

AgBIO COMMUNICATIONS UNIT
SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

For release: Nov. 6, 2009

Contact: Donna Bittiker, (605) 997-2469

Cooperative Extension service offers producers coping strategies during tough harvest

BROOKINGS, S.D. – The fall harvest represents the culmination of an entire year of work, but it also is a time when too many producers push themselves beyond healthy physical and mental limits.

Producers and their families are feeling additional stress this year due to the delayed harvest, compounded with livestock feeding challenges, according to South Dakota Cooperative Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Educator Donna Bittiker, who said the wet, cool fall has made things even tougher.

“Agricultural producers face the same societal pressures as most people encounter, such as balancing work and family,” Bittiker said. “However, they also face stress from sources that are beyond their control, including the weather and market prices.”

Compiled with the additional stress of harvest time, producers may take unnecessary risks. Mental mistakes and rushed decisions can result in injuries, said Bittiker.

“Recognizing and responding to the early warning signs of stress can reduce the likelihood of injuries and improve physical and mental health,” Bittiker said. “For help in dealing with stress-related problems, producers can turn to their spouses, friends, clergy, or licensed counselors.”

According to South Dakota State University counseling and human resources development professor Marla Muxen, nearly every community has individuals and

organizations available to help producers deal with stress-related problems. She suggests these simple steps to help manage stress during harvest season:

- Keep lines of communication open. Share your concerns or troubles with a trusted friend or professional.
- Stay connected socially. Resist the urge to avoid worry by avoiding other people.
- Take 15-minute breaks every 2-3 hours.
- Admit when you are irritable or moody or when you feel like you're not thinking clearly – it is often a sign that you need a break.
- Eat nutritionally balanced meals and snacks. Caffeine and sugar provide short boosts of energy, but can also increase fatigue and slow reaction time as the effects wear off. At the same time, avoid numbing yourself with substances such as alcohol.
- Get plenty of sleep. If sleep is elusive, use prayer, meditation, or music to buffer worry.
- Be your own best friend – be tolerant of your inability to control things and try to take the long view of challenges you have already survived.
- Allow people around you to show that they care about what happens to you and offer the same message to them.
- Establish realistic goals for yourself, your family members, your equipment, and your operation.
- Seek professional help when problems become overwhelming.

For additional information on counseling resources in your county or town, contact your county Extension office, or visit the South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service Web site page, “Weather-Damaged Grain” at this link:

<http://sdces.sdstate.edu/weatherDamagedGrain/index.cfm>.