

Testimony for the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention – Farms/Agriculture

John Shutske, Professor
Extension Specialist
Agricultural Health & Safety



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Quick Background on Myself

- Family farm – NW Indiana
- Since 1985 – Safety, Health and Well-Being on farms (longtime partner here 1991-2005)
- Affiliate Professor – UW Family Medicine Department
- Stress & suicide: 1988 drought; late 1990s in Minnesota; 2009 downturn (dairy prices & input costs)
- Since 2016, WI situation and partner on several projects in other states (including large FSA project)
- Certified QPR Gatekeeper Trainer & trained in MHFA



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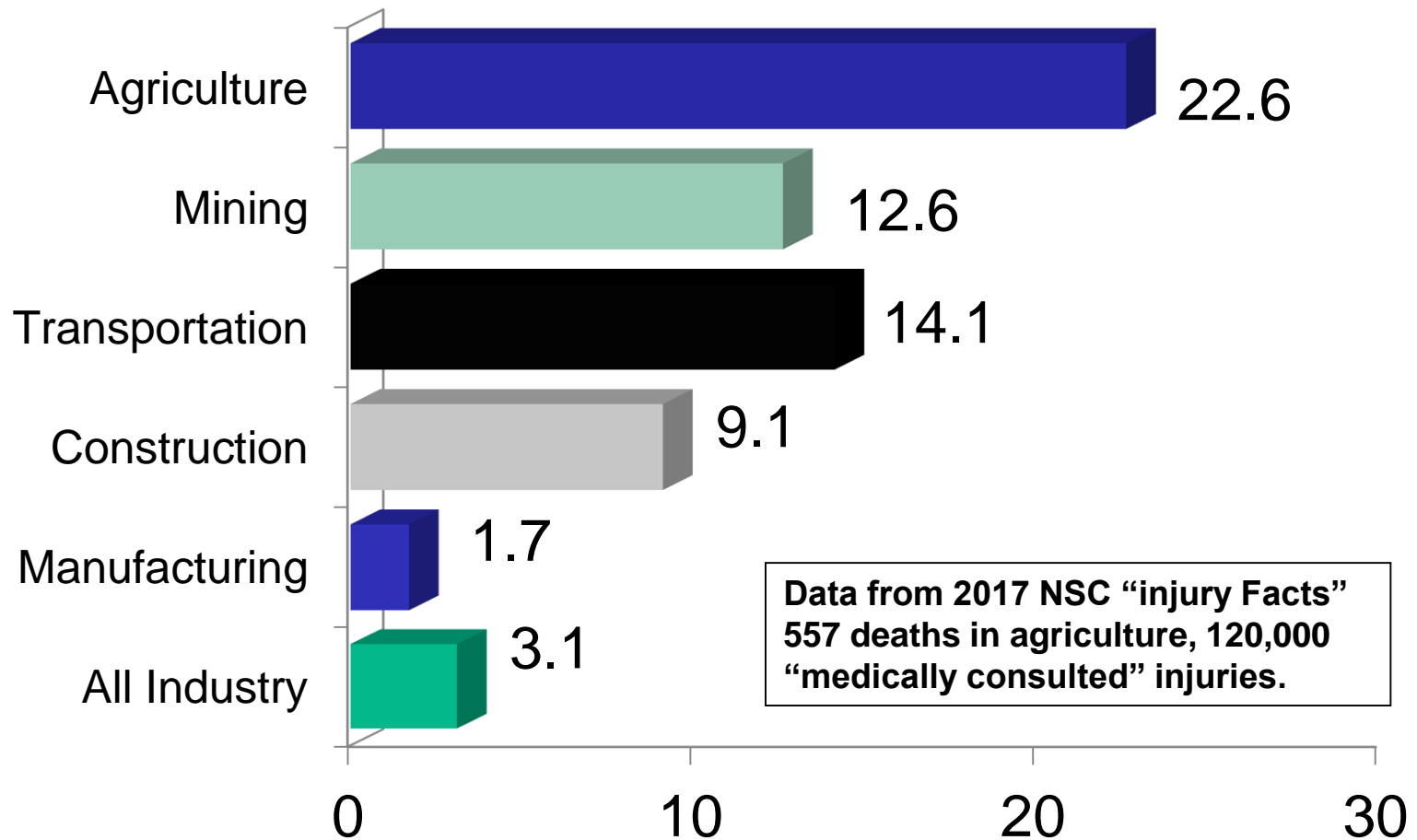
Contextual Info

