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# Rural Mental Health Matters!!!

How we can connect and protect Georgia's  
Agricultural and Farming Communities

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# What is Rural Georgia

## Did You Know?

- One in Five Georgians Live in Rural Areas
- About 60 million people, or one in five Americans, live in rural America.
- The term “rural” means different things to different people. For many, it evokes images of farmlands and pastoral landscapes.
- In general, rural areas are sparsely populated, have low housing density, and are far from urban centers. Urban areas make up only 3 percent of the entire land area of the country but are home to more than 80 percent of the population. Conversely, 97 percent of the country’s land mass is rural but only 19.3 percent of the population lives there.
- For more, go to [Defining Rural at the U.S. Census Bureau](#)





# What is Rural Georgia

## Did You Know?

### Georgia Population

The current population of Georgia in 2022 is **3,744,385**, a **0.36% decline** from 2021.

The population of Georgia in 2021 was **3,757,980**, a **0.21% decline** from 2020.

The population of Georgia in 2020 was **3,765,912**, a **0.13% decline** from 2019.

The population of Georgia in 2019 was **3,770,811**, a **0.04% decline** from 2018.



### Georgia Rural Population

Rural population refers to people living in rural areas as defined by national statistical offices. It is calculated as the difference between total population and urban population. Aggregation of urban and rural population may not add up to total population because of different country coverages.

Georgia rural population for 2021 was **1,488,191**, a **1.41% decline** from 2020.

Georgia rural population for 2020 was **1,509,450**, a **0.94% decline** from 2019.

Georgia rural population for 2019 was **1,523,815**, a **1.15% decline** from 2018.

Georgia rural population for 2018 was **1,541,599**, a **1% decline** from 2017.

<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/GEO/georgia/rural-population>

# Georgia Agriculture Facts

**Food and fiber production**  
plus directly related processing and indirect sectors  
**contributes...**



**69.4 billion dollars**



**352,430 jobs**

**to the Georgia economy**

The Center for Agribusiness & Economic Development | University of Georgia | Ag Snapshots 2022

Average age of primary producer • 59.8 years  
Female • 22.9% (9,717)  
Black • 4.4% (1,878)  
Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin • 1.2% (525)

## 2020 NATIONAL COMMODITY RANKINGS\*



**GEORGIA  
#1**

**COMMODITY**

Broilers  
Peanuts  
Pecans, Utilized



**COMMODITY**

Cotton Lint  
Cotton Seed  
Watermelon



**GEORGIA  
#2**



**GEORGIA  
#3**

**COMMODITY**

Cantaloupe  
Peaches

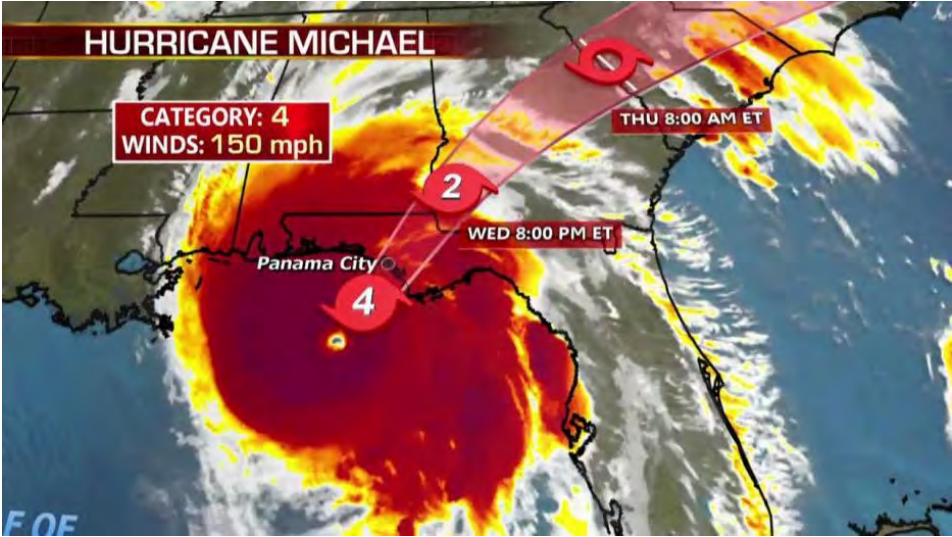


**GEORGIA  
#4**

**COMMODITY**

Blueberries

# How it started



## FACING THE STORM



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# Southwest Rural Stress Partnership

