MEMBER CARD**



- Legal
- Stress
- Financial
- Personnel
- Conflict
- Injury
- Relationship
- Alcohol/Drugs
- Depression
- Healthcare

**Call 1-877-493-6216**



# Utilization & Outreach Report

for

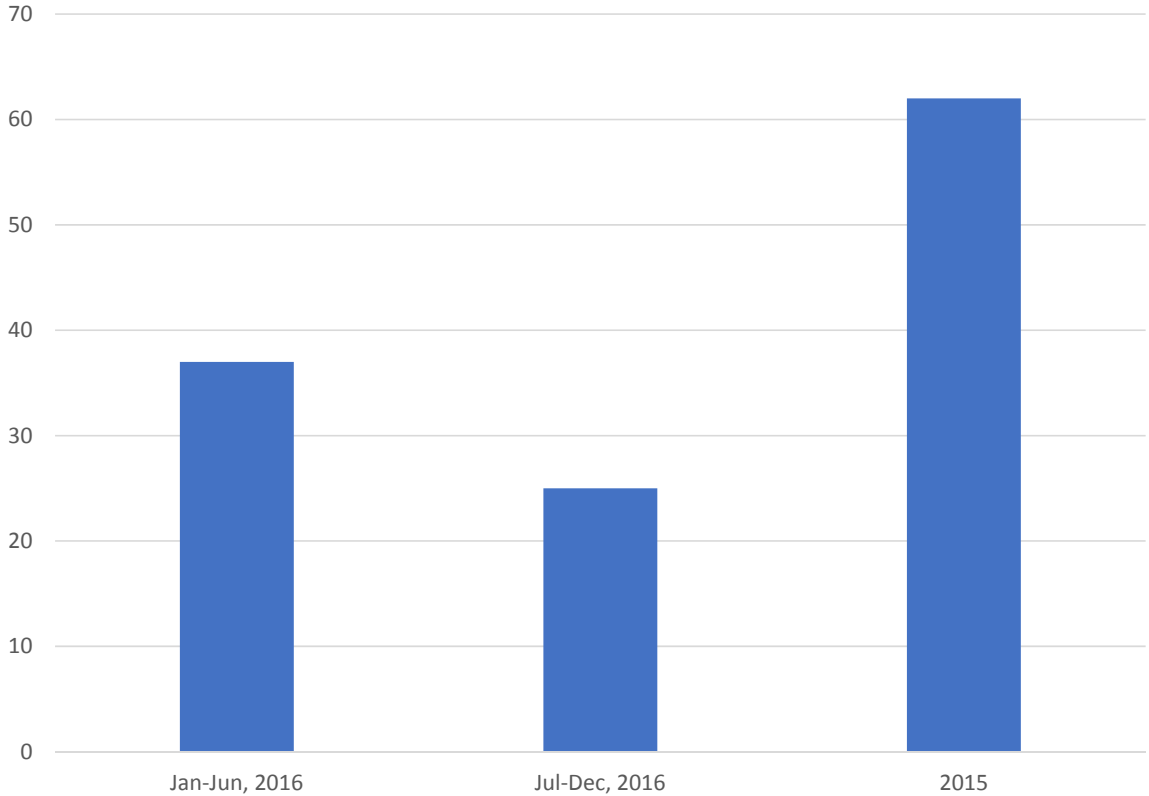
