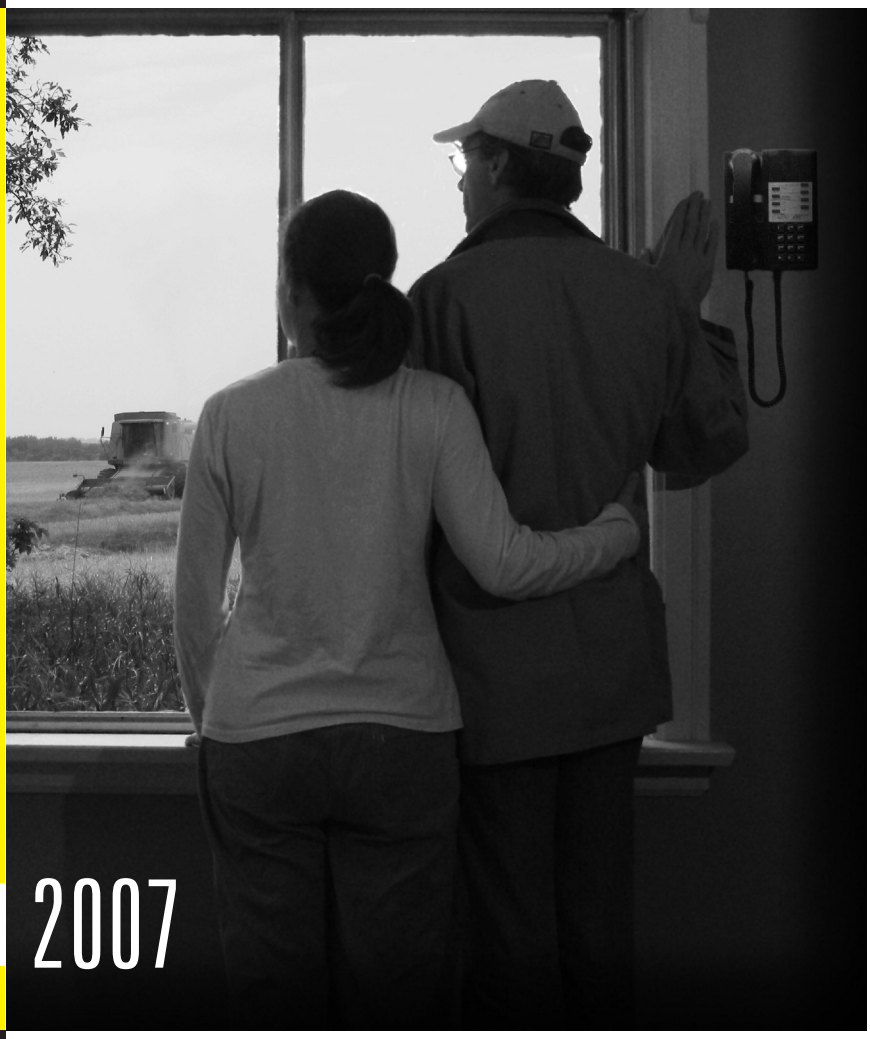
Manitoba Farm & Rural Stress Line

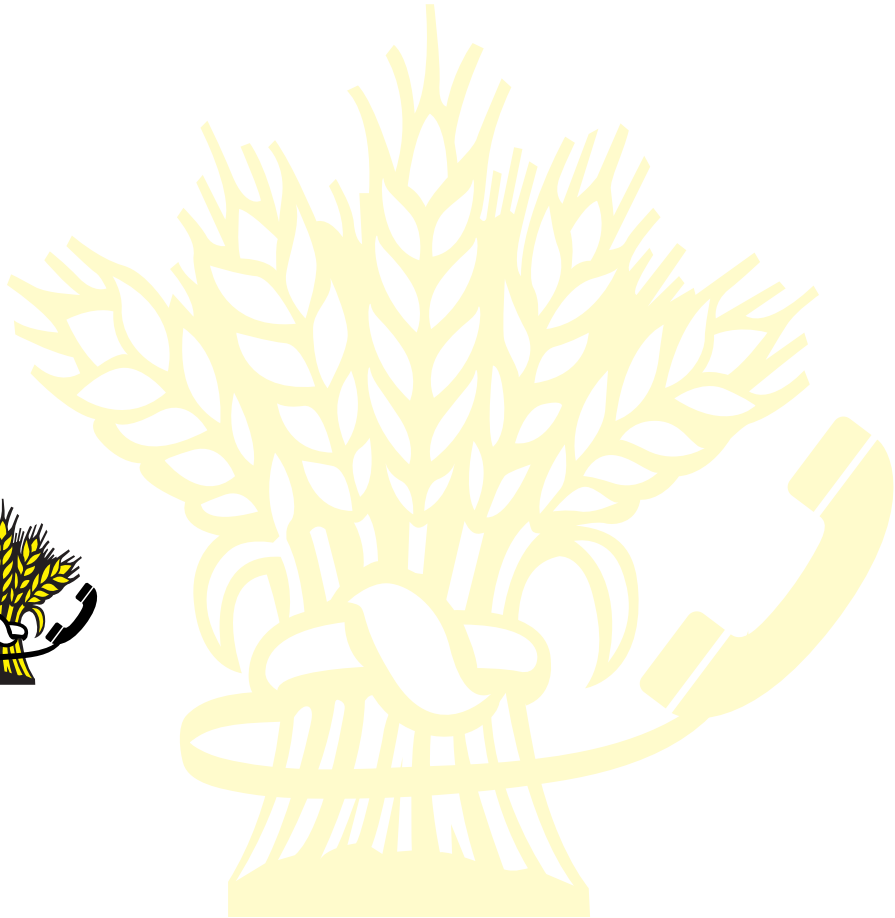


ANNUAL REPORT 2007

Manitoba Farm&Rural Stress Line

1-866-FOR-FARM 1-866-367-3276

2007 Annual Report
Manitoba Farm & Rural Stress Line



Manitoba
Farm&Rural
Stress Line

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a message from the advisory committee chairperson

The MFRSL Advisory Committee represents a broad range of agricultural, health and other rural community groups. Currently the following organizations are represented on our Committee: Ecumenical Working Group, Manitoba Health, Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Klinic Community Health Centre, Women's Institute, Assiniboine RHA, Keystone Agricultural Producers, Manitoba Association of Agricultural Societies, and the Southwest Farm Women's Network.

The Committee meets 3 times per year to serve as a resource to the MFRSL. We advise on matters related to farm and rural living, help to identify areas of concern within the rural and agricultural communities and make recommendations to enhance MFRSL programming and service delivery.

Farmers and rural people continue to face challenging times and the stresses on farmers, their families and their communities continue to escalate. While commodity prices have risen, so too have input costs, leaving the farmer to carry the ever increasing financial risk incurred in crop production. Dropping livestock prices combined with higher feed costs have seriously affected cattle and hog farmers, with many facing the difficult decision of leaving the industry. As farmers strive to cope in this ever changing and challenging environment, the resultant stress affects not only themselves but their families as well.

