

Brittney Schrick, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor Family Life Specialist  
University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension



# The Hidden Farm Crisis

## Chronic Stress & Mental Health in Rural Communities

# Overview

- What barriers do rural populations face when seeking support?
- What stressors have increased pressure on already struggling communities?
- How do these stressors impact individual producers and families?
- How is the extension system equipping farmers, agriculture workers, and their communities to cope?
- What can we all gain from healthier rural communities?

Image: APA.org

A wide-angle photograph of a rural landscape. The foreground is a lush green field with some patches of brown earth. A dense line of green trees runs across the middle ground. In the background, there are rolling hills under a bright blue sky filled with scattered white clouds. The text "What does 'rural' mean?" is overlaid in the center of the image.

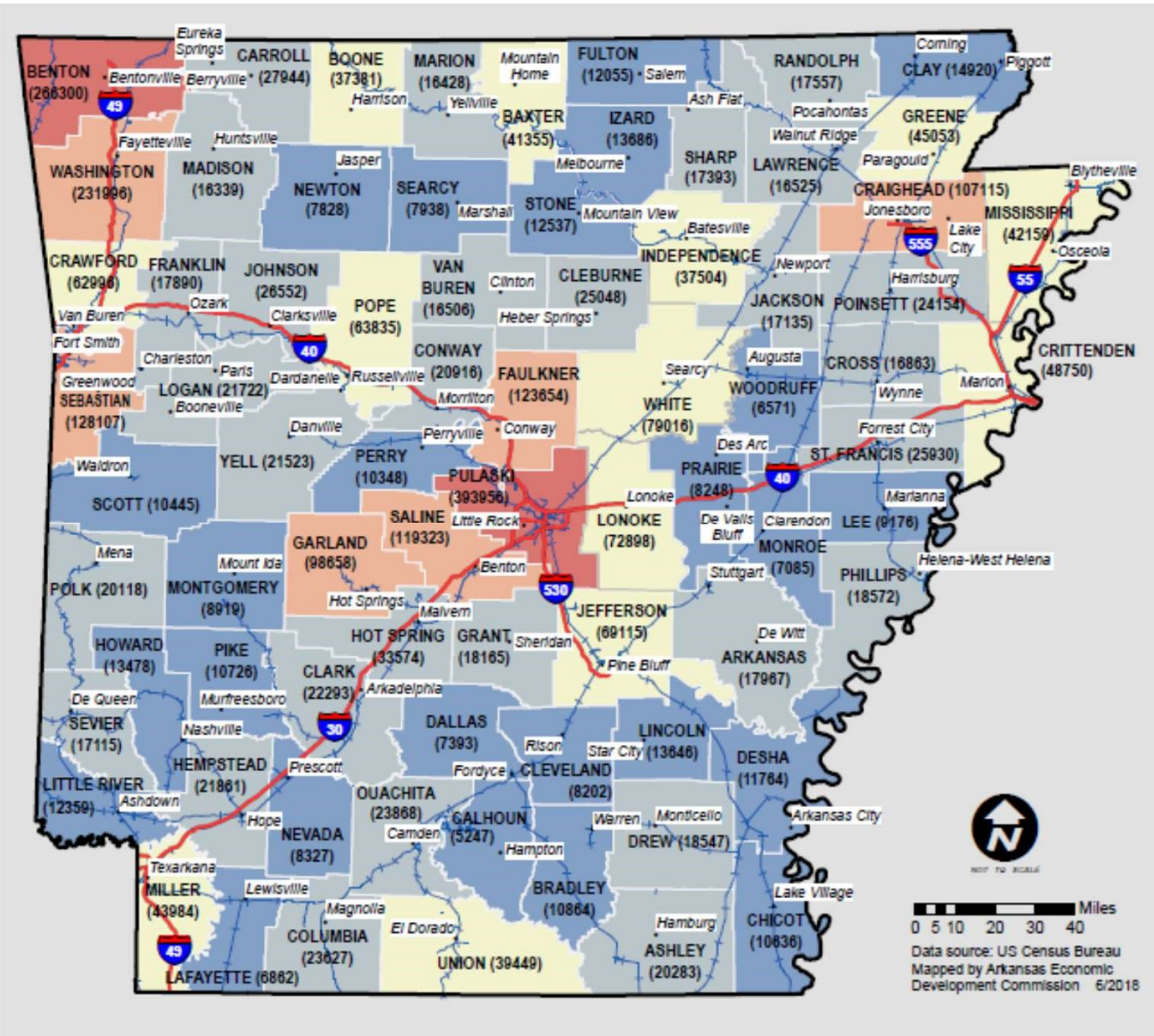
What does “rural” mean?