## FARM FIRST

January 1, 2016 - December 31, 2016

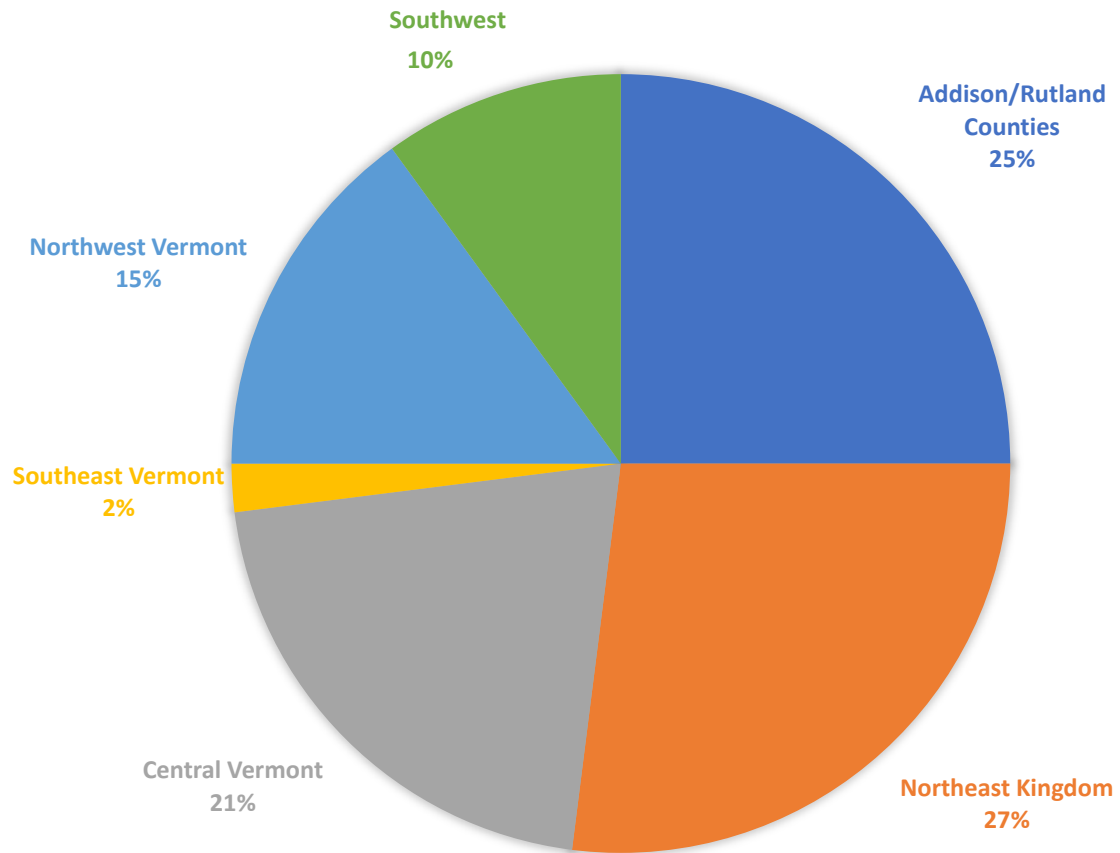


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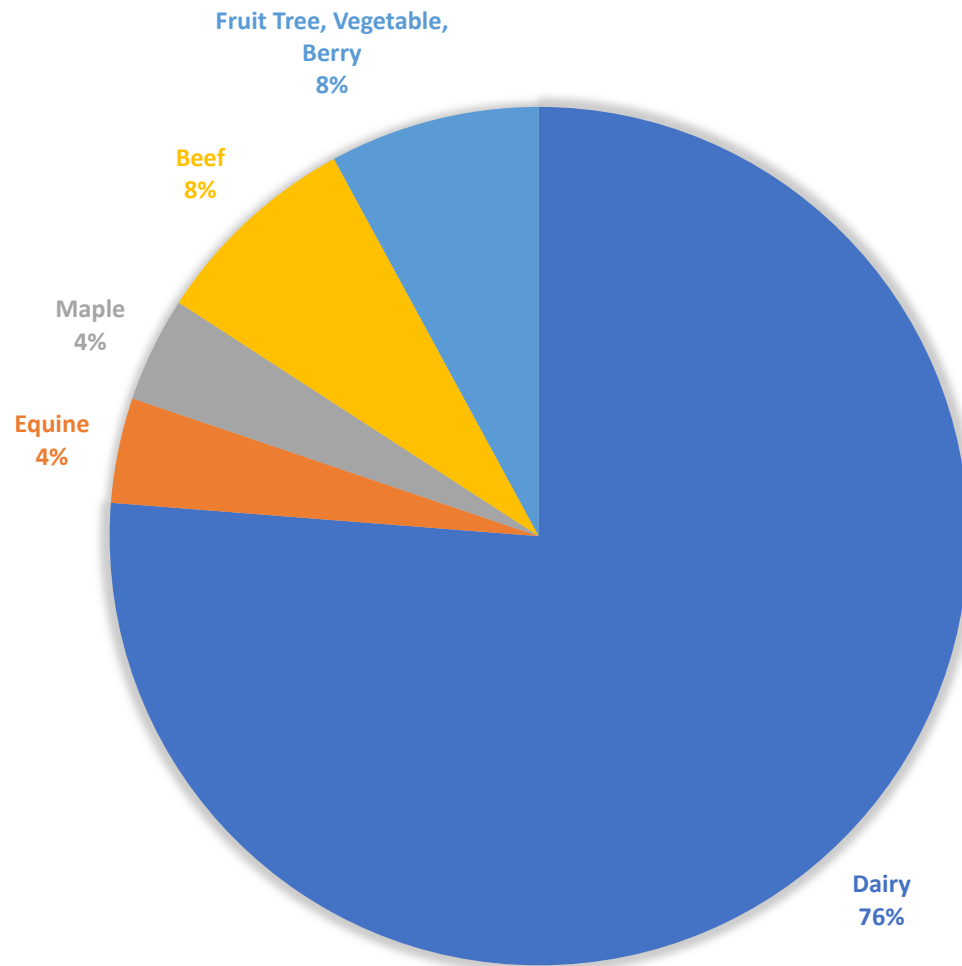
### Farmers using Farm First for Individual Counseling



