

# Farmer Health

November 2022

Ohio farmers play an essential role in agriculture, an industry that strengthens the food supply and boosts the economy. However, agricultural producers and others in rural communities face unique health challenges. By exploring the factors that impact their well-being, researchers at The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) have additional knowledge that could improve farmer health.



## Health Behaviors

Farmers and rural populations are shown to have a higher risk of work-related injuries, have less access to health care, and are more vulnerable to chronic health issues compared with people living in urban or suburban areas.

Knowing these enhanced risks, CFAES researchers wanted to explore how behavioral choices further influence Ohio farmers' health. They **surveyed** these producers to collect data on seven key factors: sleep, physical activity, fruit and vegetable intake, mental health, tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use.

### The results?



**51%** scored high for having sleeping problems.



**70.8%** of females and 83.5% of males were considered overweight or obese according to Body Mass Index calculations.



Few consumed the recommended **2½ cups** worth of fruits and vegetables.



Few, **9.6%**, met qualifications for a major depression disorder.



**17.9%** reported using tobacco.



**27.7%** of females and **31.4%** of males were considered hazardous or at-risk drinkers.



Very few, **3.7%**, reported using illicit drugs.

Knowing what health behaviors to prioritize could help health care providers use resources better and develop more effective health prevention programming for Ohio farmers.

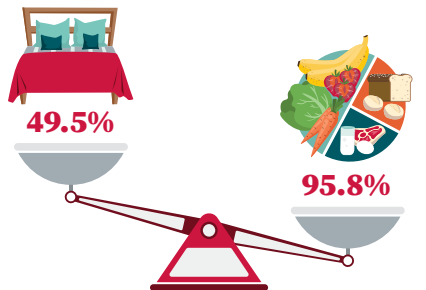


## Health Resources

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There are over 40 medically underserved areas designated in the state of Ohio. For those in rural communities, health care access is constrained by distance and transportation issues, long wait times, health personnel shortages, social stigmas, and more. Despite these issues, providing health behavior programs and tools is vital for the health of farmers and others in rural communities.

To take stock of available services, CFAES researchers surveyed health clinics, hospitals, Ohio State University Extension offices, and other entities in rural areas around the state. They also worked to identify barriers to providing health services to Ohio farmers from the perspective of these health care stakeholders.



### Sleep and Nutrition Program Offerings

Surveys **showed** the biggest barriers to promoting these services included **lack of personnel and lack of financial resources**. Sleep programs were offered least (49.5%) and found least important. Conversely, nutrition and healthy eating programs were offered most (95.8%) and valued most. Social media and health education resources were used most to spread the word because these tools are easy to implement.

Through identifying resources, researchers hoped to pinpoint any gaps in services and help providers determine their priorities.

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## Recommendations

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**Health Behaviors:** Researchers underscore that health care providers should consider health holistically and recommend implementing sleep hygiene programs, alcohol usage and healthy weight education, tailoring mental health education to focus on farmer stress issues, and continuing physical activity and nutrition work in rural communities.

**Health Resources:** Understanding where gaps exist in services and programs may encourage collaboration among providers and improve offerings. Alternatively, OSU Extension programs may provide health-related resources for farm populations who don't regularly see their primary care physician.

For more information, visit [kx.osu.edu](http://kx.osu.edu) or contact Kim Winslow, [winslow.52@osu.edu](mailto:winslow.52@osu.edu).