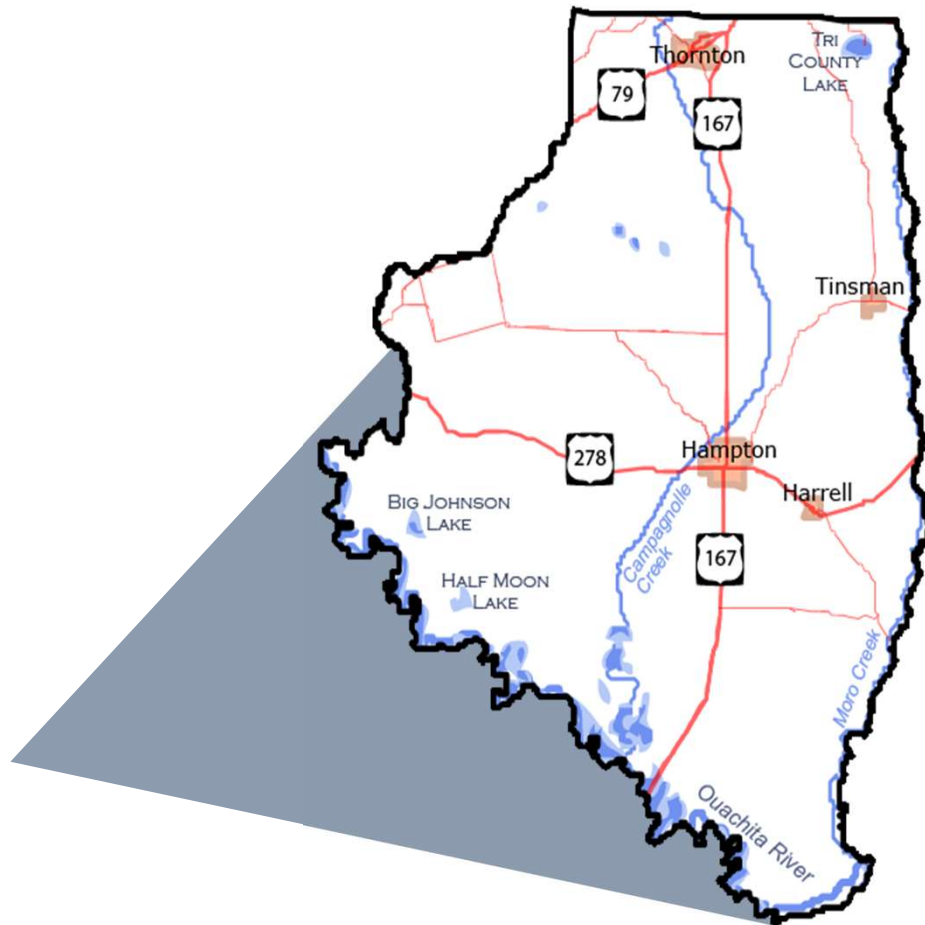
# What is Rural?

- **Merriam-Webster:** of or relating to the country, country people or life, or agriculture.
- **The Census Bureau:** any population, housing, or territory NOT in an urban area.
- **US Office of Management and Budget:** All counties that are not part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) are considered rural.
- **USDA Economic Research Service:** Uses Rural-Urban Commuting Areas (RUCAs) delineating metropolitan, micropolitan, small town, and rural commuting areas and further subdivides into 21 secondary codes based on commuting flows — local or to another census tract.