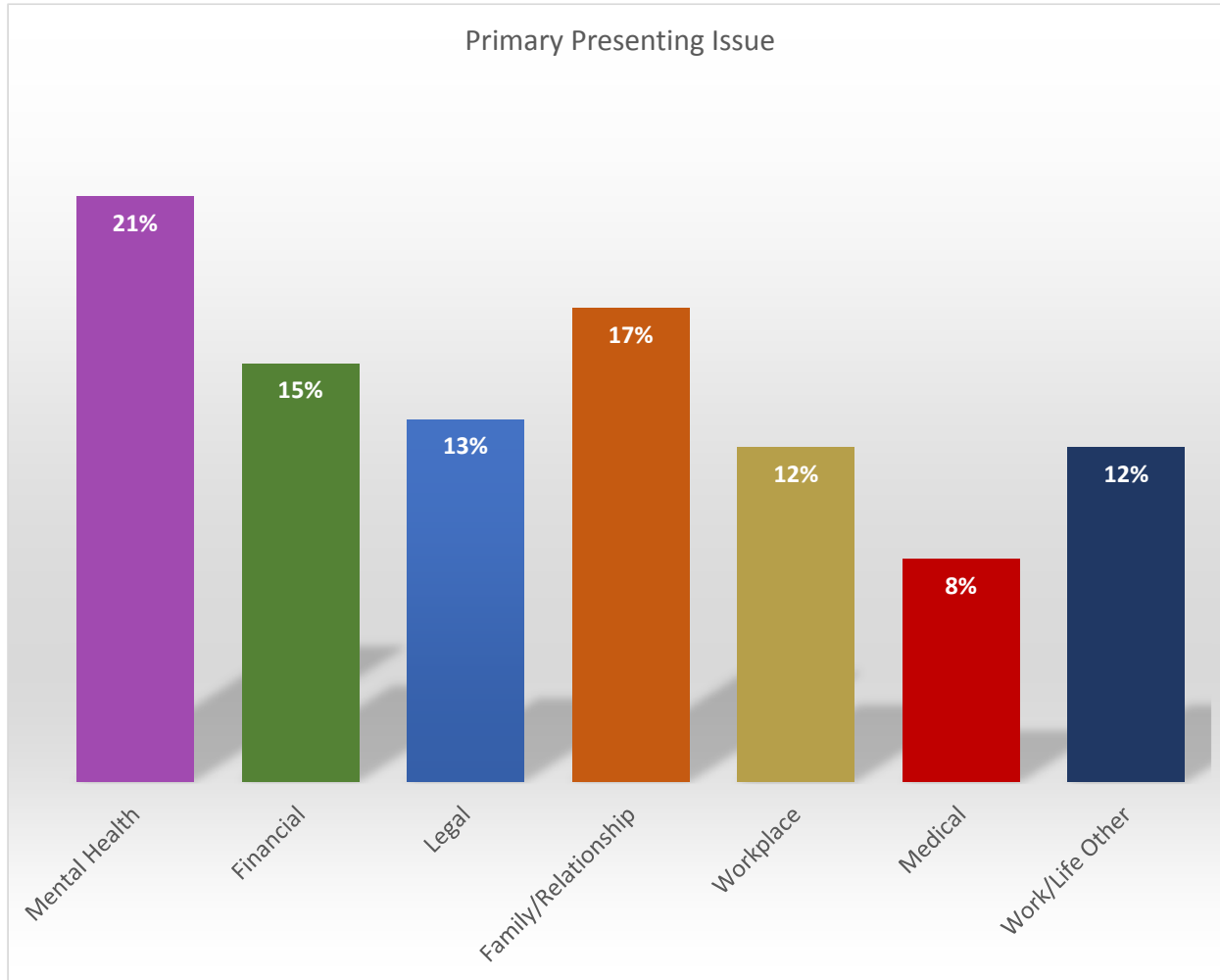
## GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION



