

Life on the farm isn't all that laid back

City dwellers who think life on the farm is all laid-back need to take a closer look at their country cousins, according to a human development specialist.

Concern about weather, prices, equipment failure and "plain hard work" add to irritation and fatigue that may be masked from casual visitors or bank loan officers.

Today's farmers are managing large sums of money, being affected by events in other countries and trying to keep up with the latest advances in scientific and technological developments. Farming remains a dangerous occupation with a high risk of accidents.

Stress has its good points, specialist Marcelle Straatman points out, because the body's reaction to threats provides greater strength and faster reactions which are important to human safety and survival. After the threat is over, the body returns to normal.

However, in cases of mental threats or prolonged stress, "stress energy" is not used for physical exertion. The strain on the body continues and fatigue or serious illness can result.

Among farmers, it's reasonable to suspect that the most stress comes not from the daily possibility of physical harm, but because of concern about unresolved issues and worry about whether or not they made the right choices.

Like others, farmers carry many problems with them,

rather than finishing them off, Straatman notes.

A check of behavior and attitudes likely would show that concerns fall into categories seldom recognized or dealt with such as anger, fear and resentment. Like many, farmers go along without taking action to resolve fears, over-load and under-load, technological and life changes, and other uncertainties.

Some scientists investigating the problems of stress point out that it can prompt creative thinking that finds inventive ways to handle troubling situations. But when many things go wrong at once or over a long time, body defenses weaken.

REACTIONS VARY

Not every farmer reacts to stress in the same way. Each judges stress according to how serious the problems seem to them. Some people seem to be "stress seekers" who function best when time and pressure are most intense. Other just don't get as worked up.

The individual's belief system will determine how stressful a situation is. If a farmer thinks farmer is boring and unrewarding, then each new stressor adds fresh insult to an already troublesome burden, Straatman explained.

If the farmer finds his work challenging and rewarding, problems are more quickly resolved. They are just part of the job.

No one has "magic coping skills." Most people have not learned how to use or control

stress to keep life on a steady course.

The misuse of stress energy is evident in the drug industry that supplies billions of drugs to keep people in low gear and vitamins to pep them up, even though no drug or vitamin has ever solved a stressful problem.

As stress multiplies, accidents are more likely to happen. When the stress cycle gets rolling, it's important to resolve as many issues as possible, control what's possible to control and forget what's not important now.

A 1979 survey of Iowa farmers revealed that stress was not intense enough for most to impair their health. However, the unpredictables in their work exaggerated tendencies toward insomnia, habitual smoking, heavy drinking, irritability and restlessness, all of which interfered with judgment, job performance and family relations.

Because each farmer has a different tolerance level, effects of stress are hard to measure. However, each

person seems to have a point at which excessive stress takes its toll in lower job performance and vigor.

FACTORS NOTED

They know they are stressed when they feel vague physical discomfort, have emotional outbursts, are unable to relax, experience mental confusion or have periods of anxiety and depressions. Some feel tired and apathetic.

The top stressors reported by the Iowa farmers were death of a spouse or near relative, days when nothing goes right, machinery breakdown, disease outbreak, death of a valuable animal, loss of help or no help when needed, high debt load, production loss to disease or insects, poor cash flow, weather-caused delays, government regulations, uncertain crop yields and balancing work with family responsibilities.

More than 50 percent of the men and women in the study reported using a combination of strategies to combat stress. They leave a pro-

blem, change their attitude, resort to a hobby or recreational activity, or sleep and relax. Leaving a problem means that the situation has little significance in relation to survival.

Underlying most mental stress is a resistance to change, Straatman believes. Change is constant and adaptation is a stressful process.

Farmers can never be totally prepared for change because each day calls for new creative action. Farmers develop a high level of useful sensitivity to threatening situations, but this sensitivity can cause them to exaggerate a danger or lose sight of the fact that a real threat may not exist, that they can choose to avoid it, or counter-balance it with alternative actions.

"Choosing a way to handle today's stressors will not take care of tomorrow's, but the blueprint for stress management can be called upon daily to meet new and different situations," Straatman pointed out.

Classifieds deadline noon, Monday



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Vacation won't end bills

Going on vacation isn't necessarily going to reduce your electric bill.

"Unless you take certain actions to reduce energy consumption before going on vacation, your house will still use energy," according to Alice Ross, conservation information manager at Portland General Electric.

Most people forget that the water heater heats water, the refrigerator refrigerates and the furnace or air conditioner may even come on despite the fact that no one's around to use them—unless they've been unplugged or turned off.

Ross has several suggestions to conserve energy and reduce vacation-time bills.

Raise the temperature setting on the refrigerator—without frequent opening and closing of the door, a higher setting will maintain sufficient cooling. Unplug the television set—the instant-on feature of many newer models is a constant drain on electricity, using from eight to 40 kilowatt-hours per month.

If you're going away for more than two days, turn off the water heater at the fuse box or breaker panel. This saves about three kwh per day. The water will reheat in one to two hours after the heater is turned back on. It's also a good idea to make sure the furnace is turned off before leaving home.

Prior to going on an extended vacation is a good time to empty, defrost and unplug the freezer, Ross said. Put any food you wish to keep in the freezer compartment of the refrigerator.

This saves as much as 100 kwh per month for a 16 cubic-foot freezer, or up to 150 kwh per month for a 16.5 cubic-foot frostless freezer. Always leave the door ajar on a freezer or refrigerator which is turned off to prevent build-up of unpleasant odors.

It's also a good idea, she said, to use a timer on a lamp set to come on each evening. "This small use of electricity is easily justified by making a vacant home look lived-in," Ross said.

Smith sets OC stop

Rep. Denny Smith, R-Ore., will hold a town meeting in Oregon City on Tuesday, Aug. 25, beginning at 1:30 p.m. at the Oregon City Senior Center, 615 5th St.

"I'm looking forward to discussing the steps Congress has taken toward achieving our goal of economic recovery, and what the president's program will mean to the 2nd District," he said.

"This will be a good opportunity to discuss the next

major task facing Congress, funding the Social Security program," Smith said. "I am committed to seeing that Social Security benefits remain intact for all those who've contributed their hard-earned dollars into the system."

Smith's Oregon City visit is one of 10 town meetings scheduled during August in the 2nd District. He will not be stopping in the Sandy-Mt. Hood area this time through.

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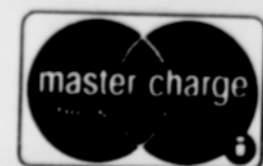


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