



Meeting Date: May 2, 2023

Submitted by: Michael Di Lullo, CAO

Report No: CAO-16-2023

Subject: First Annual National Symposium on Agricultural Mental Health

Recommendation:

THAT Report CAO-16-2023, re: First Annual National Symposium on Agricultural Mental Health be received for information.

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to update Council and the public about the First Annual National Symposium on Agricultural Mental Health which was held on March 30, 2023 in Guelph, Ontario.

Background:

The [Farmer Wellness Initiative](#) hosted an information session on March 8, 2023 and an inaugural symposium on March 30, 2023 to discuss mental health in the agricultural sector. In particular, a Mental Health Summit for Agriculture and Rural Communities' took place on March 30, 2023 which was hosted by the Farmer Wellness Initiative which was attended by Mayor DeViet.

Through the Farmer Wellness Initiative, farmers across Ontario and members of their household will have access to free counselling sessions with a mental health professional. The mental health professionals have received training to understand the unique needs of Ontario farmers. This event was also sponsored by the [National Farmer Mental Health Alliance](#).

Analysis:

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), Ontario and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) are proud to announce the launch of Agriculture Wellness Ontario, a suite of programs designed to ensure farmers are getting mental health support when and where they need it. Living in rural areas, and the stigma surrounding mental health, can make it more difficult for farmers to seek help. Agriculture Wellness Ontario's new site is designed to make it easy to seek support and increase mental health literacy from one starting point.

The attached Mental Health Summit Report dated March 30, 2023 provides an overview of the conversation and agenda topics focused on the unique challenges faced by agricultural and rural communities when it comes to mental health and explore ways to address these issues. The intent of the symposium was to bring a guest speakers, industry leaders and hold facilitated discussions to explore ways to enhance support to our rural residents, and to work together to address gaps and grow healthy communities.

The purpose of the day long summit was to identify steps to address mental health wellness in agriculture and rural Ontario with the following objectives:

- Learn about the mental health needs and challenges facing farmers and others in the agriculture community
- Learn about existing mental health resources in agriculture and rural Ontario
- Identify gaps in supporting mental wellness
- Discuss opportunities to work collaboratively
- Identify actions to support mental health wellness

Some of the program highlights included guest speakers:

- Dr. Leith Duncan, Associate Professor, Rural and Planning Development, University of Guelph
- Chair Glen McNeil, Warden of Huron County, Western Ontario Wardens Caucus
- Vice-Chair Bonnie Clark, Warden of Peterborough County, Eastern Ontario Wardens Caucus
- First Responders
- Farmer Wellness Initiative and Agriculture Wellness Ontario

Some of the key themes that were touched upon include:

- Growing awareness
- Funding
- Collaboration
- Attitudes surrounding mental health
- Unique challenges in agriculture

Municipalities have a role to play and can be seen as one of the stakeholders to form the support systems among a list of other groups as per the attached Summit Report.

To learn more about the supports available, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Farmer Wellness Initiative and National Farmer Mental Health Alliance have an array of information focused on mental health support for our agricultural community

Financial Implications:

N/A

Strategic Plan:

This matter aligns with following strategic priorities:

- Engaged Community

Reaching out to various organizations that have the knowledge and support system is important to creating strong links to areas of our community, including the agriculture sector.

Attachments:

Appendix – Farmer Wellness Initiative Mental Health Summit Report dated March 30, 2023