## FARM TYPE

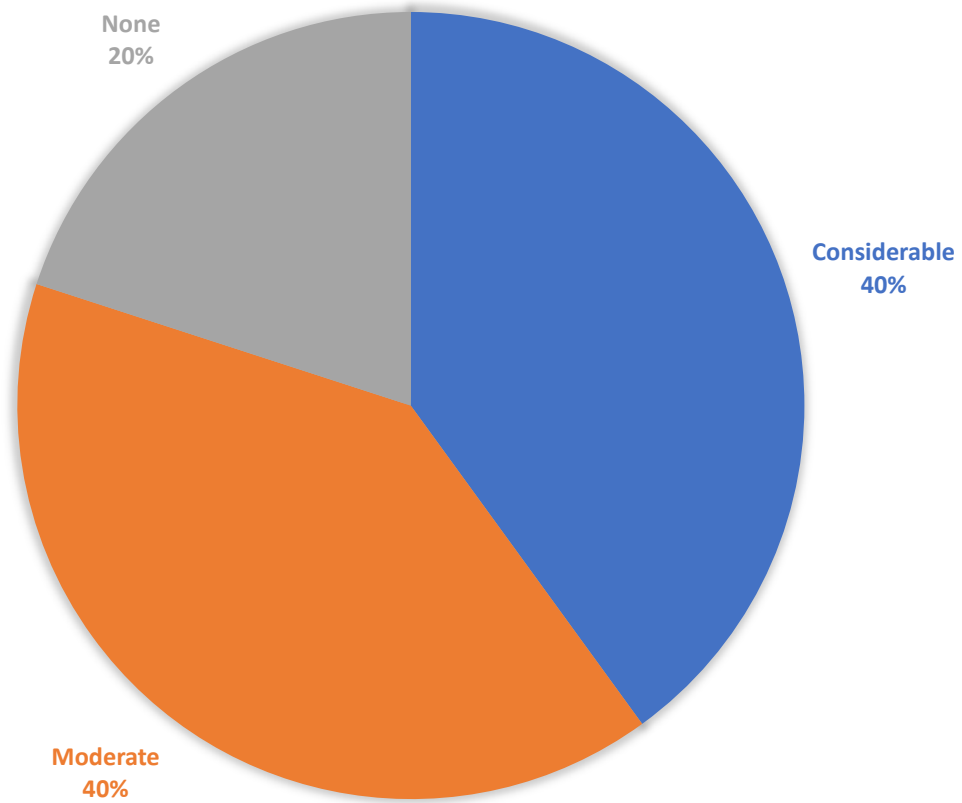


### Primary Presenting Issue

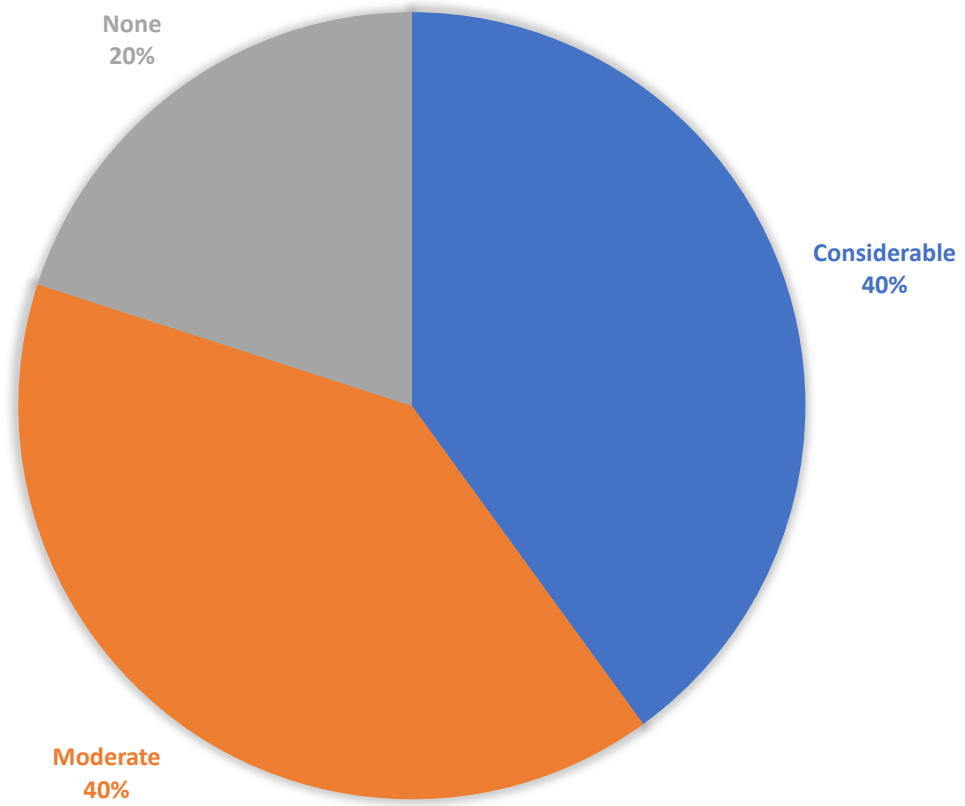




## STRESS LEVEL



### IMPACT OF PROBLEM ON WORK



UTILIZATION REPORT

**FARM FIRST**

January 01, 2016 - December 31, 2016

**Organizational Services Summary**

Date	Type	Duration	Location	Attendees
1/15/2016	<b>Customized Service</b>	5	Lake Morey	100
<b>Details:</b>	Annual Grazing and Live stock Conference Spoke to entire audience explaining Farm First services Made contact with org. admin about further promotion efforts			
1/22/2016	<b>General Meeting</b>	1.5		5
<b>Details:</b>	Planning Meeting for Farm First Collaboration: VR, EAP, VCIL			
1/26/2016	<b>Customized Service</b>	5		20
<b>Details:</b>	VT Farm Show- Farm First Representation at Healthy Farmers, Healthy Farms Table			
1/27/2016	<b>Customized Service</b>	5		30
<b>Details:</b>	VT Farm Show- WDEV Radio Interview and Farm First Representation at Healthy Farmers, Healthy Farms Table			
1/28/2016	<b>Customized Service</b>	6		60
<b>Details:</b>	VT Farm Show- Speech about Farm First at Dairy Meeting and Farm First Representation at Healthy Farmers, Healthy Farms Table			
2/14/2016	<b>Customized Service</b>	6		15
