



\*\* This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/rural-health-heart-month>

Released: Feb. 4, 2025

### **K-State ag safety expert urges farmers to monitor heart health**

February is recognized as American Heart Month

*By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news*

MANHATTAN, Kan. – The Kansas Department of Agriculture reports that there are more than 100,000 farmers in the state, and the average age of those farmers is just over 58.

Tawnie Larson, a project consultant for the [Kansas Agriculture Safety and Health program](#) at Kansas State University, said the KDA's statistics combined with national figures on heart disease serve as a cautionary tale for those who live in rural areas of the Sunflower State.

“Male farmers aged 45 and older have an increased risk of heart disease compared to their non-farming peers,” Larson said. “And women in rural areas also are at an increased risk for heart disease.”

Larson urges rural residents to take a moment to recognize heart health in February, which is recognized nationally by the [American Red Cross](#) as American Heart Month. The Red Cross reports that heart disease is a leading cause of death in the United States.

Farmers, she said, tend to experience high levels of stress due to such job-related factors as weather, market fluctuations, equipment malfunctions and financial hardship.

Plus, a by-product of living in rural communities is that those areas tend to have decreased access to health care, “or (farmers) do not see their doctor on a regular basis,” according to Larson.

As much as 44% of women in the United States are living with some sort of heart disease, according to figures from the U.S. National Institutes of Health -- for many of the same reasons that men suffer from heart disease. In Kansas, many of those women are farmers; the Kansas Department of Agriculture reports that of the 100,000-plus farmers in the state, more than one-third of those are women.

“Blood pressure tends to rise in women earlier than men,” Larson said. “Early signs of hypertension for women include fatigue, sleeping issues, bloating, headaches and blurred vision or dizziness. Don’t write these symptoms off; talk to your doctor before you have a problem.”

Larson says men and women should check their blood pressure on a regular basis; if you can’t get by the doctor’s office regularly, take advantage of blood pressure machines often available at a local pharmacy or other location.

“You can also buy a small cuff to use at home,” Larson said. “Log your numbers routinely and discuss these with your doctor.”

In addition to elevated blood pressure, other conditions that affect heart health include high cholesterol, diabetes, kidney disease, smoking, excessive use of alcohol, poor diet, obesity, limited cardiovascular activity and hearing loss.

“People, in general, may also ignore or downplay their susceptibility to heart disease and put off necessary actions to improve their wellness,” Larson said. “Poor heart health can lead to heart attack or stroke.”

According to Larson, some ideas for improving heart health include:

- Make healthy choices, such as eating a healthy diet, being more active and maintaining a healthy weight.
- Make small changes. Set one goal per week, rather many changes at once.
- Reduce stress by focusing on what you can control.
- Find a favorite stress-reducing activity and do it regularly.
- Start a regular walking routine. Listen to music or a podcast.
- Read books.
- Spend time with family or friends.
- Take up an activity that gets your heart rate up, and gradually build to higher rates of activity.

[Larson said the website, Kansas Ag Stress Resources](#), is available to help farmers cope with ag-related stress. In some parts of the state, free counseling may be available; Larson cited the example of Pawnee Mental Health in northeast Kansas.

More information is available by contacting Larson at 785-532-2976, or [tawnie@ksu.edu](mailto:tawnie@ksu.edu). Information may also be available at [local extension offices in Kansas](#).

-30-

**FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS:** Links used in this story  
Kansas Agriculture Safety and Health program (Kansas State University), <https://www.k-state.edu/kash>

American Red Cross, <https://www.redcross.org>

Kansas Ag Stress Resources, <https://www.kansasagstress.org>

K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, <https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations>

K-State Research and Extension is a short name for the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, a program designed to generate and distribute useful knowledge for the well-being of Kansans. Supported by county, state, federal and private funds, the program has county extension offices, experiment fields, area extension offices and regional research centers statewide. Its headquarters is on the K-State campus in Manhattan. For more information, visit [www.ksre.ksu.edu](http://www.ksre.ksu.edu). K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

**Story by:**

Pat Melgares

[melgares@ksu.edu](mailto:melgares@ksu.edu)

**More Information:**

Tawnie Larson

785-532-2976

[tawnie@ksu.edu](mailto:tawnie@ksu.edu)