- Farmers/workers healthy in general: some exceptions
 - Certain respiratory diseases
 - Skin cancer
 - Arthritis
 - Hearing loss
- WI: 15-20% of farms site of injury (10,000-13,000/yr)



Death Rates - by Industry

Number of Deaths Per 100,000 Workers



The Connection

- Health and STRESS are intimately linked
- Many farm fatalities and injuries are connected to risk factors LIKE:
 - Long work hours
 - Age (both old and young)
 - Distraction
 - Lack of resources for prevention



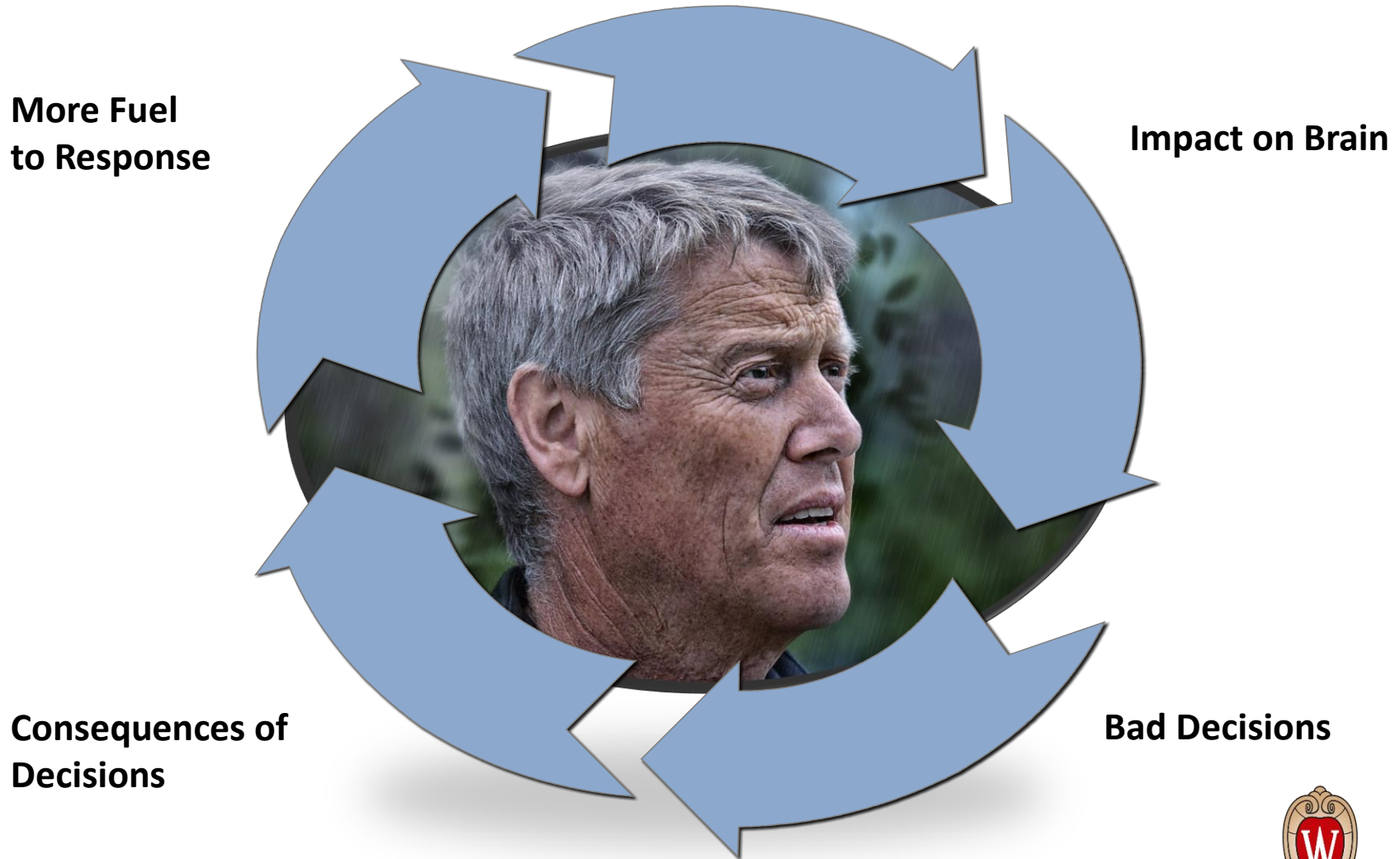
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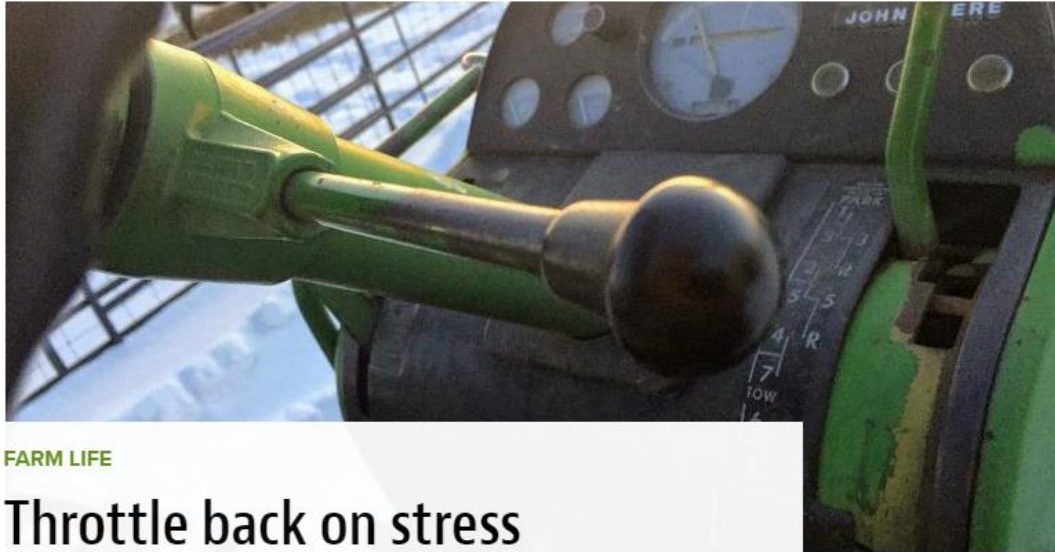
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Cycle of Chronic Stress



