

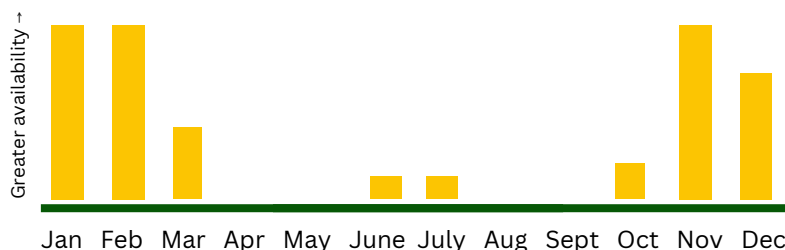
Enhancing Mental Health Support FOR ALBERTA FARMERS

Practical tools for rural service providers to engage farming communities. Based on information gathered in our workshop at the Rural Mental Health Network's 2025 Provincial Exchange Conference (Ponoka AB).

TIMING OF EVENTS



Participants said the best time of year to host an event might be over the fall and winter months when work slows down for many, and consider a time outside regular business hours.



BARRIERS TO SHOWING UP



What are possible reasons farmers decide not to attend?

- Too busy, no time, or exhausted
- Don't want to leave the farm for fear of something happening to their livelihood
- Don't see the value in it or don't think it applies to them
- Worried what others would think about them
- Using "shut down language" like *mental health* or *therapy*
- Want to be seen as hard workers with no time for fun
- Too far from event, don't want to spend more time driving

SPREADING THE WORD



What are some ways to raise awareness for an event in a rural area?

- Advertise it in the local newspaper and radio station
- Put posters in local coffee shops, businesses they visit often, and mainstreet message boards
- Bring flyers to local farmers markets
- Make a social media reels, Twitter, Facebook post
- Personal invitations, word-of-mouth, and asking people directly

GETTING PEOPLE THROUGH THE DOOR



What's one creative way you've seen to encourage farmers or families to show up at a community event?

- Make it activity-based, not a “talking head” presentation
- Make it a family event (e.g. family dance)
- Have a comedy night
- Make it free to attend
- Always have food and coffee, sourced locally
- Have a farm business co-host (e.g. chemical company, county info session, AFSC)
- Engage local farmers to speak (e.g., panel discussion)
- Ask for their help to plan and volunteer
- Bonus draw if they bring a friend
- Include immigrant workers and farmers to help them connect with the community and supports

CREATING A WELCOMING SPACE



What have you seen work well to make people feel at ease once they arrive?

- Use a place in the community that everyone knows
- Use local halls because it's their comfort zone
- Have door prizes, draws, give a gift
- Include local hosts and speakers
- Make it casual
- Designate welcomers to greet people at the door, ask key community members to greet people, have a welcoming committee
- Invite a local farmer who everyone knows and who has some good stories
- Pair people up and you introduce your partner

TRUSTED VOICES



When farmers walk into a room, whose voice do they listen to most? Why do you think that person has credibility?

- People who are willing to speak up, are well spoken and sound confident
- Local hosts and speakers
- “Local legends” or well-known family members from a multigenerational farm with history of supporting neighbours and the community
- Natural leaders who have honest and genuine traits
- Neighbours and trusted peers because they have already developed connections with the community
- People with lived-experiences that they can share
- Elders' experiences
- People willing to be open and honest, admitting setbacks as well as successes

KEEPING MOMENTUM



After an event ends, what's one simple thing we could do to keep the conversations going instead of fading away?

- Encourage participants to spread the word about their experience (e.g., use a hashtag on social media)
- Offer regular meet-up/drop-in
- Start a club
- Have a sign-up sheet ready for a future event
- Get contact information and send a follow-up 'thank you' email or message to stay connected
- Build an action group to keep people involved
- Make involvement easy (e.g., micro-volunteer options that respect people's time)
- Get feedback so you know what to do to keep it going
- Collaborate on "next steps" to build skills and knowledge
- Ask for testimonials
- Have a breakfast or lunch to bring participants together to discuss next steps (getting their input/buy-in)
- Organize a coffee and baking session to continue the conversation

SUCCESS STORIES



Think of a time when an event really connected with farmers. What did it involve? What made it work?

- Had an Ag Forum in the field (e.g., family lunch, learning, connection, belonging)
- Had meals in the fields (BBQ)
- Events where spouses/partners attended together
- Hosted a speaker evening with supper (e.g., big name speaker, brought out the men)
- Had a tractor pull ("we all got one!")
- Hosted a conference for wives/spouses, food and swag provided
- Shared knowledge about the farm with urban community
- Had a booth at the farmers market to share information
- Invited farmers to talk about drought in the 90's and how they managed
- Organized a Farmers' Christmas Party
- "Touch a truck or equipment event" - farmers brought their equipment to town for others to see and touch
- Got them to volunteer - they're used to being the helpers or fixers, and they listened while helping