

## DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY: COMMON, AND MANAGEABLE FOR FARMERS

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FOR RELEASE ON: October 29, 2018

Problems with depression and anxiety are more common among the people in the U.S. agricultural population than among most other occupational groups. Because of popular demand I revised and updated an article I first wrote in February 2016.

Many farmers experience anxiety and depression because of current economic conditions. Depression, usually following anxiety, occurs frequently among people engaged in agricultural occupations (e.g., farming, fishing, hunting, ranching, lumber harvest, farm laborer) because of their genetic inclinations and because their occupations are highly stressful and dangerous.

People engaged in agriculture are four times more likely than people in general to possess a genetic tendency for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), according to research studies of African, German and American farmers.

**People with ADHD** have high energy and tend to require less sleep than most people, yet remain vigilant to detect opportunities and they are highly creative. Who would have thought, there are upsides of ADHD!

People with ADHD are also more likely to take risks and to push themselves to their limits. Bear in mind that the ADHD genetic predisposition varies in its degree of expression, which means that some people display more of the ADHD characteristics than others.

**People engaged in agriculture** also are more prone than the general population to react strongly to perceived threats. For farmers, anything that endangers their economic well-being and capacity to continue farming is usually perceived as a threat.

Worry, which triggers adrenalin release, leads to intense efforts to overcome the threat and guardedness about additional threats. Persistent anxiety leads to greater than normal production of cortisol, which makes us feel tired and lethargic so that we rest and prepare for the next episode of alarm.

Repeated episodes of alarm exhaust our bodies and minds and reduce our production of the beneficial hormones: serotonin, norepinephrine, dopamine and oxytocin. We may begin to feel we have few options and lose hope. In short, we become depressed.

**Tendencies to react with alarm** have been shown to be linked to mutation of the gene: *COMT* p. Val 158 Met homozygous. This gene has become concentrated in farmers who trace their ancestry to the Teutonic people who originally inhabited what is now Germany and bordering countries, and who spread to other parts of Europe, including the British isles, and eventually to North America, Australia, and other agricultural parts of the world through migration.

While additional scientific clarification is needed, currently available evidence suggests the so-called Teutonic gene has become concentrated in successful farmers around the world through selection over multiple generations. Not all successful farmers carry this gene. The degree of expression also varies.

Carriers of the Teutonic gene are prone to anxiety and depression. Research has only partially confirmed that the gene contributes to farmers having a 60 percent higher likelihood of ending their lives by suicide than non-farmers.

It's interesting, and perhaps an early confirmation of the Teutonic gene, that when soldiers of the Roman Empire militarily defeated these Germanic people in the second century AD, the Teutonic men mostly fought to their end, followed by the extermination of many of their children by their mothers and mass suicides among the women.

**Managing anxiety and depressive tendencies** can, actually must, be accomplished by people with the strong genetic tendencies to be hypervigilant, to overwork and to completely wear themselves out trying to overcome obstacles to their success. Suggestions from other articles I've written are worth repeating.

- Healthful exercise reduces adrenalin, cortisol and encourages the production of serotonin, norepinephrine, dopamine and oxytocin;
- Undertake spontaneous shifts in routine, like respites from work to recreate and focus on self-restoration;
- Spend time in sunshine or around grow lights that mimic sunlight;
- Meditate, relax, indulge in activities that force one to forget about duties and worries;
- Ask for comforting physical touches, such as massages, backrubs, stroking arms and hands and affection from loving partners and pets like dogs;
- Undertake healing practices such as religious ceremonies of reconciliation, Native American sweats, visits to saunas, spas, and pleasant social outings;
- Laugh so heartily that tears of pleasure flow;
- Make sure to obtain adequate sleep for at least three periods of deep sleep with active dreaming nightly, even if medication assistance is necessary;
- Be careful handling insecticides and medications that can worsen anxiety and depression;
- Keep in mind that indulgence in alcohol and illicit or prescribed drugs do not have the same benefits as the behavioral methods of managing anxiety and depressive tendencies; and
- Ask for professional help when necessary to learn behavior management skills and to obtain medication when counseling is insufficient to keep the good juices flowing.

In closing, I thank my wife Marilyn, who says what I need to hear when she reviews the articles I write. She has put her experience teaching behavioral health nursing for many years to good use. She has lived for 46 years with an ADHD and Teutonic husband.

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