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## **Agriculture Secretary Encourages Farmers to Reach Out as Industry Faces Growing Stress Throughout Pandemic**

**Harrisburg, PA** – Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding and Department of Human Services Dr. Perri Rosen will be joined by industry and healthcare representatives this afternoon for an open conversation about decreasing stigma surrounding mental health in agriculture. The discussion will be [livestreamed on Facebook](#) at 1:00 PM.

“Agriculture is more than a job, it’s a lifestyle led by proud Pennsylvanians,” said Redding. “But farmers are not exempt from the burdens of life. The stresses we all face as we maneuver living through a pandemic are compounded by uncertain markets, droughts and extreme weather and often pressures of running a generations-old farm.

“It’s as simple as reaching out to our neighbors and having honest conversations about mental health,” added Redding. “These small actions can help to break the stigma surrounding mental health in agriculture and build a stronger, healthier agriculture community in Pennsylvania.”

According to a January [study](#) by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, farmers are among the most likely to die by suicide compared to other occupations. The study also found that suicide rates overall had increased by 40 percent. Time demands, financial issues, fear of losing the farm (and therefore a home), and the uncertainty of both weather and the economy all contribute to the mental health strain on farmers.

“Mental health is integral to good physical health and our overall quality of life, but unfortunately, it can still be challenging for people to talk about openly. This can make people feel isolated and create barriers to meaningful connection and support from those who care about us,” said Human Services Secretary Teresa Miller. “We must all work to build empathetic, supportive communities where people know that they will be heard and validated. Mental health affects all of us, and by recognizing this, checking in on each other, and offering to help, we can make sure people know that they never have to feel alone.”

Secretary Redding encourages farmers to start conversations in their communities and watch for signs of distress, including:

- Decline in care of crops, animals, and farm
- Deterioration of personal appearance
- Withdrawing from social events
- Increase in farm accidents
- Change in routine

- Increased physical complaints
- Increase in alcohol use
- Giving away prized possessions

The Department of Human Services offers free COVID-19 crisis counseling services through the Support and Referral Helpline, anyone feeling stressed, overwhelmed, alone, or anxious is encouraged to connect with a free crisis counselor by calling 1-855-284-2494. For TTY, dial 724-631-5600. Trained professionals are available 24/7 to help navigate unprecedented challenges.

If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis or is considering suicide, help is available. Reach out to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or contact Crisis Text Line by texting PA to 741-741.

A Plain Communities Helpline is also available through WellSpan at Philhaven at 717-989-8661. The Plain Communities Outpatient Clinic provides high quality mental health care that is sensitive to the values of the plain sect community.