LIVESTOCK EPIDEMICS & DEPOPULATION:

THE MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS AND VETERINARIANS

PROJECT REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Depopulation, the mass euthanasia of livestock to control the spread of disease, is a necessary measure to protect public health and safeguard the agricultural industry. However, through a series of interviews we found that livestock disease outbreaks and depopulation have profound impacts on both farmers and veterinarians, affecting their mental health, economic stability, and professional well-being.

Two qualitative studies conducted in Alberta between 2022-2023 provide critical insights into the mental health effects of depopulation on agricultural producers (i.e., farmers) and veterinarians. This report describes the findings in both studies, and offers practical strategies to support the well-being and improve resilience of those individuals involved in the process.

The first study explored the mental health impacts of depopulation on farmers, highlighting themes such as:

- emotional distress including shock, helplessness, and anxiety,
- threats to identity including a diminished sense of purpose and stigma,
- economic burden,
- distrust and frustration toward regulatory authorities.

The second study focused on veterinarians, who face the dual role of medical professionals and emotional supporters for farmers during depopulation events. Findings revealed they experienced:

- moral distress from euthanizing animals,
- emotional exhaustion from supporting farmers,
- post-traumatic stress symptoms, and
- low job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

Many used emotional detachment to cope, noting that they felt unprepared for the psychological demands of their work and emphasized the need for better mental health training, structured support systems, and recovery-focused initiatives.

Both studies underscore the urgent need for integrating mental health education into training, providing crisis support resources, ensuring consistent communication during depopulation, and fostering long-term recovery through counseling and peer networks.







DISEASE OUTBREAKS

Agriculture is one of the most stressful occupations [1], with farmers enduring long work hours, unpredictable markets, and extreme weather [2,3]. However, for the 81,000 (43%) Canadian farms raising animals [4], livestock diseases add a unique strain. Despite national biosecurity standards designed to prevent the introduction and spread of diseases [5], measures may not always be consistently implemented [6].

In Canada, there are 31 reportable diseases that can affect an animal or be transmitted by an animal to a person and are required to be reported to a veterinary inspector [7].

In 2023, there were 149 reported cases of herds or flocks affected by a disease [8]. While the majority involved poultry farms infected with avian influenza (Al, n = 133), other operations have livestock been impacted including cattle (e.g., bovine tuberculosis), swine (e.g., foot and mouth disease), elk and deer (e.g., chronic wasting disease), horses (e.g., equine infectious anemia), and honey bees (e.g., American foulbrood) [8,9].

Figure 1 and Figure 2 present data on the distribution of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (H5 and H5N1) and Chronic Wasting Disease (CSW) in North America.







DEPOPULATION

Mass euthanasia of livestock is part of a complex process in the agricultural industry called depopulation, a process of quickly and efficiently killing an entire herd or flock of animals in response to an emergency situation and doing so as quickly and as humanely as possible using established guidelines [10].

Although depopulation may be necessary due to emergency situations such as temporary border closures that occurred during COVID-19 [11], it is used as a necessary response to mitigate the spread of infectious diseases that threaten animal health, human safety, and economic stability.

The process often involves close collaboration between farmers, veterinarians, and government authorities, such as the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), which oversees and coordinates depopulation efforts [7]. It may include diagnosing disease, implementing biosecurity measures, and carrying out large-scale euthanasia procedures.

IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS

At the forefront of livestock diseases and depopulation are farmers and veterinarians.

For farmers, animals contribute to income and shape their daily lives, often representing generations of dedication and selective breeding [12]. Livestock diseases and depopulation can devastate a farm operation economically [13,14]. Research also suggests that livestock diseases and depopulation can negatively impact farmers' mental health [15].

For veterinarians, they either work with their farmer client and report a suspected case, or they work for the CFIA to confirm a case and assist in depopulation orders. Even when the rationale for depopulation is understood (16,17), veterinarians often experience negative effects (18,19).

However, there is limited research examining the impact of livestock diseases and depopulation on the mental health and well-being of farmers and veterinarians. Specifically, there is:

- limited research conducted in Canada and none in Alberta,
- no research examining the mental health impact of AI on farmers or veterinarians,
- no research examining how mental health varies across animals species.

Gathering feedback from those who have experienced disease outbreaks and/or depopulation is critical to understand their immediate and longterm well-being needs, and to guide practice and policy to enable farmers and veterinarians to navigate crises more effectively and sustainably.