In 2019 we held 3 meetings with Colquitt, Echols and Mitchell Counties. The average attendance was 97 farmers. We held blood pressure checks at these meetings to correlate physical health and mental wellbeing. Approximately 49% of farmers participated in these blood pressure checks. Approximately 63% of the farmers took home the Growing Stronger informational health folders.

In 2022, we expanded those 3 counties to include 3 more: Calhoun, Sumter and Worth. The average attendance was 63 farmers. These meetings also included the blood pressure checks but due to Covid related health care demands and the deficit of local health care providers available, blood pressure checks and consultations were only offered at 3 of the 6 meetings, resulting in an average decrease participation rate to 18% for blood pressure examinations. However, we did see an increase in those who took home the Growing Stronger informational folders at 54%.

In 2023, we added an additional 5 counties: Berrien, Grady, Macon, Terrell, and Turner. After each meeting, I received an average of 3 calls from farmers or their families requesting additional stress management information. Also, farmer feedback to ANR Extension Agents included positive statements referencing the need for the stress management topic to be addressed, and gratitude for farmer health concerns, coping resources, and the blood pressure health services provided.

In 2024, we added a statewide tobacco meeting and these additional counties: Brooks, Houston, Tift and Wilcox. As of March 2024 I have spoken to about 1200 farmers in Georgia.

We plan to continue these efforts with ANR Extension Agents to continue to effectively deliver stress management resources to farmers. Additional evaluation, development, and implementation will be conducted.

# Realities for Georgia's Agriculture Community



**Natural Disasters**  
Hurricane Michael 2018  
Hurricane Idalia 2023

**Foreign Animal Disease**  
Avian Influenza 2017 & 2022

**Annual Stress**  
Uncertain Crop Production

**Who is caring for the caregiver?**



# The Studies Informing us Today

Farm Stress in Georgia: A Qualitative Study – by Dr. Proctor and Mr. Hopkins at UGA. Journal of Rural Mental Health - “It’s Easier to go to the Beer Store Than Ask for Help”: A Qualitative Exploration of Barriers to Health Care in Rural Farming Communities. Noah Hopkins, Christina Proctor, Jessica Legge Muilenburg, and Trace Kershaw.

Farm Stress Research: Framework, Findings, and Forward Path – by Dr. Anna Scheyett

Georgia Farmer and Mental Well-Being Study – by Stephanie Basey and Dr. Anne Montgomery, Georgia Rural Health Innovation Center; School of Medicine, Mercer University

Journal of Extension - "The Farmer Stress Production Meeting Model: Acceptability and Feasibility of an Intervention." Anna Scheyett, Andrea Scarrow, Jennifer Dunn, Stephanie Hollifield, Justin Shealey, and Brian Hayes



# Berrien County Production Meetings

- **Berrien County - agriculturally diverse community in south central Georgia**
- **Produces traditional row crops, fruits, pecans and vegetables**
- **Approximately \$21 million economic value**



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# Berrien County Production Meetings

- Rural health and stress program was held at Berrien County Pecan Meeting in 2023
- Same program was held at Berrien County Peanut Meeting in 2024
- Free blood pressure checks were provided in 2023



# Berrien County Hurricane Idalia



# Journal OF THE NACAA VOLUME 16, ISSUE 2 – DECEMBER 2023

**THE FARM STRESS  
PRODUCTION MEETING: AN  
INNOVATIVE EXTENSION  
PROGRAM ADDRESSING  
FARMER STRESS**

Table 1. Participant survey responses

<b>Before Hearing the Speaker:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>After Hearing the Speaker:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
I never thought about needing to manage my stress	67	21%	I don't think that stress management is important for me	16	5%
I was aware of the importance of recognizing my stress and stress management	123	39%	I am now aware of the importance of recognizing my stress and stress management, though I wasn't before this meeting	79	25%
I thought about needing to manage my stress, but hadn't done anything much about it	76	24%	I have new ideas for ways to manage my stress	127	40%
I actively used coping strategies to manage my stress	48	15%	I am committed to actively using coping strategies to manage my stress	92	29%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>314</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>314</b>	

The average pre-speaker score was 2.34 (SD=.98) and the post-speaker score was 2.94 (SD=.87). The paired t-test revealed that this 0.6 score shift was statistically significant,  $t(313)=10, p<.001$ , with a medium effect size (0.56).