<b>Details:</b>	NOFA Conference- Myra Handy promoted Farm First to 10 farmers and 5 service providers			
2/17/2016	<b>Consult: Other</b>	.75		2
<b>Details:</b>	Outreach to service providers in order to offer support to family of young farmer who died in tragic accident on lake			
2/24/2016	<b>Consult: CISD</b>	.58		1
<b>Details:</b>	Consult with Ag Employee re. death of young farmer from exposure on lake. She will reach out to family for Farm First.			
3/15/2016	<b>Strategy Session</b>	3		2
<b>Details:</b>	Prep for Webinar 3/22/16			
3/22/2016	<b>Wellness Workshop</b>	1.5		34
<b>Details:</b>	Webinar provided for Service Providers: How to Help Those Hard to Help			
4/1/2016		.17		29
<b>Details:</b>	No details to report			
4/19/2016	<b>General Meeting</b>	5.33		6
<b>Details:</b>	Farm First Collaboration meeting between VCIL, VR, Farm First			
5/19/2016	<b>Orientation</b>	1		3
<b>Details:</b>	Myra presented on Farm First to new Water Quality staff (Tyler, Steve, Clark). Talked about how to talk with farmers and how/when to refer to Farm First.			
6/16/2016	<b>Wellness Workshop</b>	3		10
<b>Details:</b>	VT Farm Viability Training for Business Planners- Farm First manager spoke about mental health issues and how Farm First addresses these.			