EMERGENCY RESPONSE MANAGEMENT

in 2016, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada put forth an emergency management continuum [20] that consists of the following four pillars:

- **Prevention and mitigation:** Actions to identify, prevent and reduce the impacts and risks of an emergency.
- **Preparedness:** Actions taken before an emergency to increase the ability to respond quickly and recover from their long-term effects. This involves ensuring supports to respond are in place.
- **Response:** Actions during or immediately after an emergency to manage the outcomes.
- **Recovery**: Actions after an emergency to rebuild the conditions back an acceptable level.

These four pillars shown in Figure 3 work together before, during, and after an emergency event.

While this framework provides the roadmap for preparing and responding to emergencies in the agricultural industry, the proposed actions outlined for each pillar do not currently address ways to support the mental health of farmers or veterinarians.



Figure 3. The emergency management continuum.



STUDY 1: MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS



Purpose of the Study

With the continued threat of disease outbreaks among agricultural operations, it is crucial to develop effective response and recovery strategies that consider the mental health impacts on farmers. Therefore, the purpose of our study [21] was to examine the mental health impact of livestock diseases and depopulation among farmers in Alberta, Canada.

Our study asked two research questions:

- What is the mental health impact of livestock diseases and depopulation on farmers? and
- What strategies could help them build resilience to this stress?

Methodology

We conducted semi-structured one-on-one confidential interviews with 20 farmers, veterinarians or industry experts. All had experience with livestock diseases, and 18 had direct depopulation experience. To capture a broad spectrum of the impact on farmers, we gathered feedback from those raising cattle, swine, poultry, deer or elk, sheep, goats and bees. There were 12 women and eight men, with gender relatively balanced across farmers (5 women, 4 men) and veterinarians/industry experts (7 women, 4 men). Participants averaged 48.95 years old (SD = 11.72), ranging from 34 to 67 years.





We identified five main themes related to the mental health impacts of livestock diseases and depopulation on Alberta farmers, supported by additional sub-themes that deepen our understanding of their experiences. Each theme is described using verbatim quotes.



1. Emotional Distress:

Emotional distress was the most frequently reported outcome. Farmers described the immediate **shock and disbelief** upon learning their animals were infected, often followed by **feelings of helplessness** as control of farm operations shifted to external authorities. **Anxiety** persisted throughout the depopulation process, with many farmers feeling overwhelmed by balancing increased demands and worrying about longterm economic stability. This anxiety often evolved into **hypervigilance**, with farmers becoming excessively cautious and constantly monitoring their animals. Furthermore, **stigma and fear of judgment**—both from within the farming community and from the public—added to farmers' distress.

"It's just absolutely mind-blowing. I had perfectly healthy animals. And now my whole operation has pretty much grenaded" (Tyler, farmer).

"When TB hit a couple of farmers, one said, 'I don't know if I can do this anymore'" (Dorothy, veterinarian).

What Does This Mean?

- Emotional distress is a pervasive and an immediate consequence of livestock diseases and depopulation.
- Reducing stigma around mental health in farming communities is crucial for encouraging help-seeking behaviors.
- Farmers need accessible and trusted resources to mitigate feelings of helplessness and isolation.

"So now I'm really sensitive to the temperature. I'm basically babysitting the barn" (Patricia, farmer).

"We had the security guards in the yards and that felt really surreal. The school bus was still allowed to come by, so the school kids saw the security guard car, people in white suits and all that. There were a lot of questions." (Ingrid, farmer)

- Establish peer support networks to connect farmers who have experienced similar crises, providing an outlet for shared understanding and emotional support.
- Offer accessible counseling services tailored to meet farmers' schedules.
- Develop mental health literacy programs to help farmers recognize warning signs of emotional distress and seek timely support.





2. Threats to Identity

Farmers often link their identity to their ability to maintain productive operations and care for their animals. The loss of livestock, especially those representing generations of selective breeding, eroded this sense of purpose. For multigenerational farmers, depopulation also represented a failure to uphold the family legacy, leading to profound emotional and psychological impacts.

"It's not that they gave up, but many believe it's not going to be as good as it was... they decide they're not doing livestock anymore" (Megan, veterinarian). "Blaming yourself... Like, constantly wondering what did we do wrong? What could we have done to prevent it? and what didn't we do that we were supposed to? I think that's one of the biggest things is beating yourself up" (Ron, farmer).

