

# Ask in Earnest



**Candid and Compassionate Conversations about Suicide  
for the Farm and Ranch Community**

Agrability Conference August 10, 2021



# What Is Ask in Earnest?

- **Educational and Advocacy Initiative**
  - **The Data about Farming and Suicide**
  - **Identify and Discuss Risk Factors**
  - **Address Suicide Myths**
  - **Identify and Discuss Action Steps to Save Lives**
  - **Supported by the Suicide Prevention Coalition of Yellowstone Valley**

*Candid and Compassionate Conversations about Suicide  
for the Farm and Ranch Community*

**My Office**

**Mid-July 2021**



# What We Know

- **Not only America's Farmers**
- **2016 Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report**
- **Rural v. urban suicide rate**
- **Wasn't it worse in the 1980's?**
- **Every 33 hours**
- **One suicide impacts 147; even more in rural communities**
- **What is not known at this time: the impact of the drought**

# Risk Factors

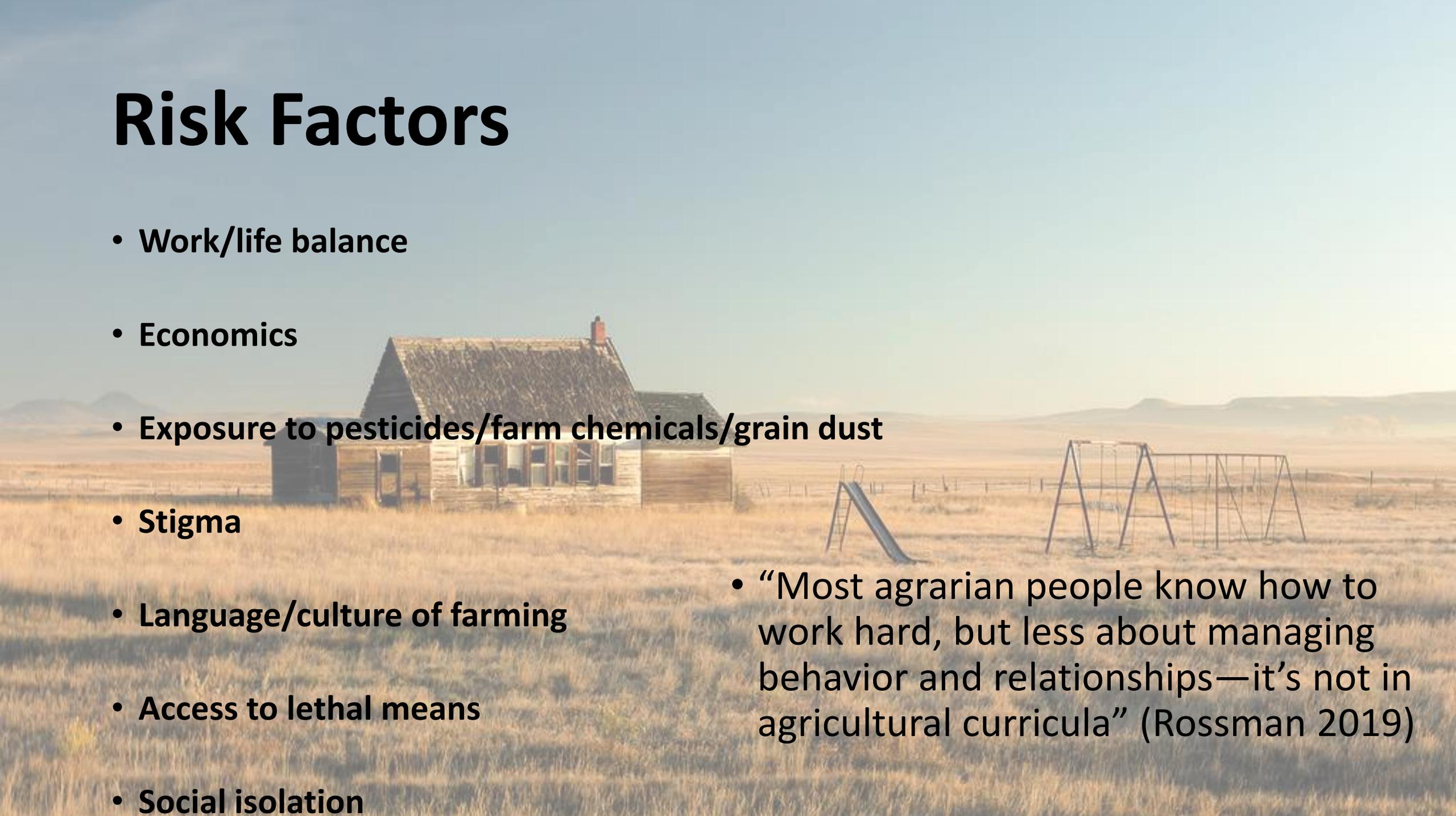
- **The Agrarian Imperative**

Like many animal species, humans have a basic need to acquire sufficient territory and the necessary resources (e.g., capital, equipment, buildings, livestock) to produce the food and shelter required by their families and communities. Also called “the agrarian imperative”, this genetically programmed instinct drives farmers to hang onto their land at all costs.