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FARM LIFE

Throttle back on stress

Commentary: Fighting off stress during difficult times takes physical energy.

Feb 22, 2018



By John Shutske

When I was a little boy, I was intrigued by trucks, tractors and machines like any farm kid. I understood what the gas pedal was in my mom's car and my dad's pickup. But it took me a while to understand exactly what the throttle did on the steering column of our John Deere 4020 and how it controlled fuel flow.

THROTTLING DOWN:
Learning where to find the levers to "throttle down" the chemicals that fuel high levels of stress is crucial.

Suicide Concerns

- Depression
- Feelings of “no hope” of total helplessness
- Disconnecting from support (family and community)
- A sense that they have ZERO control
- Alcohol (or other substance abuse)
- The sense of loss and/or LETTING DOWN your past and future generations



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Thoughts on Prevention and Intervention

- HOLISTIC, MULTI-FACETED APPROACH (there's no magic solution)



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Resilient Farms, Families, Businesses & Communities: Responding to Stress

Division of Extension



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The ongoing economic conditions in agriculture are taking a toll on farm families and their rural communities. The associated chronic stress is also impacting mental and physical well-being, relationships, and decision-making. Extension helps farmers, families, businesses, and communities remain resilient by learning how to manage stress and use planning tools to make sound decisions and create a road-map for the future.



Thoughts on Prevention and Intervention

- HOLISTIC, MULTI-FACETED APPROACH (there's no magic solution)
- Suicide is the tip of the iceberg:
 - Getting people to seek counseling – I've been a big promoter of DATCP vouchers
 - Strong encouragement for people to have more frequent contact with their primary healthcare provider
 - Providing support and services around PLANNING (financial especially) and helping people see a forward pathway
 - Stress management and wellness education



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Additional Recommendations

- Training and education for ALL who provide products, services, info and healthcare to farmers, families, workers.
- Promotion and resources for QPR and Mental Health First Aid training.
- Continued support and encouragement of holistic programming in UW-Extension and beyond
- Do any/all things possible to promote access to and use of professional health/mental health services



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