"I've reached out to a lot of producers depopulated in the last few years, and most of them are broken souls" (Tyler, farmer).

What Does This Mean?

- Loss of animals deeply impacts farmers' identity, particularly for those managing multigenerational farms.
- Farmers need help with their operational recovery as well as the psychological rebuilding of their identity and purpose.
- Recognizing farmers' contributions to society may help rebuild their sense of self-worth and resilience.

- Provide identity-focused counseling to help farmers reframe their sense of purpose and maintain self-worth despite setbacks.
- Create workshops focused on resilience and adaptability, emphasizing the farmer's role as a key contributor to community and food security.
- Incorporate farm culture into emergency response training for government officials to foster empathy and better communication.





3. Economic Burden

Depopulation created immediate and significant financial challenges. Farmers faced income losses, mounting debts, and inadequate and/or slow insurance compensation, leading to financial instability. Many were forced to rely on credit, cut expenses, or leave the livestock industry altogether due to the high costs of rebuilding their operation.

"It was a long, financially stressful time [when] you take a big loss or hit. And then I have all these guys who work a full-time job" (John, farmer).

"Yeah, the financial impact is monumental, like it's a deal breaker. It's a matter of having a successful business to a business I cannot afford to operate" (Tyler, farmer). "You spend your money, putting stuff on credit knowing that you're getting these significant amounts of money in the fall. Well that all went away" (Charlene, farmer).

"We has all of the insurance and stuff but still, you look at the financial compensation we received for massive losses and it doesn't represent the amount of money that we've put in" (Deanna, farmer).

"The cost of the clean out or new measures might be the reason why they get out of it. It costs too much [and] they can't rebuild" (Megan, veterinarian).

What Does This Mean?

- The economic burden compounds farmers' mental health challenges.
- Accessible financial relief programs could prevent long-term instability and ensure farmers can rebuild operations.
- Supporting economic resilience may be a key factor in encouraging farmers to remain in the livestock industry post-crisis.

- Develop and expand financial safety nets, including better insurance options and emergency funds to support farmers during crises.
- Simplify the claims and reimbursement processes to reduce stress and financial delays.
- Offer financial planning and business continuity workshops to help farmers prepare for potential crises.





4. Distrust and Frustration with Authorities

frustration with Farmers frequently expressed regulatory authorities, citing inconsistent a lack of transparency, communication, decisions made without sufficient and understanding of farming practices. Farmers often felt overlooked and unsupported, leading to strained relationships and added mental health challenges.

> "As a farmer, you know your barns better than anybody. [The government] wants to tell you all sorts of things. They almost take over, and that's hard, but at the end of the day, you've got to work with everybody to get the job done." (Ron, farmer)

"Being one of the first farms impacted by [AI], it was scary because of all the unknowns. It was really hard because we had no clue what was going on. So I think, from the start, we need to be given a timeline and more guidance" (Ingrid, farmer).

What Does This Mean?

(Charlene, farmer).

• Clear and consistent communication is essential for reducing tensions between farmers and authorities.

"It doesn't seem like they are trying to help solve the

problem with us. The lack of evidence they provide and

the hoops we have to jump through feels very uneven"

- Building trust requires authorities to engage with farmers as collaborators rather than imposing decisions unilaterally.
- Accessible information empowers farmers to navigate crises with greater confidence and understanding.

- Improve transparency in decision-making by providing clear, evidence-based explanations for protocols and processes.
- Assign industry liaisons to serve as intermediaries between farmers and regulatory bodies, ensuring farmers feel heard and supported.
- Create standardized resources such as toolkits outlining what farmers can expect during disease outbreaks and depopulation events.





5. Resilience and Adaptation

Despite the challenges, many farmers demonstrated resilience, employing short-term coping strategies such as immersing themselves in farm work in order to feel productive. All strengthened their biosecurity measures. However, long-term recovery was challenging for most farmers as they rarely sought counseling or professional support, relying often on peer networks that offered sympathy. These findings emphasize the critical need for systemic support to foster resilience and recovery in affected farming communities.