## Arkansas Quick Facts

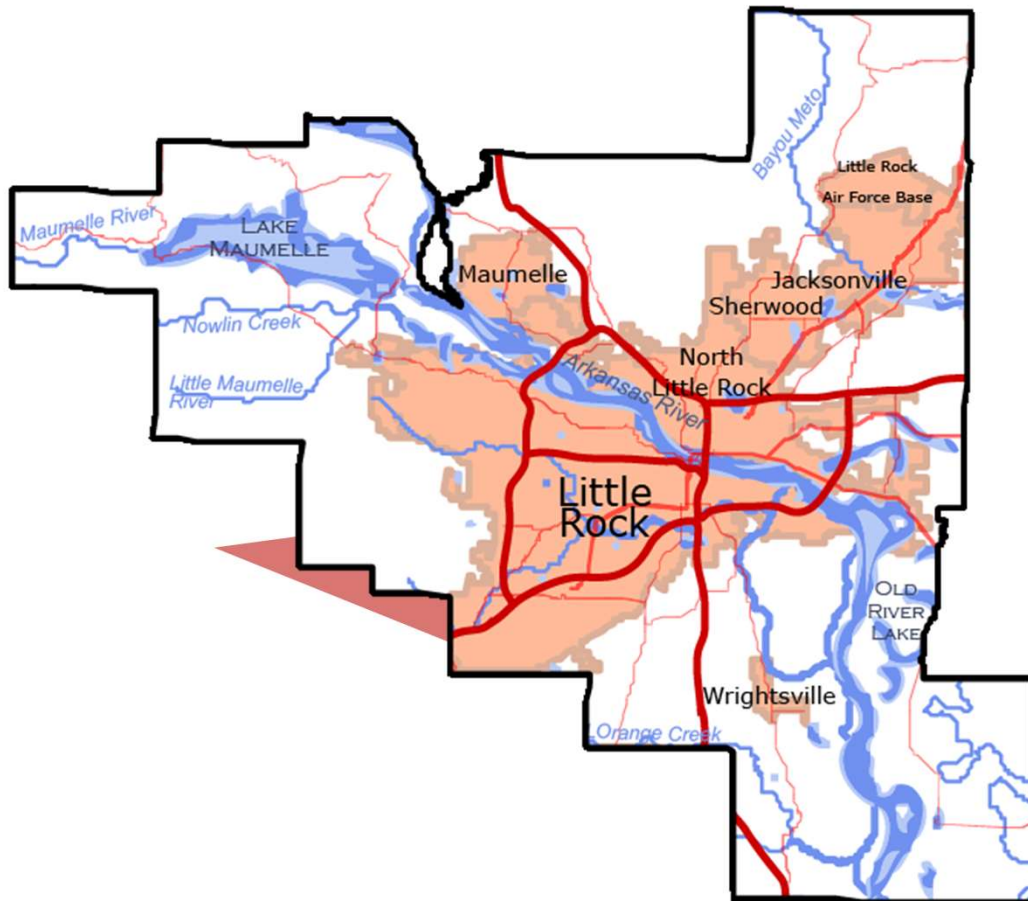
- Total population: 3,004,279
- 75 counties
- 10 of 75 counties have fewer than 10,000 residents
- Top 10 most populous counties have over half the state population.





## Calhoun County

- Total population: <5400
- 632 square miles (8.5 persons per sq. mi.)
- County Seat: Hampton, pop. 1285
- Health shortage area for mental health, primary care, dental



## Pulaski County

- Total population: 390,000+
- 808 square miles (483 persons per sq. mi.)
- County Seat: Little Rock, pop. 198,000
- No Health shortage area

- Top 10 most dangerous professions
- Stressors include constant responsibility, lack of separation between work and family life, isolation, intergenerational tension, climate change, injuries, financial struggles
- May lead to distress and despair
- Average Arkansas farmer is 58
- Age-related ailments increase stress
- Older farmers at higher risk for injury
- More difficult to access health care
- Rural residents die by suicide at higher rates than urban residents.