The MFRSL provides a safe, non threatening and confidential environment for farm and rural people, often isolated by distance and circumstance, to deal in a healthy manner with stress management and other mental health issues. Usage of MFRSL services has again increased this year, indicative of both the need for the services we offer and an enhanced awareness of the availability of these services among farm and rural people.

On behalf of the Advisory Committee, I offer our deepest appreciation to the dedicated and professional MFRSL staff who provide this essential mental health service for farm and rural people. We also acknowledge, with gratitude, Manitoba Health for their support and funding of the MFRSL, and thank Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives for their ongoing support.

Respectfully submitted,

Jan McIntyre
Chairperson
MFRSL Advisory Committee

a message from the program manager

The Manitoba Farm & Rural Stress Line (MFRSL) celebrated its 7th year of operation this year. Established in December, 2000, the MFRSL provides confidential information, support, counselling and referrals to farm families and rural Manitobans. Our main service is the toll-free Telephone Helpline which operates from Monday to Friday, 10 AM to 9 PM and Saturdays from 12 noon until 5 PM. All calls are confidential and are answered by trained counselors with farming backgrounds.

In addition to our helpline, the MFRSL provides Public Education and Training on a wide variety of topics. Staff travel to many parts of the province to do workshops on issues related to Stress Management, Communication, Work-Life Balance, Building Resiliency, Suicide Prevention/Intervention, and more.