"We really, really pushed the cleaning. We got it done in a week. And we were pretty much like 12-14 hours a day. So I think that that was what helped us because then it's super busy." (Ingrid, farmer) "From now on, when we wean, we put all the pigs out and to wash and clean and disinfect. Before it was continuous flow mixing little ones with the big ones" (Jacob, farmer).

"We've got a four-layer barn security now to enter and exit barns. Visitors are totally off [limits] now" (Ron, farmer).

What Does This Mean?

- Resilience is a strength in farming communities, but it requires support to transition from short-term coping to long-term recovery.
- Systemic changes, such as integrating mental health into emergency frameworks, can better equip farmers to adapt to crises.
- Building resilience is not just about surviving a crisis but thriving in its aftermath through robust community and systemic support.

- Promote emergency preparedness by encouraging farmers to create written risk management plans and enhance biosecurity measures.
- Offer funding or incentives for farmers to access mental health resources, particularly after depopulation events.
- Recognize and celebrate farmer resilience through community initiatives, fostering a sense of solidarity and collective recovery.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FARMERS

We adapted the emergency management framework based on our findings to specifically address the mental health needs of farmers dealing with livestock diseases and depopulation (Figure 4).

As the figure shows, the four stages of emergency management are represented as a continuous flow of activities to support the farmer through a potential emergency event. Examples of the activities in each stage are detailed in Table 1.



Figure 4. Adapted emergency management framework to support the mental health of farmers during livestock diseases and depopulation. [21]



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FARMERS

Table 1. Activities to support the mental health of farmers during an agricultural crisis of livestock diseases and depopulation. [21]

Phase	Activities
	 Educate farmers on biosecurity measures and
	emphasize the importance of implementing
	these practices on their farms.
Prevention	Incorporate mental health literacy into
	extension materials so farmers can recognize
	warning signs of poor mental health and adopt
	healthy coping mechanisms to manage stress.
	Encourage farmers to develop a written
	emergency risk management plan to guide
	them through potential agricultural crises.
	 Offer farm culture workshops to government
	workers involved in emergency response teams
	to enhance their understanding of farming
_	practices and common stressors.
Preparation	Review depopulation protocols and compile this
	information into a resource manual (e.g., toolkit)
	that can be shared with farmers, along with
	species-specific disease details, so they know
	what to expect and why certain protocols are
	used.
	 Identify crisis counselors and therapists in the
	region who can support farmers during a
	disease outbreak or depopulation event.
	 Provide farmers with a resource (e.g., toolkit)
	that outlines the depopulation process, timelines,
	and species-specific disease information.
	 Ensure open, ongoing communication with
Response	government workers, industry partners, and the
	farmer.
	 Include an industry liaison on the emergency
	response team to connect with the farmer
	Offer a list of local crisis counselling resources to
	the farmer.
	 Government and industry stakeholders should
	review policies and protocols, incorporating
	farmer input to identify successes and areas for
Recovery	improvement.
-	Ensure farmers have access to mental health
	counselors to process the event and learn
	strategies for healthy coping.



STUDY 2: MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT ON VETERINARIANS



Purpose of the Study

As depopulation is associated with significant and long-lasting mental health issues [12-17] and livestock epidemics are challenging to control or eliminate, it is essential to understand how veterinarians are impacted to ensure their mental health and well-being needs are supported. Further, there is no published study examining veterinarians' experiences during depopulation events in Canada.

Recognizing this gap, our study [22] asked two research questions:

- What is the mental health impact of livestock diseases and depopulation on farmers? and
- What strategies could help them build resilience to this stress?

Methodology

Our sample included 11 participants (9 veterinarians and 2 industry experts) from Alberta, Canada. To be included, all veterinarians needed to have experience with at least 1 depopulation event. Five of the veterinarians had worked for or were currently working for CFIA. The industry experts were representatives from species-specific commodity groups and were part of an emergency response team involved in the coordination and support of depopulation events. Participants had been employed for 24.09 years (SD = 15.90), ranging from 4 to 44 years. They ranged in age from 36 to 67 years (M = 53.64, SD = 12.64), and had experience with cattle, swine, poultry, elk and deer, and/or sheep and goats.





Our analysis revealed 3 major themes and 6 sub-themes. Each theme is described below using verbatim quotes.



