

# Wisconsin Task Force on Suicide Prevention

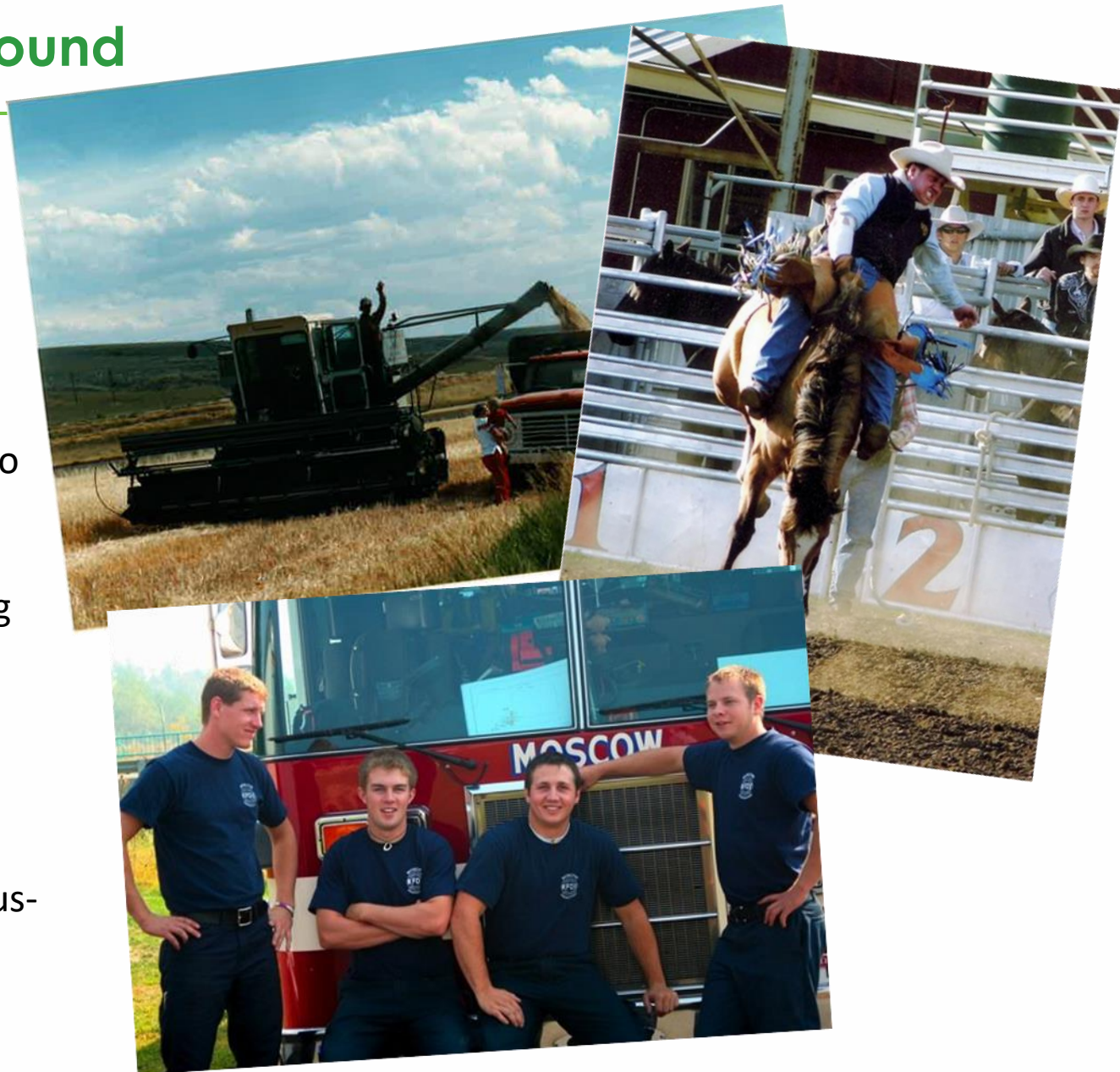
Public Hearing on Farmer Suicide Prevention  
Marshfield, Wisconsin  
July 29, 2019

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Director of the National Farm Medicine Center  
Marshfield Clinic



# Personal Background

- Family farm in Idaho
  - Barley, wheat, alfalfa
  - Beef cattle, sheep, horses
  - Outfitting
- 9 years competing in rodeo
  - College and professional
  - Bareback bronc riding
- Served as a volunteer firefighter
  - Resident fire/EMS program at the University of Idaho
  - FF1, EMT-B, Apparatus-Driver



