

Illinois Program Connecting Farmers to Mental Health Resources Visits SIUE Research Center

by Megan Wieser
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EDWARDSVILLE – As part of an ongoing campaign to connect the Illinois farming community to mental health resources, Illinois Department of Agriculture Director Jerry Costello II visited the National Corn-to-Ethanol Research Center (NCERC) at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville on Thursday, May 12 for a press conference highlighting the Farm Family Resource Initiative (FFRI).

The FFRI was established in Illinois in 2019 to address the mental health needs of farming and agricultural communities. During the last legislative session, the Illinois

General Assembly appropriated an additional \$500,000 to ensure the program remains operational in all 102 Illinois counties throughout fiscal year 2023.

The press conference at NCERC marked the third of a seven-stop campaign throughout the state with the goal of bringing awareness to this program and increasing accessibility to the farming community. SIU President Daniel Mahony, Representative Katie Stuart (D-Edwardsville), and Karen Stallman of the FFRI joined Costello as speakers at the event.

The FFRI is led by the SIU School of Medicine and funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It provides a telephone hotline for farmers to call to connect with mental health resources and providers.

“In just a few short years, the FFRI has helped many in our farming communities,” said Costello. “Providing confidential access to mental health providers while also breaking down stigmas in seeking help is critical for those working in our state’s number one industry.”

“In recognizing May as Mental Health Awareness Month, we focus on the many faces of mental illness as well as the partnerships, like the Farm Family Resource Initiative, that help our families and neighbors in rural communities who experience mental illness,” said Mahony. “Thanks to State Representative Katie Stuart and her colleagues in the General Assembly, Director Costello and the Illinois Department of Agriculture and our dedicated professionals at the SIU School of Medicine, we’ve created a partnership that not only provides a direct line to services for those in need, but also delivers education and training to rural partners working to improve the health and safety of farm families.”

Spring and fall are often the most stressful times for farmers, and this year will likely bring additional stressors due to weather causing planting delays and inflation influencing the cost of farming inputs.

“As a member of a farming family, I’m acutely aware of the challenges that farmers face that impact their mental health,” said NCERC Executive Director John Caupert. “The incredible tools that the FFRI provides are resources that can help bring some relief to farmers whose roles are incredibly important in our society.”

If you or someone you know needs to speak about stressors on the farm, the Farmer Assistance Helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-833-FARM-SOS.

To learn more about the FFRI visit siumed.edu/farm. Help is only a phone call away.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville provides students with a high-quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 13,000.