

Healthy Farmer

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The Third Shift in Farming

Many farm women also hold down off-farm employment. For these women, their day is not even half over by the time their off-farm employment ends. Farm women return to their farm homes to take on household tasks, chores outside the house and family commitments that can take enough time to be considered two more jobs.

This way of life for farm women has been common for many years. In 1993 two researchers, Gallagher and Delworth, published an article that described the “third shift.”¹ The first shift is the farm woman’s off-farm employment which is often necessary to contribute to the income of the household and to secure health insurance for the family. The second shift is household tasks and caring for the children. Finally, the third shift, unique to farm women, is farm labor.

This circumstance was addressed during the recent Clock is Ticking for Rural America conference by Sarah Buila, MSW, PhD. She is an assistant professor in the School of Social Work at Southern Illinois University. She is also a farmer who works alongside her husband in the family operation. Sarah presented a paper called “Women in Agriculture: Understanding the Third Shift Phenomenon” during a workshop at the conference.

*“Sometimes messes
must wait!”*

*—Sarah Buila, farmer
and assistant professor*

In Sarah’s paper she elaborates on the third shift phenomenon both as a social worker and as a farm woman who works all three shifts in her daily life. Sarah notes that, as an integral part of working three shifts, farm women also often face traditional gender role expectations. This gender role expectation in some families has farm women taking on the primary responsibility for housework and child care. On farms, this role may be even more time-consuming than for their urban counterparts. Sarah cites Gallagher and Delworth who say that this “second shift” for farm women may

include gardening, animal care and dealing with dust from the fields and soiled farm and play clothes. And this is all before taking on the third shift of farm chores.

¹ Gallagher, E and Delworth, U. 1993. The third shift. Juggling employment, family, and the farm. *Journal of Rural Community Psychology* 12 (2): 21-36.

There are ways to manage this additional stress and workload. Sarah names self protective factors that help her get through her three-shift days.

Sarah advocates basic self-care habits that are good for everyone: eating well, sleeping well, prayer and meditation, and getting in some good exercise every day are habits that help farm women face each new day refreshed and renewed.

Sarah also says that it is important for farm women who are working three shifts to manage the time of each shift and to stick to the routines as much as possible. This can help to reduce the stress.

It is crucial to pay attention to the relationships in a farm family. For some farm women, they may be working and living with multiple generations. It is important to nurture the marital relationship as well as the relationships with the children so that when conflicts do arise, it is easier to address them.

Sarah finds support from other farm women, including via the internet. Many other women, men and couples have found similar support from farmer educational retreats, such as those sponsored by the Wisconsin Sowing the Seeds of Hope coalition.

At the conclusion of her paper, Sarah says, "I have to think to myself, 'I work so hard but I have so much. It just can't get any better than this.'"

To read the full paper click below:

<http://www.agriwellness.org/ConfInfo.htm>

Sowing the Seeds of Hope Telephone Hotlines/Helplines

**Iowa Concern Hotline:
800-447-1985**

**Kansas Rural Family Helpline:
866-327-6578**

**Minnesota Crisis Connection:
866-379-6363**

**Nebraska Rural Response Hotline:
800-464-0258**

North Dakota 2-1-1

**South Dakota Rural Helpline:
800-664-1349**

**Wisconsin Farm Center:
800-942-2474**

Ag in Uncertain Times

**Helping producers and others
meet the challenge**

The Western Extension Committee has put together a series of webinars that are designed to provide current information to farmers, ranchers and educators about the challenges in today's agricultural economy.

Upcoming topic areas through December, include:

- Families Facing Uncertainty in Agriculture
- Operating in risky environments
- Putting it all together: Managing Ag Enterprises in Uncertain Times

Visitors can also hear past webinar topics

<http://www.farmmanagement.org/aginuncertaintimes>