# Complexities of Ag Mental Health

- Suicide and farming are multifaceted
- Dangerous work is stressful work
- It's NOT just the economy
- Stress and resiliency are a two-way street
- Farmers are people

# Suicide Rate by Occupation (CDC, 2018)

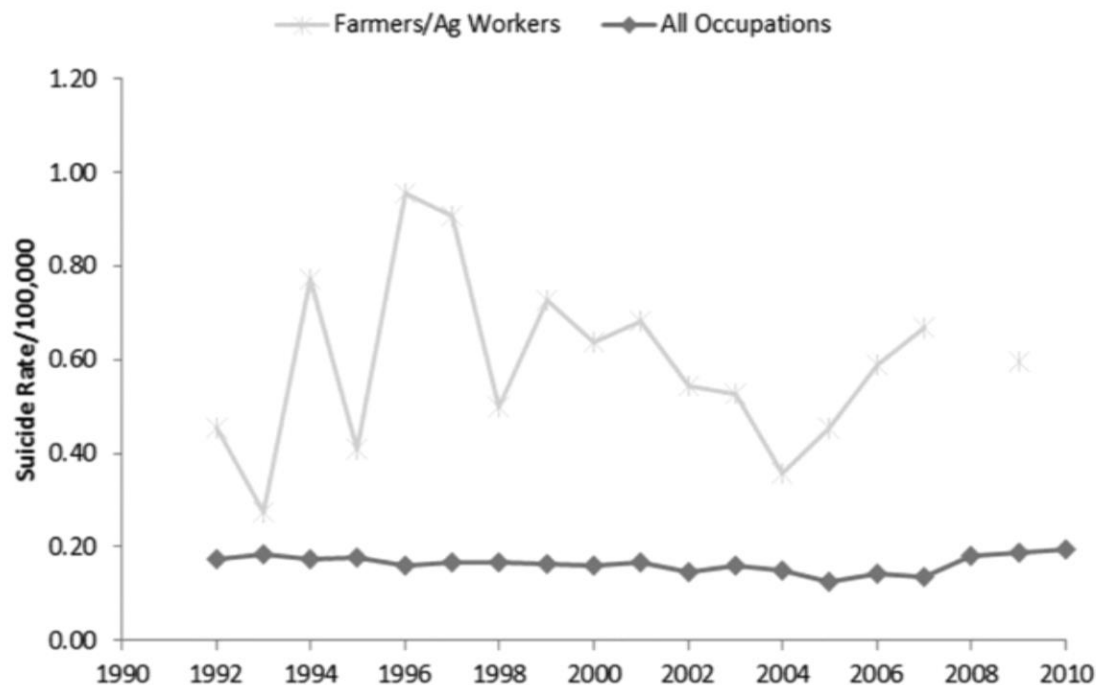
2015 rate of suicide per 100,000 according to CDC

Rank	Professions	Suicide Rate	
1	Construction and Extraction	52.1	
2	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	37.8	
3	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports & Media	27.3	
4	Transportation and Material Moving	26.8	
5	Production	24.3	
6	Protective Service	24.2	
7	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	18.7	
8	Building & Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	18.2	
9	Architecture and Engineering	17.6	
10	Food Preparation and Serving Related	14.8	
11	Sales and Related	14.2	
12	Computer and Mathematical	14.0	
13	Legal	13.8	
14	Life, Physical, and Social Science	12.8	
15	Health Care Practitioners and Technical	12.5	
16	Management	12.5	
17	Health Care Support	11.9	
18	Personal Care and Service	10.1	
19	Community and Social Service	9.0	
20	Office and Administrative Support	8.6	
21	Business and Financial Operations	8.5	
22	Education, Training, and Library	5.3	

