When Stress Becomes Distress

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GETTYSBURG (Adams) —
We're learning how to utilize drought-damaged corn and sorghum. We're weighing the use of alternative feedstuffs for our dairy cows and livestock. We're evengetting advise on businessmanagement techniques that may help our farm businesses to survive. But, what do we do for the drought-stressed farmer and his

family? This question was addressed at a recent meeting of the Gettysburgarea Young Farmers where the guest speaker was Dr. Ray Bowen of Psychological Associates in Gettysburg. While there are more smiles now in farm country since the rains have been falling, only last month many farm families were experiencing the emotional stress of anger and despair that comes from watching a year's worth of work wither and die. Farming can be a stressful occupauon. Bowne highlighted recognizing when stress becomes distress and ways to reduce that stress.

Bowen defined psychologial

stress as, "What you have to adjust

to in a given period of time." He

added that stress can be physical,

mental, or both. Using a Life Stress

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Scale developed by Holmes and Rahe in the mid-60s, Bowen pointed out that stress can be positive or negative. You experience stress at happy moments, such as weddings, and at unhappy times, such as with trouble with your inlaws. Bowen stated that stress is caused by individual factors. If someone confides they are having problems with a situation that seems trivial to you, remember that for that person the stress may be very real.

The body's reaction to these

The body's reaction to these stressful experiences ties back to our age-old instincts of "fight or flight" when faced with many of life's events. "In seconds, we make a judgement as to what kind of stress we're experiencing and we appraise the threat. Our secondary appraisal reaction then asks us what are our resources for handling this situation?", explained Bowen.

Bowen continued, "The problem arises when the body and brain are constantly bombarded with perceived threatening situations, and the person loses his ability to prioritize which reaction to work on and which to leave pass. This is when stress becomes distress."

Bowen listed several danger signs that can signal when stress is

becoming distress. Some of these include: general irritability, hyper-excitation, or depression, grinding of the teeth, nightmares, accident proneness, decreased or increased appetite, increased smoking or use of alcohol and drugs, and the inability to concentrate, just to list a few.

Citing research figures, Bowen noted that 70 percent of all doctor visits are due to symptoms brought on by stress. While no acute illness can be found, a diagnosis of "It's just your nerves", should be taken as seriously as any specific disease would be taken.

Several personality types susceptible to stress diseases are the one-man band who tries to do too many things simultaneously; the chronic hurrier who is always under a self-imposed deadline; the exasperated person who can't wait in line; the combative challenger who competes in everything he does and has to be number one. Many of these traits can be applied to farmers as we compare crop yields, our place on the DHIA list, or our pay price from the dairy.

Several suggestions Bowen had as means for reducing stress included planning for down-time or idle time every day. Bowen stressed that this does not mean merely physically resting, but also allowing your senses to take charge so you can really "smell the roses" or "see the sunset."

Another way to reduce stress is to concentrate on one task at a time so its accomplishment can be enjoyed. Bowen stressed taking the opportunity to pat yourself on the back when a job is done to your satisfaction before jumping into another task.

Also, it was suggested that you interact at least once a day with someone who makes you laugh. It need not only be a person, but also could be a book, pet, or television show that you enjoy. Other suggestions are finding time to yourself, getting more exercise, and cultivating interest outside of agriculture that provide you with personal satisfaction.

Bowen concluded his presentation with a thoughts worksheet. This worksheet asks you to describe an unpleasant situation, specify the emotions and degree of emotions you have in that situation, then list the automatic thoughts that proceed those emotions. Such thoughts might be that the situation is all your fault or that some one is to blame for your predicament. Then the worksheet asks you to list your rational responses to those automatic thoughts and challenge their validity.

Bowen stressed that if a person could mentally put himself through these steps when confronted with stressful situations, it could help to refine his decision-making processes. This could help people to live with the decisions they have to make.

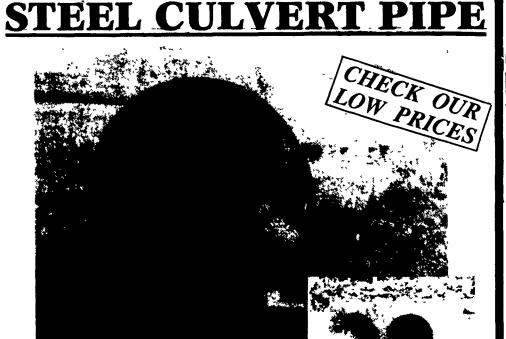
Spencer Receives Award

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre)
— Stephen B. Spencer, professor of dairy science extension, was recently named recipient of a Distinguished Service Award from the Pennsylvania Association of Dairy Sanitarians and Dairy Laboratory Analysts. The award was given in recognition of his extension work with milk quality.

Spencer also presented a paper at the 83rd annual meeting of The American Dairy Science Associa-

tion, held June 26-29 at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada. Titled "Recent Research and Developments in Machine Milking- A Review," the paper examined research on the link between milking machines and mastitis. It also reviewed new technologies such as robotic milking and in-barn computer systems which monitor the herd's daily feed consumption and milk production.

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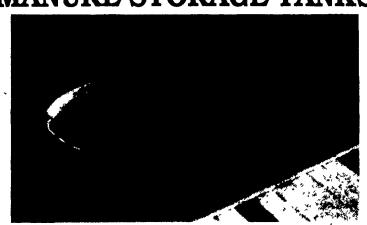
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