# It's Easier to go to the Beer Store Than Ask for Help” (Dr. Proctor, Mr. Hopkins, et al)

## Health Outcomes

- Anxiety symptoms reported by 80% of participants
  - Lack of sleep, physical consequences
- PTSD
  - Either sustained injury themselves or witnessed another farmer have an accident while working
- Physical Injury
  - Chemical burns
  - Chronic stress injuries
  - Overweight/Obesity
  - Mouth ulcers
  - Acid reflux
  - Injuries from farm equipment

## Access to Services

- 67% of farmers preferred to receive services through their PCP and 80% said they would feel comfortable speaking with PCP about mental health issues
- 20% of farmers had received anxiety medication through
- 93% of interviewees had not seen a mental health care professional and only 36% knew of an option of care in their area



# Financial Stressors (data collected in Fall 2023)

- Programs to help a farmer after a disaster

- Government programs to help farmers financially

- Information on insurance (health, life, disability)

# Taking a breath before talking about suicide



# Video

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2ufw3WpMuY&list=PLdSSKSO SBh4lyBu l0VN18clu5mTXqqdi&index=3>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjVtzA8jruk&list=PLdSSKSOSBh4 lyBu l0VN18clu5mTXqqdi&index=1>



# Top industries/occupations with higher suicide rates

Major occupation groups with higher suicide rates included Construction and Extraction; Farming, Fishing, and Forestry; Personal Care and Service; Installation, Maintenance, and Repair; and Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media.

CDC - Dec 15, 2023

# Recent data – Mercer (Dr. Montgomery and PhD Candidate, Stephanie Beasley)

- 4 months of statewide data collection for farmer mental health baseline study (Jan-April 2022)
- **1651** survey participants in **157** counties.
- **40** key informant interviews conducted.

## **WHAT WE LEARNED.... FARMERS ARE IN NEED**

PER YEAR - 42% of all farmers have thought about dying by suicide at least once in the past 12 months.

PER MONTH - 29% of farmers report thinking of dying by suicide at least once per month

## **STRESS VARIES BY AGE & FARMING EXPERIENCE**

- 9% of first-generation farmers think about dying by suicide daily. 1% of generational farmers think about dying by suicide daily
- 46% of first-generation farmers and 50% of farm managers think about dying by suicide at least once per month.

