



FARM WELL NEWSLETTER

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IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE GROUNDHOG DAY

WRITTEN BY JOHN SHUTSKE

Talk to anyone in my family and they'll tell you that my least favorite movie of all time is Groundhog Day. This is weird because the movie is beloved by many! Bill Murray is the star in a few of my other favorites, so it's not about the actor. It's the repetition and the rut that the lead character, "Phil," finds himself in, waking up every day, replaying that exact day over and over. That's how winter sometimes feels to me. February especially.

Farmers and others in agriculture work hard. Many people do. As an educator and researcher in agriculture, my chores are different, but my 50 or 60 hours a week this time of year involve the same routines that get old. Waking up (I don't need an alarm, and if I did, I would not choose Sonny and Cher). Scraping windshields. Slogging through the cold. Meetings. Grading papers. Collecting data from or with farmers, workers, or fields, or cows. Teaching the same classes. Driving until late. Maybe a meeting with a farm or business group at night. Getting home at 10 or 11. Hitting the hay with a deep sigh, and then 7 or 8 hours later starting the whole thing over. It's a difficult time of the year.

But there are ways to "break" the groundhog day cycle and improve our outlook, sense of well-being, and productivity. In 2021, we began the development of a farm/agricultural version of a program called WeCOPE. I've spoken about this program recently in this newsletter. WeCOPE focuses on 11 different skills and practices that are accessible to all of us. WeCOPE skills increase our positive emotions which can have direct positive impact on our physical and mental health. You can find more about WeCOPE at the end of this article.

One of the 11 skills is "goal setting." Some readers may be familiar with the research-proven idea of "SMART Goals." SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Based. I've always found the "SMART" acronym to be a bit clunky and hard to apply. But setting a goal or two each week does give us a clearer focus. Goal setting provides us with purpose, direction, and target toward which we can apply our thinking, actions, and activity. Having a purpose is healthy. **[Continues on page 2]**



Excessive Alcohol Consumption in WI

Finding: 24.4% is the percentage of adults who reported binge drinking (four or more [females] or five or more [males] drinks on one occasion in the past 30 days) or heavy drinking (eight or more [females] or 15 or more [males] drinks per week)

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Excessive drinking comes with risks.

Short-term risks include:

- Unintentional injuries such as falls, drownings, burns and motor vehicle accidents.
- Violence such as homicide, suicide and sexual assault.
- Alcohol poisoning.
- Poor decision-making and engagement in risky behaviors such as unprotected sex.

Long-term risks include:

- Hypertension, heart disease, stroke and liver disease.
- Cancer of the breasts, mouth, throat, esophagus, liver or colon.
- Alcohol dependence.
- Memory and learning problems.

Nationwide: Death rates from excessive drinking increased significantly between 2000 and 2019. An estimated 95,000 people die every year from alcohol-attributable causes, making it the third-leading preventable cause of death in the United States, behind tobacco and poor diet/physical inactivity. Excessive drinking is responsible for an average of 261 deaths per day, which is equal to 2.8 million years of potential life lost per year. Excessive alcohol use cost the United States a total of \$249 billion in 2010.

Source: America's Health Rankings analysis of CDC, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, United Health Foundation, AmericasHealthRankings.org,

[Click here](#) for direct link to source.

You Should Know About - The "Talking Total Farmer Health" Podcast

AgriSafe has long been a trusted voice in the health and safety of the people who feed the world, and we're excited to bring that to you in a new format. Tune in every month to hear the latest from health and safety experts in agriculture. Together we'll tackle the safety issues important to the producers and ag workers.



UPCOMING EVENTS

AgriSafe: What to Expect While Expecting- For Female Producers & Farmworkers in Ag

- Virtual- Fri, 2/16 12pm
- [Link to register.](#)

UW Extension: Employee Trust and Engagement through a Culture of Safety

- Virtual- Fri, 2/18 11am-noon
- [Link to register.](#)

The Water We Swim In:

- Virtual- Fri, 3/4 11:30AM
- [Link to register.](#)

So—part of WeCOPE is intended to promote something a little different than SMART goals, but based on the same proven ideas. FARM goals.

How do we start with FARM goals? My suggestion is to pick a time of the week when perhaps things are a little less busy—preferably at the start or end of the week. A half hour is plenty. I like the more relaxed time window on Sunday afternoons. It's easier when football season ends. Perhaps it's after church or dinner. Or early on a Monday morning as you're eating breakfast and having coffee. Purposely carve out 15 to 30 minutes and develop one or two FARM Goals for the week. Here is a link to a template that can help you. [CLICK HERE.](#)

What's a FARM goal?

F - Focus. What is one important strategic goal you need to focus on in the coming week? Be specific. If the goal is too big (like "I want to double the size of my farm"), then break it down to something that you realistically can accomplish in the next five to seven days. Perhaps your goal is to get all of your fertilizer lined up and financed for the coming season. Or maybe you are considering replacing a skid steer with one that will be a bit more reliable.

A - Action. Now, with your upcoming goal in mind, determine the next two or three specific actions that will be required. This is where the groundhog day thing comes in. This is the time of year when "getting started" is the hardest part. It's cold. The days are still short. We may feel a bit more lethargic. But, overcoming inertia gets you and processes moving. In the 1600s, Issac Newton taught us that "a body in motion tends to stay in motion...". It helps to get in motion. And as Newton suggests, once you get moving, good things happen. Figure out and write down which "motions" or actions will have the largest return on investment as you pursue your FARM goal.

R - Resources. As we pursue weekly goals, even small ones, we need resources. This often means something other than money. At least at the start. You may need to do more research. You may need to have a key conversation with a family member, your veterinarian, a lender, or a contractor. You may need a certain tool or piece of equipment. Perhaps you need some financial numbers. You may need to re-watch that YouTube video you bookmarked last fall so that you understand a key concept or how to replace a broken part. The key is to identify and write down those resources and set out to obtain them.

M - Measure. When you set a FARM goal, it's important to define what success will look like, and when you hope to achieve your measurable goal. If your timeframe is more than a week or two, your goal is probably a bit too big. Break it down with some smaller, intermediate goals that will ultimately lead to the big goal being achieved. Some of us (definitely me and other guys I talk with), resist the notion of deadlines. But they do help. And, if you get to the end of the week or other end point, and you've not achieved your FARM goal, don't beat yourself up. Recalibrate, and perhaps look back at your original plans. If the goal is still a priority, make the necessary adjustments. Figure out the barriers that are getting in the way. Name them and find a way to work around them.

Again, Goal Setting is only one of the 11 skills that we cover in WeCOPE. To learn more, send me a note (shutske@wisc.edu) and I will be happy to direct you to some opportunities to participate in this program in the future!

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In the coming week/day, what is one thing I want to **FOCUS** on accomplishing?



What are 2 or 3 **ACTIONS** to get me started so that I have success and feel peace?



What **RESOURCES** will I need to take action? Information? Tools? Equipment? Data? Conversations?



How will I **MEASURE** success? How will I know that I have accomplished my goal? And, by when?



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