We also do extensive Outreach and Promotion of our services through mail-outs of promotional materials, and ads in agricultural and health-related media.

Our interactive Website has seen increased hits over the past year, offering information on Stress Management, Upcoming Events, Programs for Farmers and more. The website houses an extensive Rural Database with thousands of listings of community, social, health and agricultural organizations.

The MFRSL Informational Display has been set up at various health and agricultural trade shows through out the province in 2007. During the past year our counsellors provided assistance to over 2,200 callers as well as approximately 60,000 contacts through agricultural trade shows, health fairs, and presentations throughout the province.

The essence of our counseling program is not about numbers however. It is about the people who staff the 'The Farm Line' and about the callers who receive support from our counsellors. Our dedicated team is comprised of paid professional staff and trained volunteers, all of whom have farming backgrounds. This combination of professional training and farming experience has proven to be very important to our callers. In the words of one producer:

"I called the Stress Line because I needed to talk to someone who'd walked a mile in my shoes. I felt understood and the counselor really helped me with my problems. It's about farmers helping farmers."

Research into help-seeking behaviours among Canadian farmers has shown that producers do not reach out for help easily and, when they do, they prefer to speak confidentially with someone who has farming experience. A recent study commissioned by the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (National Stress & Mental Health Survey of Canadian Farmers, 2005) revealed that almost 2/3 of Canadian farmers describe themselves as being "very stressed" while almost half describe themselves as being "somewhat stressed". However, only 2 in 10 had spoken with a health care or mental health professional about the impact of stress in their lives. The notion of pride and farmers' independence was cited as the most important reason producers do not seek help when dealing with

a message from the program manager (cont.)

stress and mental health. When they do however, the CASA study revealed that it is of the utmost importance to producers that the person they are dealing with be knowledgeable about farming.[1]

Agriculture is both an industry and a way of life. It is made up of people who produce food for the world, often working under extreme stress and uncertainty. Weather, pests, shrinking markets, increasing costs of production, are but a few of the many challenges producers face every day. The family farm is being challenged like never before, and an increasing number of producers have been forced to leave the land due to financial difficulties.

The Manitoba Farm & Rural Stress line continues to offer unique, specialized mental health support services to rural Manitobans and, in particular, to our farming population. In doing so, we are playing an increasingly important role within both the mental health and agricultural sectors, offering mental health services to the farming/rural populations. We look forward to on-going partnerships with others who are working to support strong, resilient rural communities now and into the future.

Janet Smith

Program Manager

1. National Stress & Mental Health Survey of Canadian Farmers, Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA), 2005. For a complete summary of the Survey, visit our website: www.ruralstress.ca under Publications.

MFRSL services

Telephone Counselling Line

The Manitoba Farm & Rural Stress Line's core service is its toll free telephone counselling line. The Line operates Monday to Friday, 10 AM to 9 PM, and Saturdays 12 noon -5 PM. It is staffed by professional counsellors with farm/rural backgrounds.

E-Mail Helpline

An e-mail helpline has been added to our counselling services, providing an opportunity for people to contact us electronically for information, support and referrals.

Public Education & Training

Speakers from the MFRSL facilitate workshops on topics such as: Understanding Farm & Rural Stress, Basic Stress Management, Care for the Caregiver, Women and Stress, Working With Farmers Under Stress, and Building Effective Communication Skills. Our facilitators also develop workshops on specific topics requested by groups and organizations.

Informational Display

Our informational display continues to be a popular addition to trade shows, health fairs and agricultural events throughout the province. The display can be shipped to groups that wish to include it in their events and, whenever possible, will be staffed by a volunteer or MFRSL employee.

The Rural Database

The Rural Database offers a current listing of agencies, associations, and other farm and rural services in Manitoba. Whether you are an individual, organization, service provider or business, the Rural Database can help you find what you are looking for.

The Rural Database is simple to use. You can either call us toll free at 1-866-867-3276 or visit the Manitoba Farm & Rural Stress Line's web site **www.ruralstress.ca.**

- Click on **Rural Database** in the menu.
- You now have the option of using the *Subject Index* or the *Simple Search*.
- If you're not sure where to start, use the **Subject Index** pull-down menu and search your question by topic.
- If you know the topic, click on **Simple Search** and type your question in the *Search Text* box.
- Narrow your search in both the *Subject Index* and *Simple Search* by typing in the **Region** and **District** you are looking for.

