

**RESOLUTION E2-23
STABLE FUNDING FOR FARM MENTAL HEALTH**

WHEREAS Canadian research shows that farmers currently have 20% more moderate and severe anxiety and depression than the general population, and 1 in 4 farmers had suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months;

WHEREAS An Alberta white paper released in spring of 2022 recommends the creation of a farm mental health network to create specific mental health resources and service accessible to farm families;

WHEREAS the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation has supported the above recommendation by providing a one off grant for the development of the AgKnow initiative in November 2022 which expires in March 2023;

WHEREAS The Alberta Farm Mental Health Network (AgKnow) is looking for operational funding to continue to pilot the free counselling session and other initiatives that make supports affordable and accessible to farm families;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED
THAT ALBERTA'S AGRICULTURAL SERVICE BOARDS REQUEST**

That the Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation provides stable 5 year funding support to the Alberta Farm Mental Health Network to hire and maintain staff and cover operational costs to continue the support and services offered through AgKnow.ca.

SPONSORED BY: ____MD Peace____

CARRIED

STATUS: ____Provincial____

DEPARTMENT: Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation,

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At the 2019 Provincial ASB Conference, Resolution E1-19: Access to Agriculture Specific Mental Health Resources was passed. The resolution asked for the Province to provide a 24/7 crisis line for the agriculture industry with access to agriculture specialized mental health supports and services. It also asked for long term stable funding to operate and maintain the service.

ACCESS TO AGRICULTURE-SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

- WHEREAS** Agriculture is economically essential, both provincially and federally, and agriculture needs healthy farmers to function;
- WHEREAS** Agriculture is a stressful occupation, which has become especially clear with three consecutive years of poor harvests, livestock feed shortages and other effects of climate change;
- WHEREAS** Despite mental illness diagnoses increasing, a large stigma exists around mental illness and asking for help which is especially prominent in industries like agriculture where members are isolated and have a distinct workplace culture of not requesting help;
- WHEREAS** Alberta does not have an agriculture-specific mental health crisis line, although neighbouring provinces do (e.g. Saskatchewan);
- WHEREAS** 310-FARM is a well-known and commonly utilized number that can direct callers to an abundance of resources, but only offers agronomic information during office hours;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

THAT ALBERTA’S AGRICULTURAL SERVICE BOARDS REQUEST

That the Provincial Government of Alberta facilitates the formation of a free, year-round, all hours, mental health crisis hotline, dedicated to the agriculture industry, providing farmers with direct access to uniquely qualified professionals and resources, whom have both an understanding of mental health issues and agriculture-specific stresses.

FURTHER THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

THAT ALBERTA’S AGRICULTURAL SERVICE BOARDS REQUEST

That the Provincial Government of Alberta secure long term, sustainable funding for the operation and maintenance of this mental health crisis hotline.

SPONSORED BY: Lac Ste. Anne County

MOVED BY: _____

SECONDED BY: _____

CARRIED: _____

DEFEATED: _____

STATUS: Provincial

DEPARTMENT: Agriculture and Forestry

[\(background found in the original Resolution on the ASB website\)](#)

At the time the Ministry of Agriculture response was that they didn’t have any Alberta specific data, and that there was “no funding available for a mental health crisis hotline dedicated to agriculture’ but that they were committed to connect with Alberta Health about the possibility.

Alberta Health's response was that they don't offer occupation specific services, but crisis supports available to all Albertans, and directed the ASBs back to the services initiatives that already existed in Agriculture including FCC, 4-H and DoMore Ag.

Advocacy by industry groups such as the Alberta Commodity Boards and Associations, Alberta Stock Growers and others continued and in 2020 the Ministry was able to provide a small grant to the ARECA association to explore the Alberta situation and adapt some resources for farm specific use. This project resulted in an extensive needs assessment and engagement that resulted in a [White Paper on Farm Mental Health](#) with a number of recommendations for improving and addressing farm specific stressors.

The recommendations were presented to the Minister of Agriculture in the spring of 2021, and further funding support was promised to start an Alberta FMH research initiative with Dr Purc Stephenson at the University of Alberta Augustana Campus, and develop a online engagement platform to facilitate access to farm specific services and resources.

2022 was a year of development and engagement for the initiative, and funding was finally obtained in November 2022. The research program is delivering on four projects: including impact of livestock depopulation (in response to the CWD and Avian Influenza currently happening in Alberta, and in anticipation of Swine fever and hoof and mouth), impact of farm transition (due to aging farming population and the lack of written transition plans), resource mapping (what services are already available and how to we encourage use by the farming community), and therapeutic approaches that fit the farm culture.

In addition to the research, the [AgKnow.ca](#) website was developed to engage and build a farm knowledgeable network of therapist, and pilot a program to reduce the barriers to therapy by providing free sessions for farmers and their families. In addition the Agknow initiative has started professional development training opportunities that they are encouraging mental health and health care workers to participate in. So far the agriculture community, ag businesses and the healthcare communities are very interested and engaged. 2022 professional development activities will focus on discovery by bringing people with lived experience to be interviewed. As the research program advances, training programs and reference resources will be built and disseminated through AgKnow.

Other programs that have been sketched out but not yet resourced include peer support networks, suicide prevention campaigns and survivor supports, and a farm transition referral network. AgKnow continues to reach out and engage with community members but is now in place where all of the funding received to explore the topic, start the research program and develop the community engagement platform is used up March 2023.

AgKnow has been in conversations with the Ministry staff regarding the upcoming

Public Trust funding that will be available through the new Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Program (SCAP), and they are optimistic that they will be able to obtain some funding through the program.

The ideal situation would be a 5 year grant to provide stable funding while the AgKnow program creates and amasses the programs and services that meet the needs of Albertans and offset this funding with sponsorship and self generating funds. Ideally AgKnow would be run as a not for profit business generating income they can leverage with government and foundation grants.

The minister already recognizes the AgKnow initiative as Alberta's approach to farm mental health, and is very supportive of the work being done. This resolution if passed would add ASB endorsement to the AgKnow initiative and provide evidence of broad support for the work being done.