



April 22, 2024

The Honourable RJ Sigurdson
Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation
Executive Branch 131 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Ave, Edmonton AB
TK5 2B6

Dear Honourable Minister Sigurdson,

The Saddle Hills County Agricultural Service Board would like to echo the sentiments expressed in Wheatland County's letter, dated April 16, 2024, regarding stable and consistent funding and support for the AgKnow program by our Provincial government.

For many, farming and ranching are not simply occupations, they are a way of life. Despite the unpredictable financial risks involved in agriculture making producers' livelihoods vulnerable to outside factors, such as the weather or global markets, they continue to put in the hard work day after day to bolster our economy. The perception of agricultural producers as stoic and strong is a deeply entrenched mindset and contributes to the stigma surrounding mental health and wellness, both in the agricultural community and beyond. This combined with the financial and physical stress of farming has led to declining mental health and an increased need for support for those in the agriculture sector. A study of Canadian farmers reported that 57% met the criteria for anxiety, 34% for depression, and 62% experienced psychological distress¹. The results from the 2021 Farmer Mental Health survey reported that suicidal ideation is over 2x higher in farmers than in the general population, and 1 in 4 Canadian farmers had thought about taking their own life in the last year². These alarming numbers only further outline the increased risks of poor mental health and resiliency for those in the agriculture sector.

The Alberta Farm Mental Health Network is dedicated to supporting our agricultural producers and their mental health needs. The AgKnow program provides avenues for producers to seek mental health support from professionals knowledgeable about the unique challenges facing the industry. Stable funding is essential to ensuring these services are available and accessible, especially in rural communities.

Sincerely,

Dan Bourassa
Saddle Hills County ASB Chair

¹ Jones-Bitton A, Best C, MacTavish J, Fleming S, Hoy S. Stress, anxiety, depression, and resilience in Canadian farmers. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 2020

² <https://www.agknow.ca/research>