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# FARM WELL NEWSLETTER

THE BI-WEEKLY NEWSLETTER OF FARM WELL WI

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MARCH 2022, ISSUE 8



## EVERYDAY MINDFULNESS—A POWERFUL TOOL IN YOUR STRESS MANAGEMENT TOOLBOX

WRITTEN BY JOHN SHUTSKE

In the last few months, I have showcased several specific skills that are part of a program we call WeCOPE. This program is designed to help individuals cultivate specific skills and “practices” that research shows can have massive benefits for stress management while also improving physical health and a sense of peace and well-being.

I’ve done presentations about the practice I will cover in this article—everyday mindfulness—close to 100 times, and I always get the same reactions when I first begin to speak about it. Reactions (sometimes uttered out loud) have included:

- I’ve tried it, and it’s not for me.
- I don’t want to spend a bunch of money on apps that teach me to breathe...I know how to breathe.
- Isn’t mindfulness and meditation connected to some religion that I don’t really understand?
- I tried all this stuff back in the 60s when I had long hair—it’s not me today!

Once, I was doing a presentation for a national group of farmers and ranchers in Ohio. As I began to talk about the power of mindfulness, I had an older man utter out, “I’ll be darned if you’re gonna get me into a pair of yoga pants!” It was then that I knew I had my work cut out for me.

Mindfulness is perhaps the most powerful and impactful tool in the WeCOPE toolbox. We have piles of research done with people all over the world of all ages, occupations, and genders that tells us that practicing mindfulness significantly increases positive emotion, improves both mental and physical health, stops ruminative thinking (spinning), and can lead to less anxiety and improve the symptoms and feelings associated with depression.

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## FREE Rural Resiliency Sessions

Live webinar sessions that help build resiliency and empower economic well-being. Sessions are 1-hour long. They will be recorded and made available for viewing post webinar.

- **The HUMAN Side of Farm Transitions**  
Two sessions on March 22, 2022 12 PM CT & 8 PM CT [Learn More & Register Here](#)
- **Farm Transition Resiliency Circle**  
Two session on April 5, 2022 12 PM CT & 8 PM CT [Learn More & Register Here](#)
- **Having Productive Farm Meetings**  
One Session April 19, 2022 – 12 PM CT [Learn More & Register Here](#)

### You Should Know About - The Rural Resiliency Project

The Rural Resiliency Project is a project funded through the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Foundation. The purpose of the project is to increase the resiliency and promote the vibrancy of rural Wisconsin focusing primarily on farmers, farm families, and those in related agricultural fields. Their programs seek to improve the lives of farmers and to enrich our understanding of the impact of farms, farmers, and agriculture in rural Wisconsin and beyond. Our collaborators for these virtual sessions include the Cultivating Resiliency Program and the Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center (UMASH)

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## COMET Catch-Up & Connect-Listening w/Empathy

- Virtual - Tue, 3/22 6:30-7:30P
- [Link](#) to register

## UW Extension - Raising Wisconsin's Children (Fathers)

- Virtual Series - Thursdays from 7-8 PM CT
- [Link](#) to register for all topics

## COMET - Lancaster, WI

- In Person- Fri, 4/13 Times TBD
- [Registration Coming Soon](#)



So, what is the practice of “mindfulness?” Jon Kabat-Zinn, a former professor in medicine, defines it as, “...paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, with a non-judgmental and accepting attitude.” This is straight forward, but probably the easiest way to explain mindfulness is to look at its opposite - mindlessness. How many times have you made a long journey into town to pick up parts or groceries, or to sign papers at the bank, and you pull into the driveway and have no recollection of the 35-minute trip you just made? Or you finish a long day, and step into the garage to take off your boots and coveralls and realize that you were simply “going through the motions” for the last five or six hours, almost as if you were a hollow shell of yourself?

Mindfulness is the opposite. For at least moments of the day, when you practice mindfulness, you are purposely paying attention to the sensations and feelings around you. It could be sounds, sights, and physical sensations. It’s also about the signals and sensations you feel within your body. The warmth you are generating as you work. Your breath as your body burns the fuel you’ve consumed and how you can feel the beat of your heart as it pumps nourishment and oxygen to the cells in every part of your body. When we are mindful we pay attention and we simply observe and “feel” what is going on in the moment without judgement.

So - If you’ve read this far, my guess is quite a few of you are thinking (or saying out loud), “Yeah, I sort of get it, but this is just not for me!” Guess what? Farmers and others who live and work in rural America already do this! And you do it quite well! Some examples:

- Sitting in a tree stand on a cold, snowy day in November, waiting for that big buck –hearing the oak leaves rustle in the wind and seeing your breath as you wait with quiet patience.
- Spending a few moments in the barn with a cow and her newborn calf–marveling at the miracle of life and feeling one with your farm, your family, and feeling the gratitude to your ancestors who were here in the same place 100 years ago.
- Sitting during quiet reflection or prayer in church–listening to your breath and feeling the comfort of the oak pews supporting your body as you sit still. Being aware of the presence of your family, neighbors, and other things that are special.

We do this stuff. And we do it really well. But perhaps not often enough. The idea is to try and develop the practice of mindful meditation during most days during the week. Ten minutes is a great start. Getting up to a half hour is even better. It’s okay to multi-task while you are practicing everyday mindfulness, but it’s even better if you can clear your to-do list and simply focus on yourself, the moment, and the things happening around you without distraction.

Try it! It does work and can make you a more healthy, less stressed, and happier person.

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

\*This content is adapted from core content of WeCope program. The original WeCOPE program is supported by a grant through the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The farm/agricultural adaptation is supported through by a generous grant from the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) through a special funding partnership with the State of Wisconsin’s Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP).

Farm Well is funded by the Wisconsin Partnership Program at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health through its Community Impact Grants Program

