

For: State and County Offices

Farm Stress Training Focus Groups

Approved by: Administrator



1 Overview

A Background

In 2021, FSA released farm stress training on AgLearn to help employees::

- better understand and navigate stress
- communicate with producers through difficult situations
- improve awareness of mental health issues and suicide risks.

This training was developed after a 2019 online and in-person farm stress training pilot program in which approximately 800 employees participated.

FSA is currently partnering with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for the next three years to develop more training and resources for FSA Field Office employees who are working with stressed producers. As part of this partnership, a series of employee focus groups will be held during the week of September 25, 2023, to collect feedback on the existing training.

This feedback, combined with input from an Extension educator peer review team, will be used to update and develop new AgLearn training that supports employees in their roles as agricultural service providers working with producers affected by financial distress and disasters.

Disposal Date	Distribution
September 1, 2024	State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices

1 Overview (Continued)

B Purpose

This notice provides State and County Offices with information about:

- employee focus group details and the information collection process
- employee participation requirements
- upcoming FSA farm stress training actions.

C Contact

If there are questions about this notice:

- County Offices will contact their State Office
- State Offices will contact the Outreach Office at **FSAOutreach@usda.gov** with questions about outreach or farm stress training and resources.

2 Employee Focus Groups

A Employee Focus Group Details and Information Collection Process

FSA will recruit up to 150 employees from across the country to participate in a 1-hour focus group during the week of September 25, 2023, hosted and facilitated by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and other Extension educators. The focus groups will:

- collect feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the 2019 pilot and 2021 AgLearn farm stress trainings
- discuss employee training needs on issues of customer service and working with distressed producers.

Focus group input will help FSA and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign evaluate the previous training materials and develop new modules that meet employee needs. Each focus group session will be recorded and transcribed by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for research and evaluation purposes. Session information provided to FSA will be in the form of themes and quotes where names will be removed. Employees are encouraged to share their candid feedback, and participation will not impact employee performance in any way.

2 Employee Focus Groups (Continued)

B Employee Participation Requirements

State Offices will select 3 employees who will each participate in 1 focus group. An emphasis should be placed on selecting customer-facing employees. Of the 3 employees selected:

- at least 1 employee must have been a participant of the 2019 pilot farm stress training, and

Note: AO's will receive a list of 2019 participants by e-mail during the week of September 11, 2023.

- at least 1 employee must be a farm loans officer or manager.

An individual may meet more than one criteria. Selected employees are asked to commit to participating in one 1-hour focus group session during the week of September 25, 2023.

C State Office Action

State Offices must provide their 3 selected employees to FSA Outreach and DAFO through the online form at <https://forms.office.com/g/T2nZx5wm9C> by **September 18, 2023**.

3 Future FSA Farm Stress Plans

A Current Available Resources

FSA is revising and developing additional online and in-person farm stress training materials intended to supplement and support State efforts to conduct local farm stress training in partnership with State and regional stakeholders. FSA Outreach's Farm Stress Toolkit details the current farm stress resources available to employees and supervisors seeking to provide additional training and learning opportunities to employees:

<https://inside.fsa.usda.gov/operations/office-of-outreach/program-toolkits/farm-stress-toolkit>

B Online Training

In FY 2024, FSA plans to release AgLearn training modules targeted on:

- understanding farm stress (updated 2021 training)
- working with distressed borrowers
- working with producers affected by disasters.

Policy on employee groups that will require training and training frequency will be provided as training materials are finalized.

3 Future FSA Farm Stress Plans (Continued)

C In-person Training

FSA will deploy in-person training opportunities for employees by FY 2025. FSA, in partnership with NIFA, has entered into a 3-year grant with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign to offer farm stress training workshops that can be added to State and district in-person trainings. FSA Outreach and DAFO will provide more guidance in FY 2024 on the purpose and availability of these in-person workshops.