Data Source: CDC Report from 2018 showing 2015 results in 22 states

# CFOI, BLS (1992-2010)

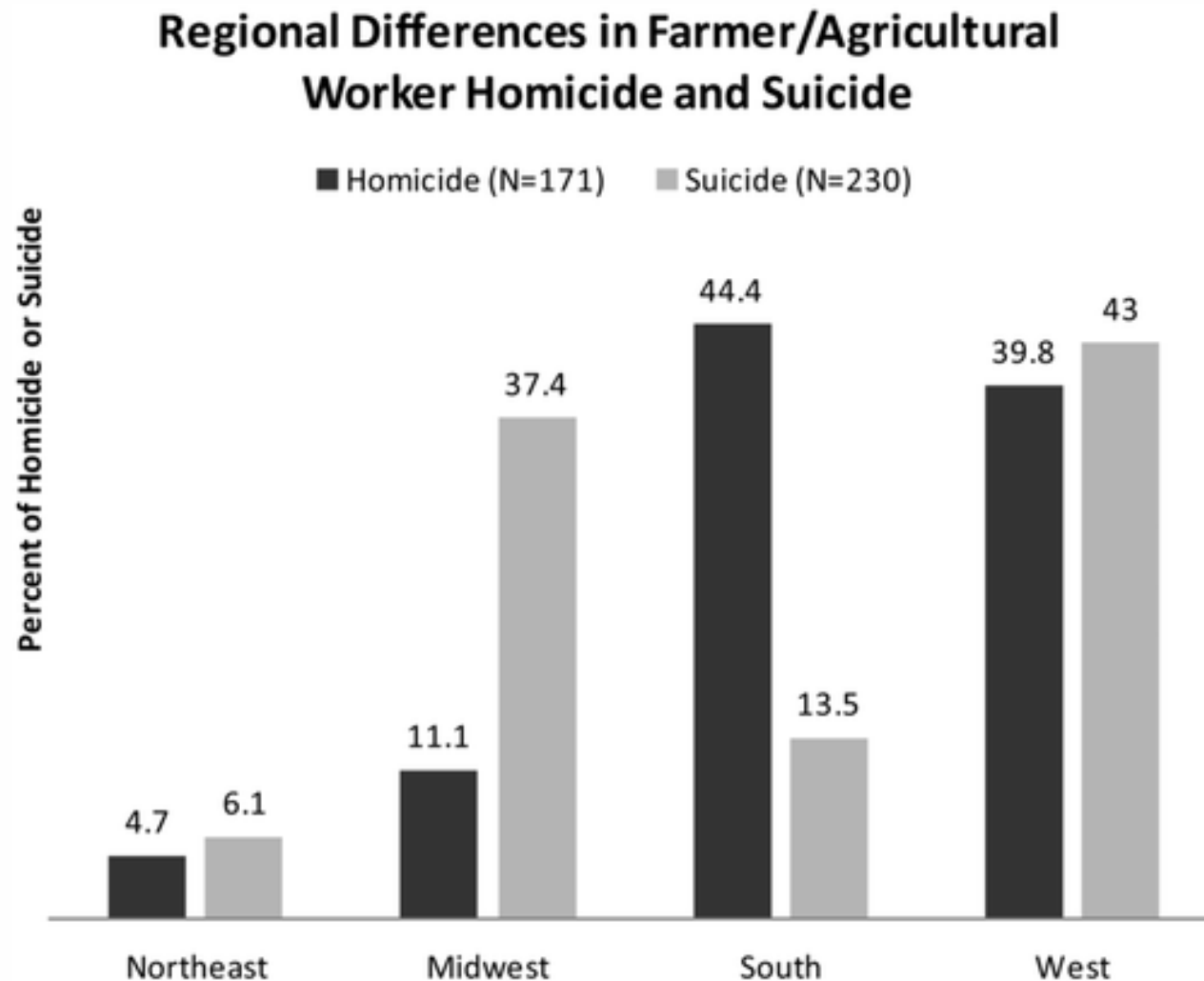
**Occupational Suicide Rates/100,000 for Farmers/Ag Workers and All Occupations, 1992-2010**



Note: 2008 and 2010 data are either not available or do not meet BLS publication criteria. Fatal injury data and rates were generated/calculated by the author with restricted access to BLS CFOI microdata.

Ringgenberg et al, 2017

# Trends and Characteristics of Occupational Suicide and Homicide in Farmers and Agriculture Workers, 1992–2010



The Journal of Rural Health, Volume: 34, Issue: 3, Pages: 246-253, First published: 02 May 2017, DOI: (10.1111/jrh.12245)

# High Rates in Anxiety, Depression, and Suicide

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Farmers have higher rates in all three domains when compared with the general population.

- General US population: 3.1% Generalized Anxiety Disorder; 6.7% Major Depressive Disorder (Anxiety and Depression Association of America); 11 per 100,000 commit suicide (National Center for Health Statistics)
- Farmers and farmworkers: 10-25% anxiety symptoms; 10 – 50% depressed symptoms; 19 per 100,000 commit suicide.
  - Preliminary data from Dr. Rudolphi among beginning farmers and ranchers in Wisconsin in 2018: of 170 farmers, well over half screened as anxious and depressed

# Suicide is Multifaceted

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- No one element in someone's stress is likely to lead to self-harm and/or suicide.
  - Finances
  - Labor
  - Personal relationships
  - Environment
  - Genetic disposition
  - Access to care



# Farming is Multifaceted



Personal  
Finances



Economics



Time Pressures



Interpersonal  
Relationships



Pesticide  
Exposure



Weather

# Dangerous work is stressful work

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- Those in agricultural are 7-8 times more likely to die on the job than most other US workers.
- Every week, approximately 2 children are fatally injured in farm settings.
- Farmers experience high rates of injury, near-misses, and chronic pain.
- Agricultural settings often include dangerous equipment and firearms.