UTILIZATION REPORT

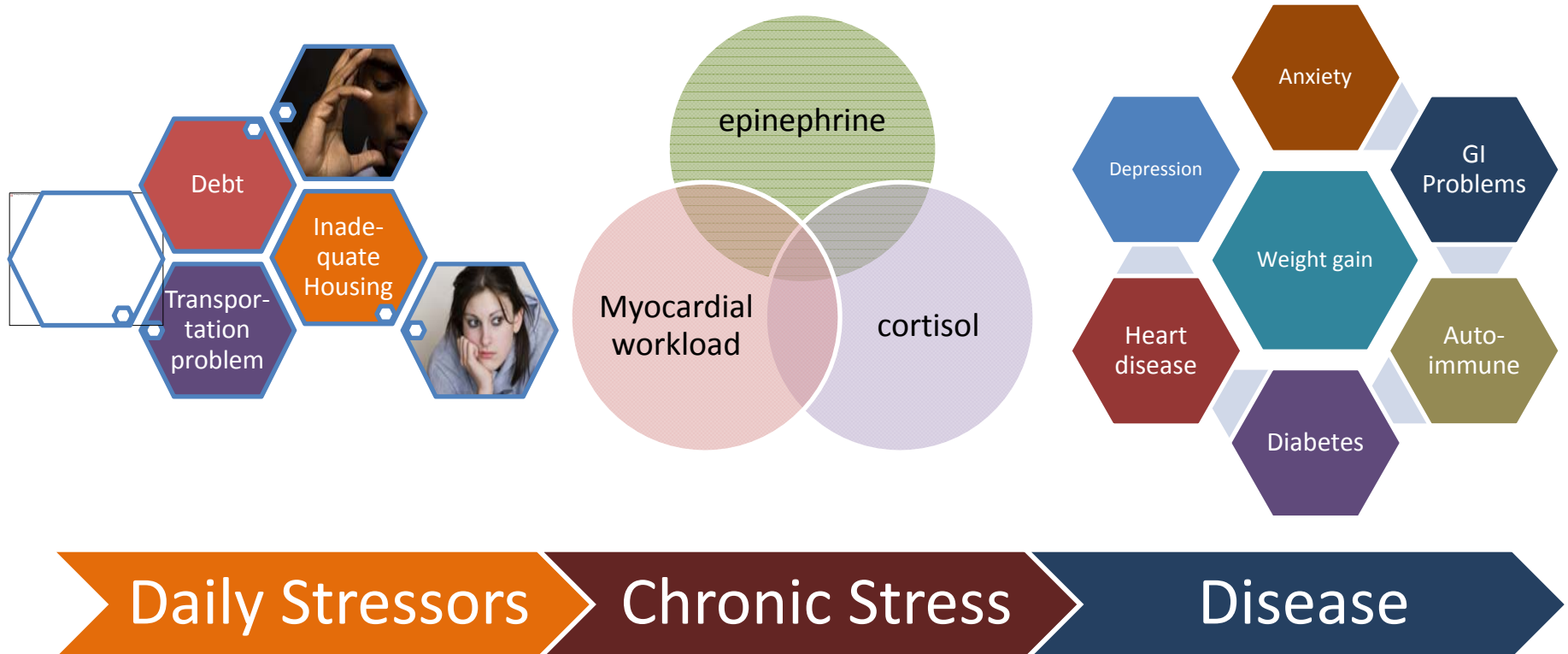
**FARM FIRST**

January 01, 2016 - December 31, 2016

**Organizational Services Summary**

Date	Type	Duration	Location	Attendees
8/31/2016	Consult: Troubled Employee	.5		1
<b>Details:</b>	Consult w. Tom Younkman- VCIL- as he referred a dairy farming couple with multiple health problems including depression to Farm First.			
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>44.33</b>		<b>318</b>

# Chronic Stress Leads to Disease



McEwen B. S., 2000. "Allostasis and allostatic load: implications for neuropsychopharmacology". *Neuropsychopharmacology* 22 (2): 108–24. doi:10.1016/S0893-133X(99)00129-3. PMID 10649824.;  
Hara MR, et al. 2011. "A stress response pathway regulates DNA damage through  $\beta$ 2-adrenoreceptors and  $\beta$ -arrestin-1." *Nature*. 2011 Aug 21;477(7364):349-53. doi: 10.1038/nature10368.PMID:21857681[PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE

Table 6

*Change Over Time Results for Cases At Risk on Primary Outcomes with Health Care Cost Implications*

