

OSF SilverCloud Can Help Farmers Weather a Storm of Uncertainty

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ALTON - Matthew Goedeke farms 1800 acres in Knox and Fulton Counties and he talks about the stress of unprecedented planting challenges, trade disruptions and depressed commodity prices which have collided to impact his livelihood and that of fellow farm families across the state. To manage those stresses, Goedeke has used a free resource, OSF SilverCloud, that lends digital support from the comfort of his home, shop or tractor

“We’ve never been here before,” said Western Illinois farmer Matthew Goedeke. He’s talking about this year’s unprecedented slow planting season in which many farmers waited past critical planting dates for the state’s two biggest crops, corn and soybeans.

In some areas, rivers have spilled over leaving farm fields looking like fishing ponds. Combine that with uncertain markets because of trade wars with China and Mexico, and it’s a perfect storm of sorts for stress, anxiety and depression in farming communities.

Goedeke farms 1800 acres of corn and soybeans on family farms in Knox and Fulton County. He also has an off-farm job selling Ag products. He worries most about his employees struggling to make ends meet.

Goedeke, who is in his 30s, has spent the past several months constantly assessing whether to plant, whether to change seed type, and as he wraps up planting, his worries have shifted to whether the crops he managed to plant will survive and the impact of a delayed harvest, even on next year's planting season. Unfortunately, Goedeke has known farmers who let that kind anxiety and depression drive them to suicide.

"They're also the same guys, I talked to them quite often and I never really thought they had a problem or anything like that so it goes back to that, they just hold it in and then don't really know what to do and in their minds, there's really no other option," he shared.

OSF HealthCare Behavioral Health Manager Luke Raymond said its important farmers know about OSF SilverCloud, which offers a digital way to manage those stresses with support from the comfort of farmers' home, shop or tractor.

Especially for farmers who are part of a generation of family farmers, Raymond says the pressure not to fail can be tremendous.

"It intensifies the pressure to maintain that family ownership of a farm. Couple that with some other factors that may be out of their control – whether it's environmental factors like what we've seen this spring or economic factors – that can have a tremendously negative impact on their ability to manage those feelings of stress or worry," according to Raymond.

Isolation also keeps farmers at a higher risk for depression, stress and anxiety.

"They don't necessarily have close neighbors they can hang out with and have a beer at the end of the day or something like that that's relaxing. That social isolation also leads to a lack of available resources." Raymond added, "If you live 30 miles to the nearest town, that town may not even have a health clinic in it, much less a behavioral health resource."

OSF SilverCloud, is a website and smart phone app that offers evidence-based tools for adults who are not in crisis but who could benefit from helpful assessments, exercises, and strategies available in short modules that are easy and available 24/7.

Goedeke has found himself tapping SilverCloud while waiting in his truck for chemicals to arrive or while at home watching TV. He likes that he can work at his own pace and

use it whenever he has a few spare minutes. Quizzes and exercises provide personalized feedback and helpful strategies such as journaling, mindfulness and breathing exercises.

“Based off of how your personality is, this is some ways you can kind of deal with things and cope with things and go about tackling task at hand but it’s super easy to navigate. You just scroll up, get to the bottom of that page, hit the button and it’s on to the next one.”

The tool advises not rushing through modules to avoid added stress. Raymond says it is a softer entry into receiving help which is important for farmers who research shows are more reluctant than most about seeking professional help for mental health struggles.

Goedeke says as a younger farmer, he’s probably more willing to admit he doesn’t have all the answers, even when it comes to managing stress. He recommends SilverCloud for anyone, even if they aren’t experiencing obvious symptoms because he says it helps uncover issues, re-frame perspectives, and improves how you relate to the world and those around you.

He said, he gained new insights when he reflected on recent challenges.

“I felt like I could just relate more real-life scenarios of alright, if I had thought of it this way, maybe I could have handled this situation better.”

SilverCloud is monitored by regional behavioral health navigators who can be accessed through a “Get Help” button to offer coaching, personalized support or to connect users with more immediate, community-based resources when warranted. Raymond says those behind-the-scenes navigators set SilverCloud apart from other digital behavioral health tools. He stresses, studies of SilverCloud users show a reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression equal to those who’ve experienced traditional face-to-face therapy.

You do not have to be an OSF HealthCare patient to enroll in SilverCloud.

To get started, create an account at: OSF.SilverCloudHealth.com/signup. Then, access the tool via web site or download the app.