

Summary – Town Hall Meeting
The Clock is Ticking for Rural America:
A Behavioral Health and Safety Conference
Sioux Falls Convention Center
Sioux Falls, SD
August 5, 2009

A hush came over the participants in the town hall meeting, held on the last day of the conference, as AgriWellness Board President, Charlie Griffin, reported that earlier in the day the United States Senate passed the Agriculture spending bill without any behavioral health supports for U.S. farmers, who are experiencing mounting stress, especially livestock and dairy producers. The failure to fund the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network galvanized the meeting participants to work even harder to secure its passage in the future.

Redoubled resolve to work for behavioral health supports for the agricultural population was the main conclusion of the town hall meeting, although the participants endorsed several related directions for the field of agricultural behavioral health. Two people captured the sentiments of many when they said “It is important not only to be concerned about the financial well-being of agricultural producers but equally as important to care for their spirit. Having healthy farmers is likely to ensure a healthy food supply.”

The meeting participants recommended working together with agricultural advocacy groups and farm organizations. Others commented that the field of agricultural behavioral health needs better communication techniques, perhaps through application of health information technology, word bytes, press releases and timely articles in key U.S. newspapers (e.g., The New York Times, Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post), television and radio networks (e.g., CNN, NPR) and key farm publications.

While the field of agricultural behavioral health has come a long way since the first conference in 2003, it is critical now to capitalize on this recognition. A vital step needed now is to develop a textbook and teaching resources to train caregivers already serving the agricultural population and to educate students in our nation’s universities to be the providers of the future. These caregivers must be ready to work with an increasingly diverse agricultural population and understand the benefits and perils of agricultural people relying on advances associated with the industrial model of agriculture that have led to disconnections of producers with consumers, increasing isolation of a declining population of food producers and lack of understanding that agricultural people are the most important resource in the production of food, fiber and renewable energy.

Your comments are invited. Please send them to AgriWellness, Inc. at info@agriwellness.org.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael R. Rosmann, Ph.D.
Executive Director
AgriWellness, Inc.