The Rural Database is quick and easy to use. Give it a try! If you have any additions or deletions to the service, don't hesitate to contact our partners, CONTACT Community Information toll free at 1-866-266-4636.

MFRSL Website

Our website (www.ruralstress.ca) is another important resource for farm and rural families and the professionals who work with them. The site contains information on Current Events, Weather, Markets, Rural News, Signs and Symptoms of Stress, Managing Stress, Programs for Farmers, and Links to related sites. Our newest addition is the Youth Corner, an interactive web site for farm and rural youth.

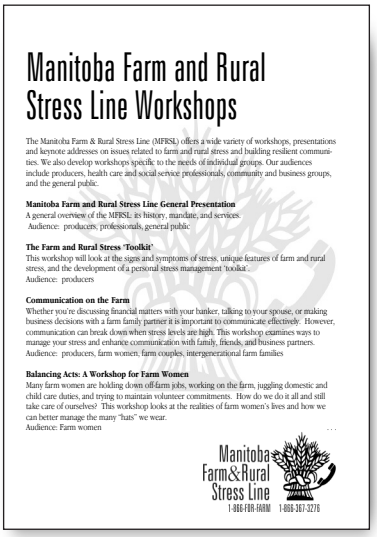
Rural Database

Our Rural Database is a partnership between MFRSL and CONTACT Community Information Guide. It includes information on programs and services available throughout Manitoba. Clients can access the database on-line on our website, or through our counsellors.

MFRSL counsellors, public education & training

The Manitoba Farm & Rural Stress Line employs one Program Manager and seven part-time counsellors. In addition to their professional qualifications, all counsellors have farming backgrounds. They have obtained their Crisis Worker Certification through the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) and have taken the ASIST suicide intervention program. Ongoing professional development opportunities are available to staff throughout the year.

The MFRSL also has a dynamic team of volunteer counselors who answer the 'Farm Line'. Volunteers undertake a rigorous screening and interview process before being accepted into the program and then participate in the Klinic Crisis Line Volunteer Training Program. This 3 month training and the practicum that follows equips volunteers to handle a wide variety of issues that may present themselves on the Lines including: relationship stress, depression and anxiety, domestic violence, sexual assault, addictions, and suicide to name a few. Volunteers work under close supervision of MFRSL staff to assist on the phone lines.



Manitoba Farm and Rural Stress Line Workshops

The Manitoba Farm & Rural Stress Line (MFRSL) offers a wide variety of workshops, presentations and keynote addresses on issues related to farm and rural stress and building resilient communities. We also develop workshops specific to the needs of individual groups. Our audiences include producers, health care and social service professionals, community and business groups, and the general public.

Manitoba Farm and Rural Stress Line General Presentation
A general overview of the MFRSL, its history, mandate, and services.
Audience: producers, professionals, general public

The Farm and Rural Stress 'Toolkit'
This workshop will look at the signs and symptoms of stress, unique features of farm and rural stress, and the development of a personal stress management 'toolkit'.
Audience: producers

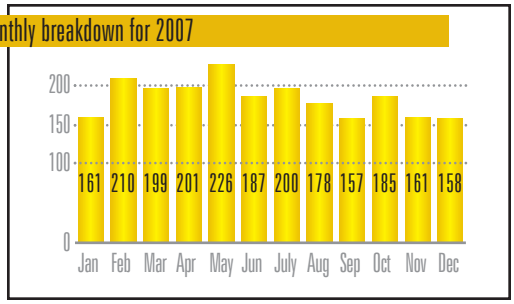
Communication on the Farm
Whether you're discussing financial matters with your banker, talking to your spouse, or making business decisions with a farm family partner it is important to communicate effectively. However, communication can break down when stress levels are high. This workshop examines ways to manage your stress and enhance communication with family, friends, and business partners.
Audience: producers, farm women, farm couples, intergenerational farm families