# Distracted work is dangerous work

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- Lack of sleep
- Interpersonal relationships
- Lack of focus
- Lowered sense of self-worth
- Substance abuse during work

Leading symptoms of depression and anxiety in most dangerous work setting are likely just as fatal as suicide.

# Media Coverage

U.S.

## WISCONSIN FARMER TELLS FOX NEWS SUICIDES, BANKRUPTCY RISING IN RURAL U.S. AMID CHINA TRADE WAR

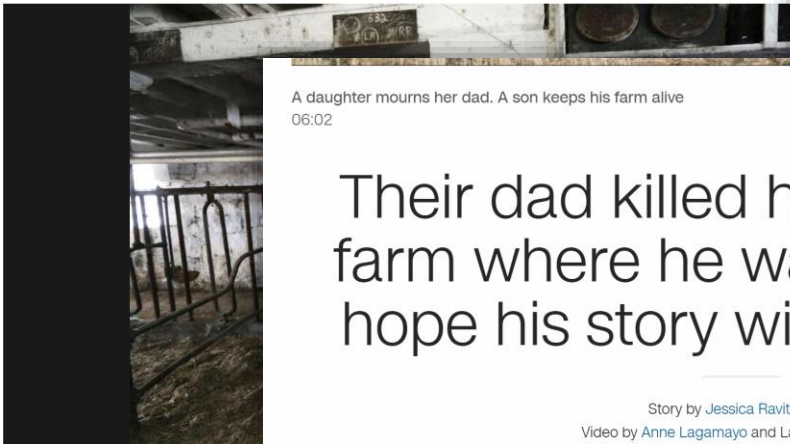
BY BENJAMIN FEARNOW ON 5/16/19 AT 4:07 PM EDT



## As Wisconsin farmers struggle, new effort aims to prevent suicide

DAVID WAHLBERG [dwahlberg@madison.com](mailto:dwahlberg@madison.com) Jan 27, 2019 6 min to read

99¢ FOR THE FIRST MONTH



A daughter mourns her dad. A son keeps his farm alive  
06:02

Their dad killed himself on the  
farm where he was born. They  
hope his story will save others

Story by Jessica Ravitz, CNN

Video by Anne Lagamayo and Lauren Cook, CNN

## American farmers confront a mental health crisis

By Bloomberg on Mar 20, 2019 at 12:02 p.m.



# It is NOT just the economy

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While it is likely that agricultural depressions increase rates of anxiety, depression, substance abuse, self-harm, and suicide:

- Rates of mental distress and self-harm are always higher, regardless of commodity prices
- Eras of influence (e.g. shifting technology, generational ownership, and climate)
- Economic band aids are not social change.
  - Overall rural economic policy
  - Overall rural healthcare system, (e.g. insurance coverage, presence of experts, access)

# Resiliency

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## Farmer mental health is understudied, but farmer resiliency is more so.

- We assume farming has mental health resources (e.g. physical exercise, green therapy, mission-driven, family oriented, and religious connections)
- Canadian research reveals high rates of mental stress and lower rates of resiliency among farmers.
- Research and interventions have a two-way street:
  - How do we lower levels of stress and depression in agricultural communities?
  - How do we raise levels of resiliency in agricultural communities?

# Farmers are people

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As a society, we all see and experience mental health problems. Farmers are both normal and unique. The farm community is NOT one community. “Farmers” are:

- Commodity driven
- Regional
- Workers and families
- Veterans
- Men and women, sons and daughters
- Fulltime and part-time
- Suffer from other ailments (e.g. substance abuse, mood disorders, chronic pain, isolation)
- Stigma, and then some . . .

# Unfair Distribution of Stigma

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We as a society have unfair expectations of our agricultural neighbors. We expect:

- Toughness, no matter the pain
- Grit, no matter the challenge
- Stoicism, no matter the turmoil

In addressing agricultural wellness, we need to let go of elements of the agrarian, bucolic myth (but leverage others).



# Today and Tomorrow

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## Today:

- Mental health first aid
- Hotline resources
- Real-time care

## Tomorrow:

- Better surveillance of mental health
- Increased mental health professional presence
- Increased insurance coverage
- Better research on mental health and dangerous work

# Questions?

Connect with us!

1-800-662-6900

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