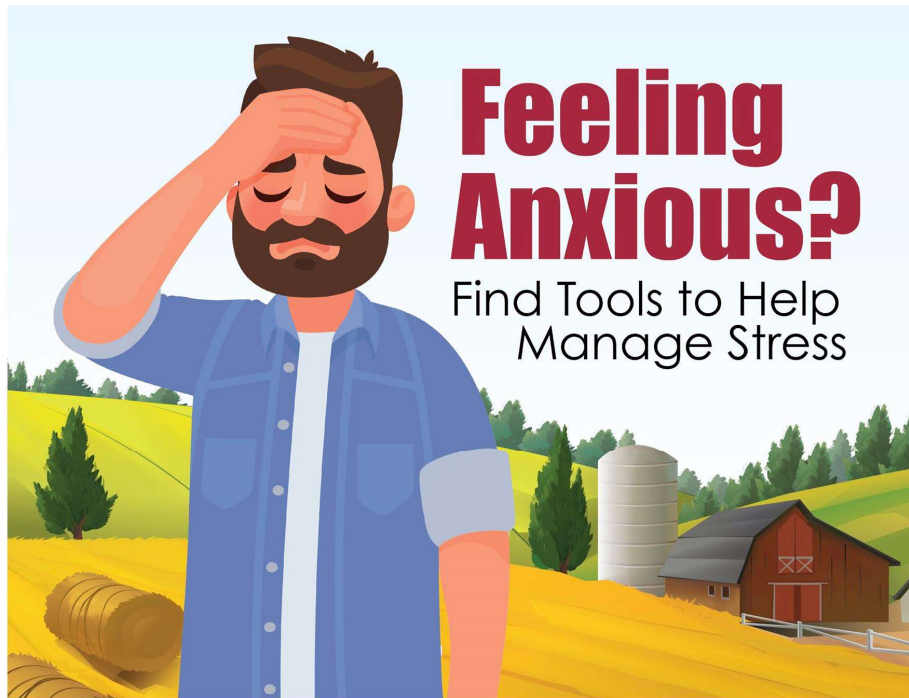


A photograph of a person wearing a plaid shirt, holding a single yellow tomato in their right hand. Below the hand is a green plastic basket with several other tomatoes inside. The background is a blurred green field, suggesting a farm or garden setting.

**Socially disadvantaged farmers may experience compounding stressors:**

- Limited access to loans or other monetary support
- Disproportionate heir's property concerns
- Lack of culturally competent outreach
- Higher rates of poverty

# COVID-Related Stressors



**U of A**  
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE  
RESEARCH & EXTENSION  
University of Arkansas System

Your Resource for  
**COVID-19 INFORMATION**  
for Agriculture, Families & Communities  
[www.uaex.edu/COVID19](http://www.uaex.edu/COVID19)

- Supply chain limitations
- Limited access to supplies needed to maintain farming operation
- Farmers who engage in direct sales may be losing or gaining sales depending on whether they rely more on restaurants and institutions, or sell directly to consumers.
- Inability to pay employees
- Not having workers available to manage livestock or to plant and harvest crops
- Loss of income that leads to financial issues
- Market fluctuation
- Concerns about family well-being



# Chronic Stress Management

- Identify stressors
- Notice how those stressors affect physical health, mental health, behavior, & relationships
- Identify existing resources, including current coping strategies
- Find additional resources
- Discuss ways to overcome barriers to additional help

Image: Shoppe Black

# Barriers

- Accessibility
- Availability
- Acceptability
- Affordability
- Stigma




Image: Kentucky Farm Bureau



## Cultural Competency

- The capacity for people to increase their knowledge and understanding of cultural differences
- The ability to acknowledge cultural assumptions and biases
- The willingness to make changes in thought and behavior to address those biases



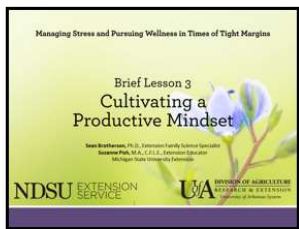
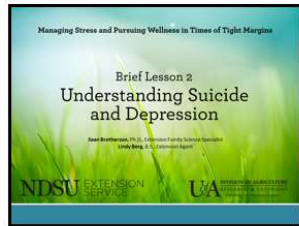
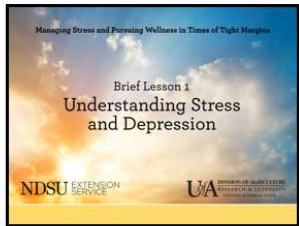
What does cultural competence look like for someone seeking to work with rural populations?

# Cultural Competency

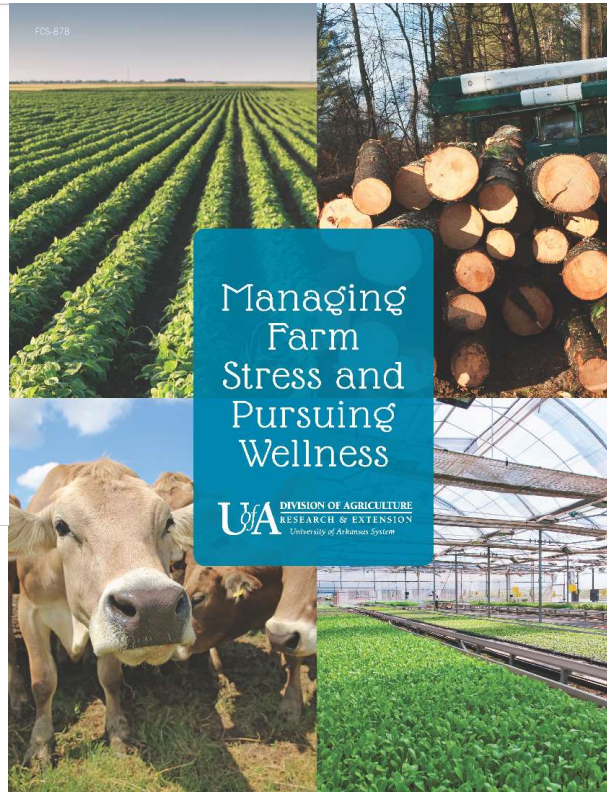
- Address cultural, language, or communication barriers within a program that may hinder engagement
- Provide an environment where diverse individuals can negotiate treatment options or engage in conversations within the context of their cultural health beliefs and practices
- Use community health workers to reduce barriers to care for different populations
- Become familiar with and respectful of different beliefs and integrate them into plans or curricula when appropriate