Outcome	Measure	At Risk Status			Before EAP	After EAP	Change	Statistical Test of Change	
		Risk Criteria	%	<i>n</i> of cases	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	%	Paired <i>t</i> -test of difference	Effect Size <i>d</i>
<b>Higher scores indicate better health: Goal to increase scores</b>									
<b>HEALTHY LIFESTYLE OUTCOMES</b>									
Healthy Eating	Rating (range 1-4)	Score < 4	87%	131	2.14 (0.69)	2.48 (0.78)	16% Better	$t(130) = -4.24, p < .001$ (paired $r = .37$ )	.46 Small
Physical Exercise	Rating (range 2-8)	Score < 6	81%	122	3.10 (1.02)	4.28 (1.67)	38% Better	$t(121) = -7.76, p < .001$ (paired $r = .30$ )	.83 Large
<b>Lower scores indicate better health: Goal to decrease scores and reduce risk</b>									
<b>MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES</b>									
Depression	Symptoms on PHQ-9 (range 0-27)	Score > 10	50%	75	16.57 (4.66)	8.26 (6.10)	50% Better	$t(74) = 11.49, p < .001$ (paired $r = .30$ )	1.51 Very Large
Stress	Rating (1-5)	Score > 3	45%	68	4.26 (0.44)	2.98 (1.04)	30% Better	$t(67) = 9.28, p < .001$ (paired $r = -.02$ )	1.56 Very Large
<b>ADDICTION-RELATED OUTCOMES</b>									
Smoking	Cigarettes smoked past month	Score > 0	39%	59	359 (394)	247 (282)	31% Better	$t(58) = 1.88, p = .08$ (paired $r = .11$ )	.33 Small
Hazardous Drinking	Binge drinking days past month	Score > 0	31%	46	7.62 (9.34)	5.04 (7.71)	34% Better	$t(45) = 2.45, p < .01$ (paired $r = .66$ )	.30 Small
Drug Use	Drug use days past month	Score > 0	21%	32	16.50 (12.09)	11.13 (11.39)	33% Better	$t(31) = 2.30, p < .05$ (paired $r = .37$ )	.46 Small

## Reducing Stress to Minimize Injury: The Nation's First Employee Assistance Program for Dairy Farmers

Steven Dickens, MA  
Earl Dotter, BS  
Myra Handy, MSW, LICSW  
Louise Waterman, BS

**ABSTRACT.** This commentary describes the nation's first Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for dairy farmers. It discusses (1) the significant financial strain and emotional stress experienced by Vermont's dairy farmers reaching dangerous levels; (2) the effect of stress and anxiety on workplace safety; and (3) the highly effective role of an EAP in reducing stress. The commentary depicts the Farm First program model of prevention and early intervention services for dairy farmers that include short-term solution-focused counseling, resources, and referrals to help farmers address the stressors they confront daily. The Farm First program mitigates depression, anxiety, financial and legal problems, family issues, and other stressors on farms that are correlated with accidents, on-the-job injuries, disability, and harm to self or others. EAPs specifically have been shown to reduce on-the-job injuries by reducing employee stress. Ultimately the program has seen good usage commensurate with that at any place of employment. Further, in addition to seeking help for themselves, a number of farmers have used this management consultation service to obtain assistance with farm worker issues. Although the authors have not systematically studied this approach, it shows promise and the authors encourage its duplication and further study in other states.

**KEYWORDS.** Agriculture, anxiety, dairy farmers, depression, EAP, early intervention, Employee Assistance Program, farm, farming, on-the-job injuries, prevention, reducing stress, safety, stress, workplace

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Myra Handy is Clinical Operations Manager, Invest EAP Program, State of Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Burlington, Vermont, USA.

Louise Waterman is Education Coordinator, State of Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Montpelier, Vermont, USA.

This commentary summarizes the poster session "Reducing Stress to Minimize Injury: The Nation's First Employee Assistance Program for Dairy Farmers and Related Photo Documentary Project" at the Agricultural Safety and Health Council of America/National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health conference, held September 25–27, 2013, in Minneapolis.

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In 2009, milk prices declined precipitously. Vermont dairy farmers felt a dangerous rise in stress and financial strain. Stoic farmers were breaking down in tears in the offices of lenders. When a nearby New York State dairy farmer killed his herd and then himself, the stress throughout the agricultural industry was nearly palpable.

Recognizing the emergency, representatives from the Agency of Agriculture and Invest Employee Assistance Program (EAP) formulated a response. The Farm First program was born: the nation's first program to make wide-ranging EAP services and support available to *individual* farmers and their families. The innovative program has been so successful and so well utilized by farmers that in 2012, the Vermont legislature agreed to use state dollars to fund the program.

### ***SAFETY CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS—AND THE NEED FOR REFORM***

The US Department of Labor conducted a large-scale survey of businesses using EAPs, and reports that well over 90% of these organizations indicate that the presence of an EAP had resulted in fewer injuries on the job.<sup>1</sup> The International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans surveyed 185 benefit plan administrators about substance abuse services for multiemployer fund participants and reported that 49% of those surveyed reported reduced disability costs thanks to the EAP, and the EAP resulted in reduced workers compensation costs for 41% of respondents.

Prevention and early intervention programs such as Farm First reduce on-the-job accidents by reducing stress. The US Department of Labor reports that more than half of all on-the-job injuries are the result of people being distracted by thoughts not related to what they're doing in the moment. Various studies corroborate that workers who are stressed are more likely to have a propensity for *cognitive failures* resulting in accidents.<sup>2</sup> Cognitive failures include perceptual, attention, memory,

and action-related mental lapses that present as difficulties in concentrating, forgetfulness, and mental confusion.