1. Work-Mental Health Tensions

Veterinarians experienced significant strain from balancing their professional roles and mental health during depopulation events. Often, these strains spilled over into their personal lives and negatively impacted their mental well-being. We identified three sub-themes:

- **Professional bond versus emotional labour:** Vets were usually farmers go-to source for information and often found themselves supporting farmers emotionally during and after a depopulation event.
- **Disease control versus moral distress:** Vets described struggling to balance the satisfaction of controlling the spread of a disease and keeping people healthy with the moral distress of euthanizing animals.
- Sense of duty versus trauma of the event: They had a strong sense of duty to fulfill their job responsibilities, but struggled mentally and physically to euthanize so many animals.

"You put yourself out there to support them... And you're in trauma when you leave the call because you're going through this with them, you're feeling their pain."(Ryan, industry expert)

What Does This Mean?

- Emotional labor is unavoidable but can be mitigated with structured support.
- Moral distress undermines veterinarians' professional identity and requires active management.
- Emotional and logistical support must be integrated into depopulation protocols.

"Well, it's very hard... you know, you're here to help animals, not kill them ...It's hard." (Ronald, veterinarian)

"I don't want to see sick kids from contaminated eggs. I don't want to see barns full of birds dying. And so that by itself helps me, and I think if I didn't have to do too many at once, I'll be okay." (Dorothy, veterinarian)

- Provide training on managing moral distress and emotional labor.
- Offer counseling and peer support programs for veterinarians involved in depopulation after they have physically recovered from the event.
- Develop guidelines to limit consecutive depopulation events to prevent burnout.





2. Emotional Detachment

Veterinarians frequently relied on emotional detachment as a coping mechanism to manage the distress of depopulation. By focusing solely on the tasks and compartmentalizing their emotions, they were able to fulfill their responsibilities. However, this strategy often led to unresolved feelings and cumulative mental health challenges, such as physical symptoms of stress, guilt, and difficulty processing their experiences. Many participants noted a lack of training in mental health management, which left them feeling ill-equipped to cope with the psychological toll of their work.

"[I have] lots of training on the practical [and] the physical safety of things. I have zero training on mental health, either for me or my staff, or for the people we're dealing with." (Dorothy, veterinarian)

"I think sometimes when we talk about mental health, the veterinarians are sometimes forgotten about because they're the professionals." (Megan, veterinarian)

"I didn't cope well. We finished everything off. I took a little bit of vacation time [but] I was very, very sick, physically sick from it. ... I think my body was catching up to what my eyes had seen." (Alex, veterinarian)

"So you compartmentalize. You do your job because it's your job. I looked at it scientifically. I knew one day we're gonna have African swine fever come here. So I looked at it as something that we all could learn from." (Janet, veterinarian)

What Does This Mean?

- Emotional detachment offers temporary relief but risks long-term health.
- Proactive mental health support can reduce reliance on maladaptive coping mechanisms.

- Include mental health education in veterinary curricula to address emotional detachment.
- Train veterinarians to identify and address their own emotional triggers.
- Normalize seeking professional help for veterinarians experiencing long-term mental health impacts.





"I can see why people would not do it. With every big outbreak we lose staff, because they just say 'we can't do this'" (Dorothy, veterinarian).

"I didn't want to continue working full time and having to do that. ...the constant pressure knowing that it's just a matter of time before we get 'the big one.'" (Janet, veterinarian)

"I still lose sleep over those cases in [location]. I knew those producers" (Chris, veterinarian).

What Does This Mean?

- Addressing occupational distress is essential to retain skilled professionals.
- Proactive interventions can prevent longterm consequences like PTSD and turnover.

"I kept calling [the farmer] and texting to see how he's doing. So, a lot of support... As veterinarians, there's trust there. When they hear stuff, they'll come to the vet and ask, what do you think of this?"(Jim, veterinarian)

Actionable Items

- Implement debriefing sessions after depopulation events to help staff process their experiences.
- Schedule regular breaks and rotations during depopulation to prevent fatigue.
- Offer incentives, such as paid leave or mental health services, to retain staff.

3. Occupational Distress

The prolonged exposure to high-stress depopulation events resulted in significant occupational challenges. Participants reported three common outcomes:

- **Emotional exhaustion:** Frequent and intense interactions with farmers during depopulation blurred boundaries between professional and personal life, leaving veterinarians feeling unable to "switch off" their professional role at home.
- Job satisfaction and turnover intentions: Direct involvement in depopulation often resulted in reduced job satisfaction from the persistent pressure, moral distress, and limited resources.
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms**: Those directly involved in depopulation reported having vivid flashbacks of the event, nightmares, increased drinking, difficulty concentrating, guilt, and fear about when another outbreak might start.