# Arkansas Extension Stress Management Resources



UAEX - Farm Stress



Farmers can become stressed by a range of challenges - low commodity prices, debt, weather events, animal and crop issues, illness, injuries and other problems. This stress can carry over into farmers' personal lives and families. As a result, youth may experience stress from their family's farm conditions.

## Warning Signs of Stress

*FARM STRESS CAN AFFECT YOUTH EMOTIONALLY, PHYSICALLY AND SOCIALLY. SIGNS OF STRESS IN YOUTH ARE CATEGORIZED BELOW:*



## Mental Health First Aid

- Food
  - ▶ [Food Safety](#)
- Health
  - ▶ [AIM for CHangE](#)
  - ▶ [Colon Cancer Screening](#)
  - ▶ [Coronavirus](#)
  - ▶ [Dining with Diabetes](#)
  - ▶ [The PROMISE Initiative](#)
    - ▶ [Prescription Opioid Misuse](#)
    - ▶ [Mental Health First Aid](#)
    - ▶ [Farm Stress](#)
- Insects-Human Pests
  - ▶ [Insects-Pet Pests](#)
- Nutrition
  - ▶ [Rural Health](#)



[www.MentalHealthFirstAid.org](http://www.MentalHealthFirstAid.org)

For adults in rural Mississippi, Extension offers Mental Health First Aid, an 8-hour course that teaches individuals how better to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental health problems or crises, such as substance-use disorders.

Opioid-use disorder and mental health go hand-in-hand. Not only is opioid-use disorder a mental health problem, but often individuals try to cope with underlying mental health problems, such as depression or anxiety, with opioids or other substances.

### Select Your County Office

SELECT A COUNTY ▼

### Related Material

[Contact the PROMISE Initiative](#)

[PROMISE Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[PROMISE Team Member](#)

[R is for Rural and Resilience Series](#)

### Your Extension Experts



 A banner for 'Rural Resilience: Farm Stress Training'. The background is a photograph of two men in a field. One man is wearing a green jacket and a brown cap, the other is wearing a blue jacket and a blue cap. They are shaking hands. In the background, there are red tractors in a field under a blue sky.
 

**Rural Resilience:  
Farm Stress Training**

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension

ILLINOIS EXTENSION

National Farmworker Laborer FARM CREDIT

 A banner for 'Cultivating Resiliency for Women in Agriculture'. The background is a sunset over a field with a dirt road leading into the distance.
 

**CULTIVATING RESILIENCY  
for Women in Agriculture**

Join Us for the Original Coffee Chat  
Thursday, July 30 – 12 p.m. CDT

*mixed-gender session*

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION

UMASH Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center

AAW A FORCE FOR TRUTH



# Why does this matter?

Healthier rural people = Healthier rural communities

Healthier rural communities contribute to a healthier world.

# Emergency and Other Resources

- **Suicide Lifeline:** 1-800-273-8255 (TALK)
- **Crisis Text Line:** text **HOME** to **741741**
- **Arkansas Coalition Against Domestic Violence:**  
1-800-269-4688
- **Crimes Against Children Hotline:** 1-800-482-5694
- **Call your doctor or local ER**
- **If you are physically unsafe or victimized, call your local police department or 911**



Follow:

**UAEX Family Life**  
**UAEX Farm Stress**  
On Facebook

Contact:

**Dr. Brittney Schrick**  
Assistant Professor  
Family Life  
[bschrick@uaex.edu](mailto:bschrick@uaex.edu)