

# CSU Extension & Colorado AgrAbility Project support the Agricultural Access to Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Mental Health Care Act

For over 150 years, Colorado State University (CSU) Extension has carried out its land grant mission to safeguard the health and well-being of rural Coloradans. With 63 county offices, 47 of which are located in rural or frontier counties, our trusted network of Extension professionals play diverse roles as educators, conveners, collaborators, emergency responders, and researchers within Colorado communities.

The Agricultural Access to Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Mental Health Care Act well articulates the struggles and needs faced by our agricultural producers, partners, and rural communities. The *Colorado AgrAbility Project (CAP)*, a longstanding successful program under CSU Extension, is actively engaged in addressing the areas proposed for assessment in this bill. For over two decades, *CAP* has provided education and services that support farmers, ranchers, agricultural-adjacent workers, and their families that have been affected by injuries, disabilities, or conditions inhibiting their ability to work.

In 2021, funding from the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) expanded *CAP's* scope of work to include a specific focus on the behavioral health needs among this population. Additionally, Colorado SB21-137 helped to fund four new full-time CSU Extension Behavioral Health Specialists working across the state to expand and improve behavioral health support, stress management, and suicide prevention initiatives.

CSU Extension takes a leading role in providing rural mental health support, not just in Colorado, but nationwide. As a major contributor to the Western Regional Agricultural Stress Assistance Program (WRASAP) and FRSAN, CSU Extension's *CAP* collaborates with partners across regions to promote best practices and advance research that supports behavioral well-being among ag communities.

**With its longstanding support of agricultural populations, access to globally recognized CSU-based agricultural resources, and well-established partnerships at the local, state, and national level; *Colorado AgrAbility Project* is well positioned to support the objectives and is eager to provide assistance in any capacity to the Agricultural Access to Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Mental Health Care Act.**

# Overview of Our Efforts to Support Behavioral Health

A brief overview of our efforts is presented below based on the four objectives from the Bill Summary:

## Efforts related to assessing the *availability and accessibility of substance use treatment and mental health care providers trained to serve the needs of farmers, ranchers, agricultural workers, and their families*



CAP partners with the Colorado Agricultural Addiction and Mental Health Program (CAAMHP), which offers up to six free therapy sessions from providers that are culturally competent and dedicated to working with agriculture populations. In addition to promoting CAAMHP's services and providing direct referrals, we have collaborated on several recent projects, including:

- Implementation of 8 free workshops designed to support and train rural families and behavioral health providers in navigating youth substance abuse.
- Creation of an educational video to decrease stigma and increase utilization of CAAMHP.



CAP codeveloped LandLogic, a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy model adapted specifically for agricultural populations. LandLogic provides cultural responsiveness training to help providers understand the unique stressors and strengths within ag populations and provides evidence-based tools and interventions to support rural clients.

**200+** 

mental health professionals nationwide have been trained in LandLogic since 2022.

**100%** 

of participants surveyed who have mostly agricultural clients agreed they would apply the LandLogic training to their practice

**97%** 

of participants surveyed said the LandLogic methods will build trust with clients

## Efforts related to assessing the *barriers faced by farmers and ranchers in accessing substance use disorder treatment and mental health care resources*

Like much of the nation, Colorado faces significant behavioral health provider shortages. All but two of our counties are designated as experiencing “entire coverage shortages”, with the two exceptions still experiencing “partial coverage shortages”[1]. Recognizing the provider shortage is currently a static factor, CSU Extension and CAP have developed creative strategies to advance non-clinical behavioral health support that promotes resilience in rural communities, including:

- Investing in the expansion of a local-level workforce to identify community needs and develop sustainable programs and resources that promote overall well-being
- Providing health care system navigation
- Hosting skills-based trainings for community members, such as COMET and QPR
- Engaging with providers to provide education on agri-culturally competent care

**1,500+ producers, providers, and ag-adjacent professionals**

have attended workshops designed to increase behavioral health literacy, normalize conversations about mental health, and ultimately decrease the stigma of seeking help.

## **Examples of successful programs at the state and local levels that can be replicated at the federal level to address the mental and behavioral health needs of agricultural communities**

Through collaboration with multiple FRSSAN partners, CAP sought or developed training in a wide range of programs to support agricultural communities including:

### **COMET (Changing Our Mental and Emotional Trajectory)**

Recognizing that mental health functions on a spectrum, COMET™ teaches participants strategies to use when they encounter someone who is in a “vulnerable space” and may have mental or emotional issues. The communication strategies taught in this program help people know how to address mental health concerns and shift an individual’s trajectory back to a place of wellness instead of proceeding towards a mental health crisis. COMET aligns with rural cultural values of “neighbor helping neighbor” and communities being their own best resource. Informal support systems created by COMET are important given the nationwide shortage of mental health professionals.

### **QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer.)**

QPR is a training program designed to teach individuals how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis, engage with someone at risk, and connect them to appropriate professional help. QPR has been successfully implemented for agriculture-specific audiences throughout the FRSSAN region.

### **Producer Wellness Workshops**

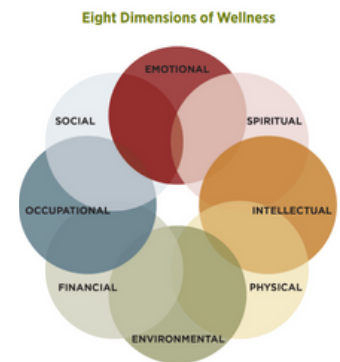
Based on SAMHSA’s 8 Domains of Wellness model, we developed workshops specifically designed for producers that aim to educate and involve participants in holistic wellness practices. These workshops vary in duration and can range from 3-hour sessions to weekend retreats.

In partnership with Farm Aid and Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, we helped to host two weekend producer retreats in Washington state. This successful event featured informative sessions on the advantages of yoga, interactions with agricultural financial planners, and numerous opportunities for participants to connect with content experts to develop a personalized farm management and wellness plan.

### **Trauma Responsive Trainings**

Through our involvement in WRASAP, CSU Extension Behavioral Health Specialists provided Trauma Responsive Trainings for Ag Mentor programs that support producers in the wake of natural disasters. Organizations that have received these trainings include:

- California Alliance of Farm Families
- Hawaii Ag Mental Health Mentorship Program, Seeds of Wellness
- New Agrarian Program (serving New Mexico, Colorado, and Montana)



## **CSU Extension and CAP exemplify best practices for grantees of the Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network**

**CAP, representing CSU Extension, serves as a lead agency in the Western Region Agricultural Stress Assistance Program, and has demonstrated a track record of collaboration across FRSSAN regions nationally. This partnership allows us to not only stay informed of best practices but also provides access to networks to share research, resources, and lessons learned.**

**We believe that the objectives of the Agricultural Access to Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Mental Health Care Act would greatly benefit our rural and agricultural communities in Colorado and nationwide. CAP, in partnership with CSU Extension and WRASAP, is eager to provide any necessary support, assistance, or resources to reinforce these efforts.**