Anecdotal reports to Farm First counselors from Vermont dairy producers affirm the relationship of cognitive failures to accidents. For example, one farmer reported to us falling asleep on his tractor while haying, and suddenly awakening before an accident occurred; another reported driving through a barn door due to inattention related to anxiety about a family substance abuse problem.

By self-report we know that Farm First has reduced these farmers' considerable stress levels, and therefore reduced the likelihood of distractions and other conditions that are known to correlate with accidents, by helping them resolve such issues as

- Family matters
- Farm personnel management problems
- Financial problems
- Substance abuse
- Legal difficulties
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Impacts of natural disasters

### ***OUTREACH***

As with any new and wide-ranging program, disseminating the information to our target audience has been the key to its success. EAP works closely with agricultural service providers such as the University of Vermont Extension and financial institutions to inform dairy farmers across the state about the program benefits and to encourage its use. The Vermont Secretary of Agriculture has been a champion of the program and continually promotes Farm First as a critical component of the statewide farm safety net.

On-the-farm outreach is perhaps one of the most unique facets of our program. Farm First staffers train service providers to explain the program and equip these providers with the information necessary to refer farmers. This is important because often it is the agricultural service provider who has a relationship with



a farmer and notice that he or she is in trouble. We conduct outreach directly to farmers at all major farm shows and conferences in the state.

We worked with the award-winning photo-journalist Earl Dotter to photo document our work with farmers as a means to outreach to new farmers and as part of prevention efforts to educate workers about hazards on farms. Mr. Dotter has documented the working lives and occupational hazards of American workers for nearly 30 years, from the Appalachian coal fields to nurses to fishermen.

We also use innovative strategies to remain front and center in farmers' lives, such as a Milk House poster contest, where farmers post educational Farm First posters and then call us to be eligible for prizes. As so much of Farm First is new to everyone, constant new marketing tactics are being put into place: right now, we are creating a mobile photo exhibit featuring Mr. Dotter's photography that will be brought to farm shows and other venues to further educate farmers about safe practices and to encourage use of the Farm First program.

### ***UTILIZATION: HOW IT WORKS, AND WHY***

Farm First is, at its core, a behavioral health program. In addition to providing resource information on a range of topics, we connect dairy producers with licensed mental health counselors and social services. Once the farmer has recognized a need for help through Farm First, there are several channels through which he or she can access support and resources. The program is staffed with licensed, agriculturally sensitive mental health counselors and resource specialists statewide to provide confidential help for any concern, 24/7. To reach a counselor, farmers call a dedicated toll-free line and are offered the service that best meets their needs. Often this is in-person counseling appointments (and we do strongly recommend that farmers "come off the farm" to meet with the Farm First counselor). Sometimes our counselors visit

the farm. Services also include facilitated conversations between family members, telephone consultations, crisis response, and help with resource issues such as financial assistance or legal difficulties.

### ***EFFECT: ON THE FARM AND BEYOND***

The prevention and early intervention model of stress reduction likely results in improved health outcomes for our dairy producers. Indeed, such outcomes are confirmed by numerous studies that demonstrate the health care cost savings of EAP programs.<sup>3-9</sup> Although we have not systematically studied this approach in dairy farming, it shows promise and we encourage its duplication and further study in other states. There is little reason to think that health care cost savings would not be realized in the dairy farmer population.

Stress is a major public health issue and one that drives up health care costs across the country. A wide range of research has linked chronic stress to disease, both directly and indirectly. For example, studies have demonstrated a connection between job-related demands and difficulty paying bills and resulting obesity and stress.<sup>10</sup> Stress has also been shown to lead to weight gain through stress-induced hormonal and metabolic changes as well as unhealthy eating behaviors.<sup>11</sup> Prolonged exposure to internal stress hormones such as epinephrine and cortisol in combination with other stress-mediating physiological agents such as increased myocardial workload has been demonstrated to precipitate more severe psychopathology and pathophysiology, including anxiety, depression, gastrointestinal problems, heart disease, sleep problems, weight gain, memory and concentration impairment, chronic headaches, a range of autoimmune disorders, and other chronic conditions.<sup>12</sup>

Proactively providing resources to farmers that address stress, enhancing quality of life, and improving health outcomes are the goals of the Farm First Program in Vermont.

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