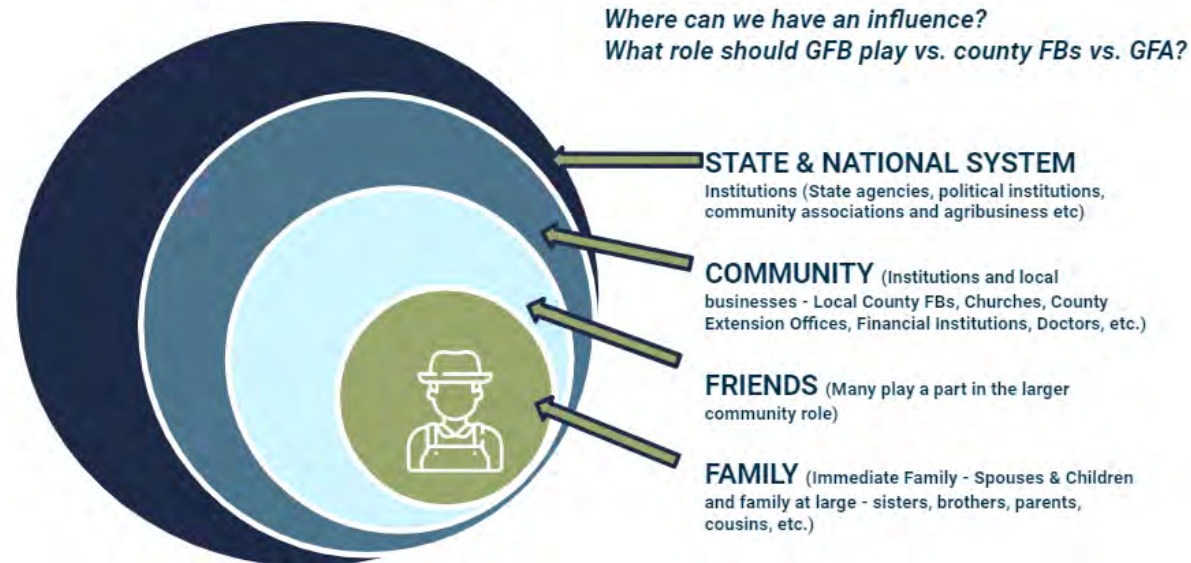
# Recent data – Mercer (Dr. Montgomery and PhD Candidate, Stephanie Beasley)

## PEER NETWORKS ARE IMPORTANT

Nearly 60% of young farmers report stress about the lack of a role model.

31% of farmers report talking to friends or family as a coping mechanism and this coping mechanism serves as protective factor against suicidal ideation

## FARMER PEER NETWORK



# Recent data – Mercer (Dr. Montgomery and PhD Candidate, Stephanie Beasley)

## WHAT FARMERS ARE EXPERIENCING

At least once per month,  
% of farmers experienced...

- 47% loneliness
- 49% Sad/depressed
- 39% hopelessness

42% of all farmers have thought about dying  
by suicide at least once in the past 12 months.

## TOP STRESSORS

Balancing home and work life	61%
Weather & its effect on the farm	61%
COVID19's effect on income	59%
Saving and retirement	59%
Unexpected financial burden	59%
Succession planning	56%
Health issue	54%
Changes to ag laws or policies	53%

## HOW THEY COPE

Exercise/walk	39%
*Talk to family or friends	31%
Engage in a hobby	28%
Drink alcohol	27%
*Watch TV or read	27%
Sleep	22%
Pray or other religious	18%
Spend time alone	17%
Spend time with pets	15%
Draw or paint	12%

\*Protective factor against suicidal thoughts

## FIRST GEN FARMERS

46% think about dying by suicide  
at least once per month vs.  
generational farmers...



# Focus Groups with Farmers Wives (Dr. Anna Scheyett)

## Implications? If we can...

- Learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of farmers at high risk of suicide;
- Have caring people who know the signs at sites where farmers might feel the most stress (points of leverage); e.g.
  - Health: primary MD and rural health clinics
  - Relationships and loss: faith leaders, divorce lawyers, assisted living facilities, funeral homes
  - Financial stress: banks, FSA, extension agents
- We can help farmers before a crisis occurs

# What can you do?

MH Professionals  
connecting with Ag  
and Farming  
communities

Reach out to your  
local/County UGA  
Extension Office

Join the Thriving  
on the Farm Blog

Offer MHFA or QPR  
classes to Agri-  
businesses

Remember why  
**YOU** are  
important!!!!!!

If interested, join the Thriving on the Farm Blog



**YOU** are the most important asset to your farm.

please visit  
[site.extension.uga.edu/thriving](http://site.extension.uga.edu/thriving)  
to sign up for a newsletter  
with tips for managing  
stress, staying healthy,  
and thriving.

A QR code is located on the right side of the red background, enclosed in a white shield-shaped border. The QR code is black and white.

