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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 92nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

For Immediate Release:
February 22nd, 2019

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The Silent Hardship of Agricultural Workers

Around this time of year there are even more stressors than usual that are affecting individuals of all occupations with higher rates of depression and suicide occurring in the winter months. With the weather we are currently facing there are pipes freezing, snow piled driveways, and a lack of sunlight throughout the course of a given day. It is difficult to get out of the house to talk with neighbors, friends, and the community more broadly due to the frigid winter weather.

I have seen the face of despair in individuals across the state. The percentage of those seeking help has increased over the past couple of years and is becoming a more prominent issue today. Depression can take a toll not only mentally, but it is a physically exhausting condition. A lot of times these issues are swept under rug, but we cannot start to make a difference in these people's lives until we bring light to what they face every single day.

In addition to those in other professions, farmers are also facing many stressors that affect their mental health. Often times they are waking up early and going to bed late, spending most of their days alone and sometimes are struggling to maintain their family farm that they have owned for generations.

Farmers are questioning how they can afford equipment, seeds, taxes, and many other factors that play a critical role in their vocation. Unfortunately, there have been hundreds of farms closing down each year over the past decade. There are many contributing factors as to why some farms fail and I will be looking into these issues. In the meantime, however, we need to be supportive and help those with their mental health. I know that times are tough and that these individuals are in need of support from family, friends, and their communities. A quick conversation can end up making someone's day that much brighter.

The State of Wisconsin has a Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) at https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Growing_WI/FarmCenterOverview.aspx that can help farmers and their families with information and support. Furthermore, there are a number of mental health hotlines that open to call 24/7 such as Mental Help at <https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/mental-health-hotline/>.

As I continue to try and work with my colleagues to find solutions, I urge members of our communities to get involved as well as helping those struggling with mental health problems.

As always, feel free to contact my office with questions, comments, or concerns.