The Agrarian Imperative instills ***farmers to work incredibly hard, to tolerate unusual pain and adversity, to trust their own judgment, and to take uncommon risks.***”

Rossman, MR (2010). The Agrarian Imperative Journal of Agromedicine 16  
71-75

# Risk Factors

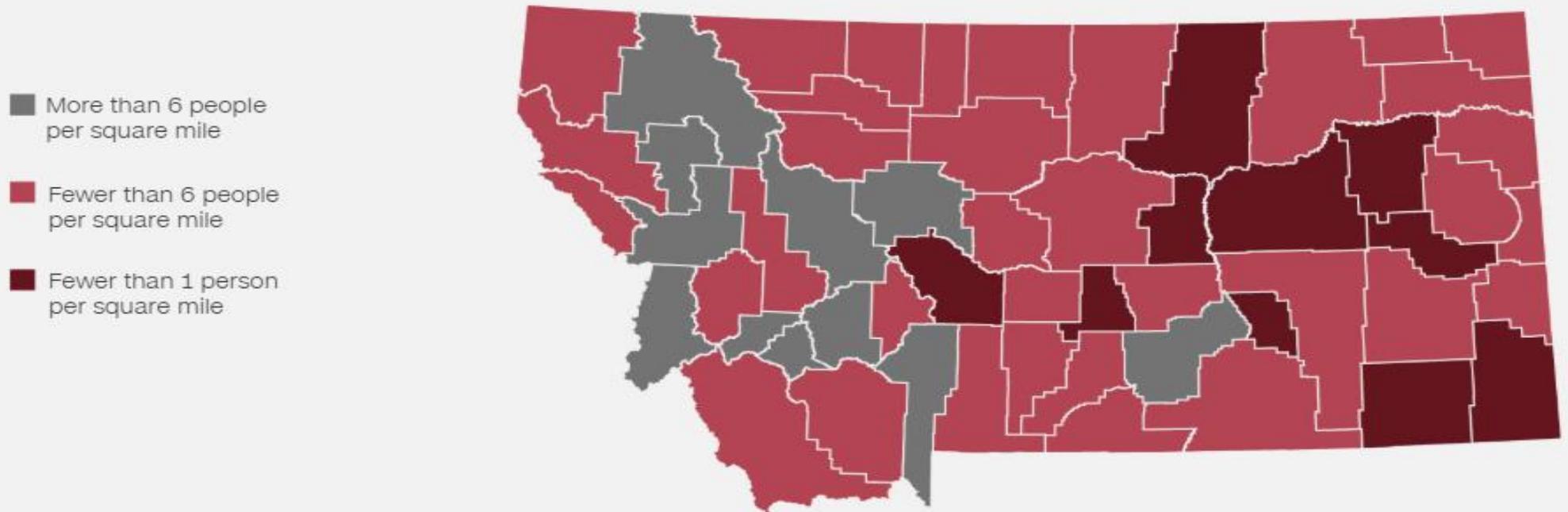


- **Work/life balance**
- **Economics**
- **Exposure to pesticides/farm chemicals/grain dust**
- **Stigma**
- **Language/culture of farming**
- **Access to lethal means**
- **Social isolation**
- “Most agrarian people know how to work hard, but less about managing behavior and relationships—it’s not in agricultural curricula” (Rossman 2019)

# Isolation in Montana

## What isolation looks like in Montana

The rate of suicides in rural America outpaces that in urban America. One explanation for this is social isolation. In Montana, it's easy to see how isolated a person can be. Of the state's 56 counties, 45 have a population of fewer than six people per square mile. And 10 of those have a population of fewer than one person per square mile.