# What can you do - Action Steps

- **If interested, join our Georgia Agriculture Wellness Alliance**





# What can you do - Action Steps

- **Stay tuned for our 2025 Farm Stress Summit. It will be held in Coastal GA in March, 2025.**



**2024 Farm Stress Summit**

March 20, 2024 - Jasper, Georgia

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA School of Social Work College of Public Health Extension | FARM BUREAU GEORGIA | GDA GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE | DBHDD Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities | GEORGIA Rural Health INNOVATION CENTER AT MERCER UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



**2023 Farm Stress Summit**

March 20, 2023 - Macon, Georgia

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA School of Social Work Extension | FARM BUREAU GEORGIA | GDA GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE | DBHDD Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities | RB



**2022 Farm Stress Summit**

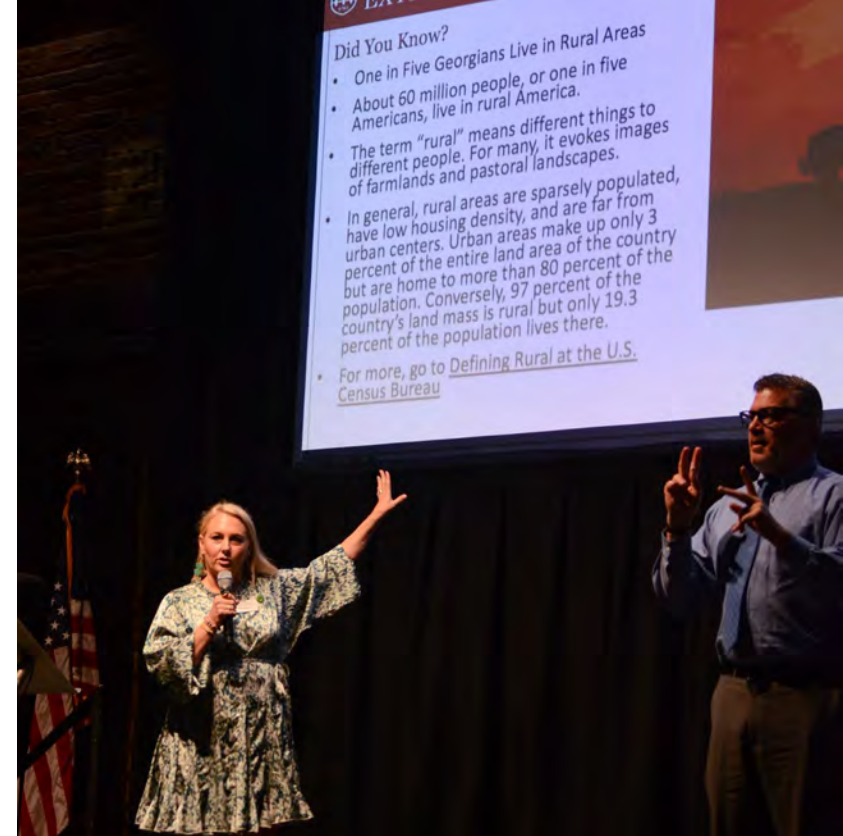
May 19, 2022 - Tifton, Georgia

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA School of Social Work Extension | FARM BUREAU GEORGIA | GDA GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE | DBHDD Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities | RB



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FARM BUREAU GEORGIA



Georgia  
Mental Health Day  
at the Capitol  
2023 & 2024

2023 - 1<sup>st</sup> time Ag and Rural Health had prominent speaking time at this event to share the issues that impact our community

Commissioner Kevin Tanner and Commissioner Tyler Harper, both farmers, are leaders on addressing the impacts to farmers and farm families

Importance of advocacy on all levels

Jennifer Dunn, UGA Rural Health Agent on Planning Committee, shared research and statistics impacting GA

**Seek help  
when you need it.**

*Need help? Call GCAL: [1-800-715-4225](tel:1-800-715-4225)*

**Find balance.**

*Need help? Call GCAL: [1-800-715-4225](tel:1-800-715-4225)*

**Connect  
with family and friends.**

*Need help? Call GCAL: [1-800-715-4225](tel:1-800-715-4225)*

**988**  
SUICIDE  
& CRISIS  
LIFELINE



# For more information

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**1-800-275-8421**

**[Extension.uga.edu](http://Extension.uga.edu)**

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Point your camera at the QR code.

# UGA Extension, We are here for you!

<https://youtu.be/KsnY7aeaJxl>



# Farming is a way of life