Balancing Acts: A Workshop for Farm Women
Many farm women are holding down off-farm jobs, working on the farm, juggling domestic and child care duties, and trying to maintain volunteer commitments. How do we do it all and still take care of ourselves? This workshop looks at the realities of farm women's lives and how we can better manage the many "hats" we wear.
Audience: Farm women

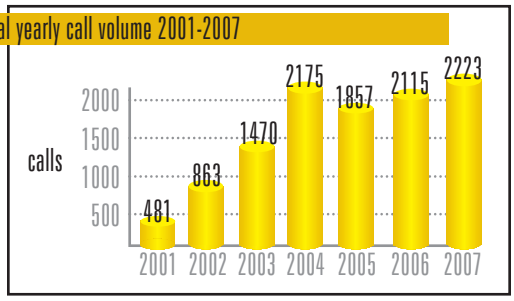
Manitoba Farm&Rural Stress Line
1-866-FRR-FARM 1-888-267-3276

The MFRSL attended 24 community events in 2007, either setting up our Informational Display or offering Workshops/ Presentations on a variety of topics related to stress management. The total number of contacts through our Public Education program is estimated to be over 60,000. This includes the numbers of people who attended major trade shows we participated in, as well as actual workshop participants.

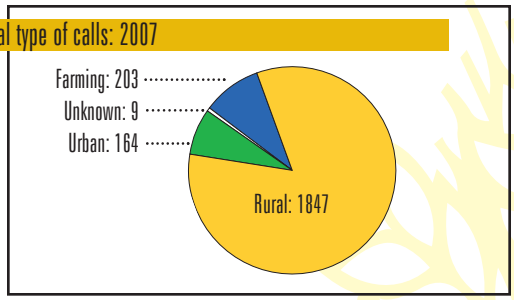
MFRSL stats 2007



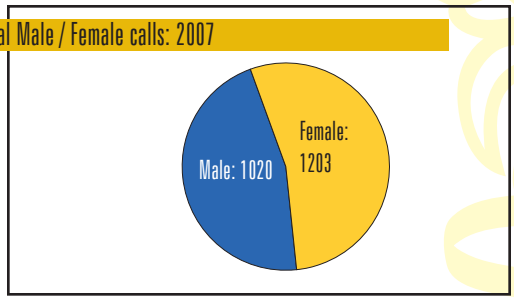
graph 1



graph 2



graph 3



graph 4

The following is a synopsis of calls and other contacts between our service population and the MFRSL for the year 2007.

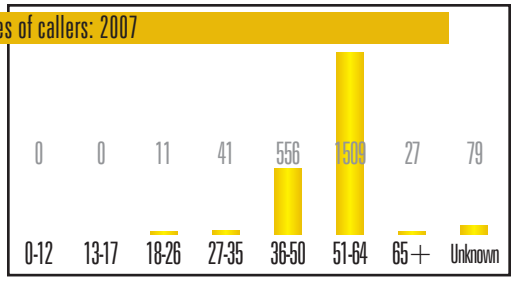
Monthly breakdown for 2007 (Graph 1): Our busiest month in 2007 was May, followed by February and April. May has also proved to be the busiest month throughout the seven-year history of the Line.

Total yearly call volume (Graph 2): The Manitoba Farm & Rural Stress Line received 2,223 calls in 2007. This represents the highest call volume since our inception. The increase in call volume represents the growing stress levels within the farming community, as well as greater awareness of our services and less stigma about seeking help for emotional and mental health concerns.

Total type of calls, 2007 (Graph 3): The vast majority of our callers are from rural Manitoba (1,847 calls in 2007), followed by farm calls (203), urban calls (Winnipeg and Brandon: 164 calls) and unknown regions (9 calls).

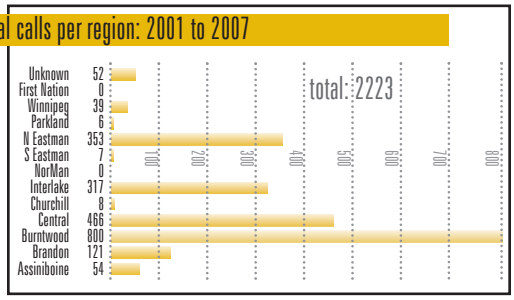
Total male/female calls, 2007 (Graph 4): There were slightly more female callers than male in 2007. 1,203 women called the MFRSL compared to 1,020 men. One of the reasons posed for the slightly higher ratio of female to male callers is that women are socialized to talk about their feelings more openly and there remains a reduced stigma for women to reach out for help. It has also been noted that many of our female callers are calling with a concern related to their male partner. It is gratifying to know, however, that men are reaching out to the MFRSL more and more, and the ratios are not greatly different from one another.