Source: US Census Bureau  
Graphic: Curt Merrill, CNN

# Myths about Suicide

- Most suicides happen without warning
- People who die by suicide are selfish and take the easy way out
- Once someone is suicidal, they will always be suicidal
- Talking about it causes it
- Strong people don't kill themselves

# Action Steps to Save Lives

- **Learn warning signs**

- Up to 80% will display warning signs often missed

- **Words**

- The Big 3:
  - Burden
  - Loss of hope
  - Don't see a future for themselves

- **Mood**

- Depressed
- Sudden improvement

- **Actions**

- Acquiring access to lethal means
- Anger; expression of anger
- Withdrawal

# Action Steps to Save Lives

- **Ask in Earnest**
  - **SEE** from the 30,000 foot view
  - **LISTEN** a little differently
  - **ASK** the hard questions
    - Strong & vulnerable
    - Direct
    - *How* you ask can make a difference
    - Plans/details

# Action Steps to Save Lives

- Restrict access to lethal means
  - Put **TIME** and **DISTANCE** between suicidal thoughts and actions
- In Montana, nearly 2/3 of suicides involve the use of a gun
  - This is NOT about gun control, this is about saving lives
- Share your concerns
  - Too serious to take on by yourself

# Action Steps to Save Lives

- **Take action:**
  - **CALL** 1-800-273-TALK or 911
  - **TEXT** “MT” or “Start” or “Help” to 741741
  - **GO** to your local emergency room
  - **HELP** them connect
  - **FOLLOW UP**

# Action Steps to Save Lives

- Gatekeeper training i.e,  
Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR)  
QPR is like CPR for suicide  
QPR for Farmers is now available
    - County health department
    - County extension office
  - Who in your community can champion these efforts?
- 

# Action Steps to Save Lives



# Action Steps to Save Lives

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-04fpNDFGWM>



# Action Steps to Save Lives



- **Self care**

- Why spend time talking about these things???

- All of these can help combat **depression**

- **Sleep**

- **Nutrition**

- **Exercise**

- **Stress Management**

# The Message in Action

- NILE Rodeo
- Tristan Billmeyer Memorial Walk in Turner, MT
- Suicide in Eastern MT conferences
- MT Farm Bureau Conference
- ID Farm Bureau Conference
- National Potato Council Conference
- North Carolina AHEC



# Next Steps for *Ask in Earnest*



- Continue to raise awareness and educate
- Certified as a QPR trainer and I look forward to sharing QPR for Farmers in rural Montana
- Website enhancement
- Explore non-profit status
- Listen to farmers and help build what is most impactful

# Sources

- Their dad killed himself on the farm where he was born. They hope his story will save others <https://www.cnn.com/2018/08/21/health/rural-suicides-among-farmers/index.html> Retrieved August 18 2018
- Suicide is preventable: here's how to stop it <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/14/opinions/how-to-prevent-suicides/index.html>
- Be aware of indicators of farmer suicide <http://www.agweek.com/lifestyle/family/4294160-be-aware-indicators-farmer-suicide>
- Suicide in Montana Facts, Figures and Formulas for Prevention Updated August 2018
- Water and Stress Reduction: Sipping Stress Away <https://www.edbmd.com/diet/features/water-stress-reduction?print=true>
- Understanding Survivors of Suicide Loss <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/two-takes-depression/201311/understandingsuicide> retrieved June 14 2018
- Blue light has a dark side <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/blue-light-has-a-dark-side> retrieved November 1 2018
- Exercise is an all-natural treatment to fight depression Harvard Health Letter Retrieved November 1 2018

# Sources

- The Neurochemical of Happiness <https://www.psychologytoday.com> Retrieved November 1 2018
- A booming economy with a tragic price <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/20/world/Australia/rural-suicides-farmers-globalization.html> retrieved October 4 2018
- Suicides rising across the U.S. <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/suicide/inforgraphic.html> retrieved August 15 2018
- Happy or sad: the chemistry behind depression The Jackson Laboratory <https://www.jax.org/news--and-insights/jax-blox/2015/December/happy-or-sad-the-chemistry-behind-depression> retrieved November 1 2018
- Means Matter <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/>
- Rossman, MR (2010). The Agrarian Imperative Journal of Agromedicine 16 71-75
- Rossman, Mike (2019). Agricultural Behavioral Healthcare. Colorado Farm and Ranch Stress Summit. Colorado State University December 3, 2019
- Alliance of Hope <https://allianceofhope.org>
- American Association of Suicidology <https://suicidology.org/resources/suicide-loss-survivors>

# Thank you for your time and attention

- *Ask in Earnest*, and you may save a life
- [www.askinearnest.org](http://www.askinearnest.org)
- [askinearnest@hotmail.com](mailto:askinearnest@hotmail.com)
- Darla Tyler-McSherry, Founder and Visionary

