

After listening to "Groundwork" Episode 7: Normalizing Mental Health Care in Agricultural Communities, Addressing Farm Stress & Restoring Wellbeing in Rural Montana, I've come to realize how much the stigma around farmers has quite literally excluded them from any thoughts I may have regarding mental health and awareness, let alone any programs in place. If I'm being honest, I picture hunky Kevin Costner struggling to make ends meet with the voice of James Earl Jones saying, "if you build it, they will come." Then, after everyone thinks Kevin Costner is nuts, a ghost baseball team shows up and sort of makes things okay.

It's a complete shock to me that the large majority of suicides that happen are on farms. Politics plays a big part in this for me. I imagine blue-collar workers whose only concern after a long day's work is driving around in pickups with Confederate flags and creating violence. I realize this is not fair, and just like I do not want to be put into a bubble, I should also practice not putting others in one based on ignorance.

As for the programs put in place to help facilitate places and programs for rural farmers to access, I believe community outreach is truly what might work best. That is, checking in on your neighbors and recognizing the signs of mental decline. Using a deck of cards, creating a game, also seems like it would have success.

In the end, I believe the community gatherings where such topics can be talked about with others going through something similar or at least recognize why and how they feel—is the best resource. Providing free food certainly would encourage farmers to want to do something after a long day's work. Mostly, I relate to this in terms of getting sober myself. In the beginning, it wasn't the therapist, online info, any of that—it was the AA meetings. It provides a safe place for people to talk about tough subjects. Topics that the rest of the world does not and cannot fully understand if they do not suffer from the same afflictions.

For me, these meetings hit home because of the people's stories—what it was like then and what it is like now after working a program. In short, the experience, strength, and hope of others. These people loved me until I could love myself. I could tell them AA was bullshit and they all suck, only to be hugged after the meeting and told to keep coming back. Also, the free coffee... that was huge.

My questions concerning our game are these: how can we cultivate this sort of safe place outside of a meeting hall or in person? How can we share the experience, strength, and hope with those in need, those who can barely make their own coffee in the morning? How can we cultivate a virtual world that emulates the experience of watching someone completely fall apart and then be lifted, carried, and loved by a worldwide community?

My biggest concern is that mental health is obviously not a game. Addiction is truly understood only by those living it. There are no books, websites, or podcasts that can truly bring light to these struggles—you have to be in it or at the very least witness it. Hear the struggles and stories firsthand. I'm not sure how we could do this, but I believe that it is imperative to meet this community firsthand.

Our minds can build an app, but it is our hearts that will make it meaningful and hopefully helpful.