MFRSL stats (continued)



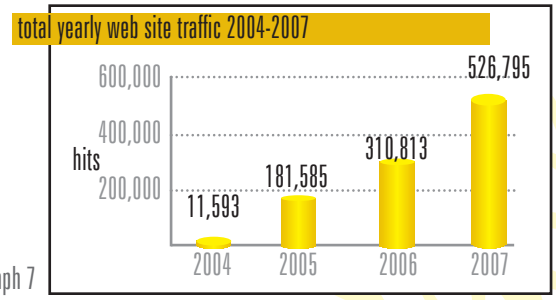
graph 5

Ages of callers (Graph 5): The majority of callers to the MFRSL are between the ages of 51 and 64 years, followed by the 36-50 year old age group. This trend is consistent with data from previous years.

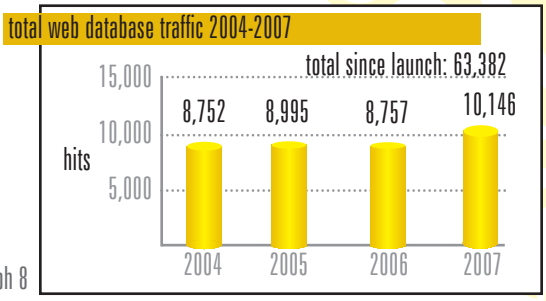


graph 6

Total calls per region (Graph 6): The majority of our calls in 2007 came in from the Burntwood Regional Health Authority area. This was followed by calls from Central RHA, North Eastman, and the Interlake.



graph 7



graph 8

Total yearly web site and database traffic (Graphs 7 & 8): Our website received approximately 526,795 hits in 2007, up significantly from previous years. Our Rural Database (located on our website and managed by CONTACT Community Information Guide) received just over 10,000 hits this year.

The National Farm Stress & Mental Health Survey

In 2005 The Canadian Agriculture Safety Association (CASA) set out to identify the main stressors experienced by farmers, who they would turn to in times of stress, and what types of services they use when stressed. This study, entitled The National Stress and Mental Health Survey of Canadian Farmers was released in February, 2005 and was submitted to the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs chaired by Senator Michael Kirby.

(For a complete summary of the National Stress & Mental Health Survey of Canadian Farmers go to: www.casa-acsa.ca under 'Media Releases'.)

Methodology:
CASA commissioned Western Opinion Research Inc. to complete 1,100 surveys with agricultural producers across Canada regarding stress on the farm. National results of this survey are accurate +/- 3%, 19 times out of 20. Key findings of the Survey were as follows:

- Almost two-thirds of Canadian farmers are feeling stressed. One in five describes themselves as being "very stressed" while almost half describe themselves as being "somewhat stressed".

- Financial concerns related to commodity prices, the BSE crisis, and general farm finances are mentioned by farmers as being the single biggest top-of-mind factors causing stress.

- Only 2 in 10 farmers across Canada have spoken with a health care professional about stress and mental health;

- The notion of pride and farmers' independence was found to be the most important reason farmers did not seek more help in dealing with stress and mental health;

- If feeling stressed, the majority of farmers indicated they would turn to: a family doctor, a stress/mental health professional, and a religious figure;

- Just less than one-half of farmers strongly agree that they are aware of resources they can turn to for help in managing stress and mental health;

- Remaining anonymous is very important to farmers when seeking help for stress and mental health issues;

- The majority of farmers prefer to meet one-on-one with someone to talk about stress and mental health;

- Farmers generally feel it does not matter to them if they deal with someone from their area with regard to stress and mental health. However, it is of utmost importance for Canadian farmers that the person they are dealing with is knowledgeable about agriculture;

- Awareness of farm stress lines was generally good. Roughly two-thirds of Canadian farmers were aware of a farm stress line (where it exists) in their province.