These impacts were particularly pronounced when veterinarians were required to handle back-to-back depopulation or lacked sufficient resources and staffing.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VETERINARIANS

To be consistent with our study on farmers, we adapted the emergency management framework based on our findings.

As Figure 5 shows, the four stages of emergency management are represented as a continuous flow of activities to support the veterinarian through a depopulation event. Examples of the activities in each stage are detailed in Table 2.





Figure 5. Adapted emergency management framework to support the mental health of farmers during livestock diseases and depopulation. [22]



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VETERINARIANS

Table 2. Activities to support the mental health of veterinarians during an agricultural crisis of livestock diseases and depopulation. [22]

Crisis response toolkits and resources are available through the Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing (ccaw.ca)

Phase	Activities					
	Familiarize veteringright with biosecurity measures so that they					
	can communicate these with their clients and reinforce the					
Prevention	importance of incorporating these measures into their operations.					
	Integrate mental health literacy content into veteringry college					
	curricula and ongoing professional development training					
	opportunities.					
	Provide mental health training to the emergency response team so					
	they:					
	 Are familiar with mental health warning signs. 					
	 Feel confident and comfortable discussing mental health issues. 					
	 Are familiar with stress management strategies. 					
	 Have resources such as counselors or crisis hotlines to contact. 					
	 Provide an overview of the depopulation process to ensure staff 					
	have a realistic preview of what to expect (e.g., integrate quest					
	speakers).					
Preparation	 Prepare and/or review a crisis toolkit, which is a booklet containing 					
	species-specific disease information, timelines, protocols, and tips for					
	supporting crisis-response teams and the farmer during a					
	depopulation event.					
	Review the depopulation process to identify and minimize potential					
	mental health triggers.					
	 Identify crisis counsellors and therapists in the region who are able 					
	to accept new clients on short notice.					
	Create a resource sheet that can be shared that provides a list of					
	available counsellors and therapists in the area, as well as crisis					
	hotline numbers.					
	Use the crisis response toolkit to guide conversations with					
	veterinarians, farmers, and staff.					
	Include an industry liaison to support the farmer and ensure they					
Response	have access to a counselor for their mental health needs.					
	• Ensure that breaks are scheduled during the euthanasia process for					
	staff to rest, evaluate, and change their roles, and provide an					
	opportunity to debrief at the end of the day to discuss goals, the					
	process, and check on each other's well-being.					
	Conduct a debriefing session with staff to review what went well,					
	what challenges were faced, and how the process could be					
Recovery	improved. This session could be led by a staff supervisor or an					
	external facilitator					
	 Encourage staff to participate in counseling. 					
	Review protocols and policies, and make recommendations for					
	improvement.					



CONCLUSIONS

The mental health impacts of livestock diseases and depopulation on farmers and veterinarians are profound and multifaceted, affecting their emotional well-being, professional identity, and economic stability.

Farmers experience significant distress due to the loss of their animals, financial burdens, and strained relationships with authorities. These challenges erode their sense of purpose and resilience, underscoring the need for tailored support mechanisms. Similarly, veterinarians face unique pressures, including moral distress from euthanizing animals, emotional exhaustion from supporting farmer clients, and post-traumatic stress symptoms from repeated exposure to traumatic events. The dual role of veterinarians as medical professionals and emotional supporters compounds these challenges, with many feeling underprepared for the psychological demands of depopulation events.

Both studies highlight the necessity of systemic changes to support the mental health of those involved in depopulation. Recommendations emphasize integrating mental health education into training, providing crisis toolkits, fostering open communication between farmers, veterinarians, and authorities, and offering long-term recovery resources such as counseling and peer support networks. Additionally, practical measures such as structured work schedules, regular debriefings, and accessible mental health services can alleviate emotional strain and build resilience.

By addressing these issues, the agricultural sector can better prepare for and respond to the mental health challenges posed by livestock disease outbreaks and depopulation. Implementing these recommendations will not only enhance the well-being of farmers and veterinarians but also contribute to the long-term sustainability and resilience of Alberta's agricultural communities.







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