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FARM WELL NEWSLETTER

THE BI-WEEKLY NEWSLETTER OF FARM WELL WI

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MAY 2022, ISSUE 11

May is Mental Health Awareness Month



THE POWER OF POSITIVE REAPPRAISAL - OUR FINAL WECOPE SKILL

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Over the last several months, several skills embedded in the WeCOPE program have been highlighted in FarmWell newsletters and blog articles with topics that include:

- Gratitude, Noticing and Savoring
- Goal Setting
- Everyday Mindfulness
- Inventorying Personal Strengths
- Emotional Awareness



WeCOPE is a program developed by national experts with extensive design, input, and participation from those at UW-Madison in the Division of Extension and College of Agricultural and Life Sciences since 2021. WeCOPE is based on the idea of “Connecting with Our Positive Emotions” and covers 11 skills and practices that research consistently shows have positive impacts on lowering stress levels, improving physical health, and increasing people’s satisfaction with life.

The last skill that will be described from the WeCOPE series is “Positive Reappraisal.”

When you operate or work on a farm, there are things that happen almost daily that most of us would consider to be stressful. Pumps freeze on the coldest day of the year. We miss that badly needed rainfall as storms move further south than expected. After a few delays, you finally get up to full speed with harvest and your biggest chopper or combine breaks down (and you need to wait three days for the parts to arrive).

When these events happen, we make judgements or “appraisals” of the situation. The way in which we appraise events determines how we experience them. In turn these appraisals and experiences impact our emotions. Remember from past WeCOPE articles, stress is often associated with negative emotions, and the WeCOPE program is based on finding ways to replace at least some of negative emotions with positive ones. This idea is a powerful tool in reducing stress and improving our mental and physical health.

Positive Reappraisal is a useful coping strategy where you consciously work to re-interpret an event more positively. It’s especially useful in situations where you have little or no control over the event. It can be used in many areas of your life, including work and relationships. Discovering you can take control over your reaction to events, in and of itself, reduces stress and increase positive emotions.

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Ten Things You Can Do for Your Mental Health

1. **Value Yourself:** Treat yourself with kindness and respect, and avoid self-criticism. Make time for your hobbies and favorite projects, or broaden your horizons.
2. **Take care of your body:** Taking care of yourself physically can improve your mental health - eat nutritiously, drink plenty of water, get enough sleep, avoid smoking, exercise.
3. **Surround yourself with good:** People with strong family or social connections are generally healthier than those who lack a support network. Make plans with supportive family members and friends, or seek out activities where you can meet new people, such as a club, class or support group.
4. **Give yourself:** Volunteer your time and energy to help someone else. You'll feel good about doing something tangible to help someone in need – and it's a great way to meet new people.
5. **Learn how to deal with stress:** Like it or not, stress is a part of life. Practice good coping skills: Try one minute stress strategies, do Tai Chi, take a nature walk, play with your pet, etc.
6. **Quiet your mind:** Relaxation exercises and prayer can improve your state of mind and outlook on life. In fact, research shows that meditation may help you feel calm and enhance the effects of therapy.

To read more and access links to exercises with the University of Michigan - [Click Here](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

UW Extension - Raising Wisconsin's Children (Fathers)

- **Virtual Series - Thursdays**
- **7:00PM-8:00PM CT**
- [Link](#) to register for all topics

COMET Catch-Up & Connect- Adding Microskills to Your Tool Bag

- **Virtual - Tue, 5/24**
- **6:30PM-7:30PM CT**
- [Zoom](#) to join

safeTALK Workshop - Richland Center

- **Virtual - Tue, 6/8**
- **5:00PM-9:00PM CT**
- [Link to register](#)

Contact

s.monson@swcap.org if you have any questions



I'm no longer responsible as the primary operator for our family farm (we rent all of our ground out now) but was once very involved when things were super stressful as we were farming—primarily row crops. My Dad and I were farming in three different counties, and to compound matters, we had undersized machinery. There was literally not a moment to waste once the busy times rolled around.

So, how would a farmer reappraise an event? Let's assume it's prime time for harvest, and you lose your chopper or combine to a breakdown for three days. It's really beyond your control. Can you use the opportunity to investigate some options for some additional custom help to make up for those lost few days? It might be a good time to really pencil out what those lost days are really going to cost you. Perhaps the cost that you perceive is really more about your own anxiousness and eagerness to get things done! Often, in this instance, a breakdown during a narrow window of seasonal production, does have a cost. But maybe you can use that freed up time to do some badly needed preventive maintenance on other things on the farm to give you peace of mind. That would be a valuable investment. Or, maybe it's a time when you can set work aside briefly and squeeze away for one last three day weekend with your family before the weather turns bad.

In my case, coming out of the pandemic here in the spring of 2022, I've been pretty bummed out about the cold, blustery weather that makes it feel more like early winter than early spring. How have I reappraised that situation? Well, the "slow to warm up" spring here in 2022 for me means:

- Fewer (if any) mosquitoes in May
- Fishing is likely to be better in the summer months when I have some days off
- I won't have to mow the lawn as often
- The cooler weather we've been having is likely to keep crop prices high

See? I feel better just typing that and it makes me smile! The bottom line is that things WILL happen in our world and lives, including life on the farm that we simply cannot control. Remember that old bumper sticker..."SH!T HAPPENS?" While lack of control is a big issue when it comes to stress, we can control how we act to and appraise these situations. This little bit of control we pull back for ourselves is healthy and creates more positive emotions.

One word of caution. Positive reappraisal does not mean sugar-coating or being a "Pollyanna" about a situation. Nor should we ignore wrongs to other people or conditions that we do have the ability to change. It does however mean that almost every event can have some silver lining that can be found. And finding it and naming it is good for our mental health, physical health, and overall sense of well-being.

The WeCOPE program, including the farm version will be available this summer in communities statewide. About 15 educators in counties statewide are delivering WeCOPE. Due to the pandemic, over the last many months, many WeCOPE programs have been virtual, but we also will offer more live programs in the coming year. The WeCOPE program is ideally taught over seven sessions with practice in between, but there will be additional shorter sessions offered and a series of videos and podcasts are being planned.

To learn more, or to find out about WeCOPE programs being offered in your area or statewide, contact Amanda Coorough, Human Development & Relationships Educator, and project manager at: amanda.coorough@wisc.edu or John Shutske, grant director for the WeCOPE ag adaptation at shutske@wisc.edu

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