

FARMER FOCUS
Cultivating Health & Wellness With Our Farming Community



Buenas yan Håfa Adai,

I am delighted to share some of the valuable work that the University of Guam Cooperative Extension & Outreach (CE&O) program under our College of Natural & Applied Sciences has accomplished during the past year in terms of helping our local farmers. The agriculture communities in the Pacific region have been greatly affected by many stress factors present in their profession, and this was further amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, CE&O coordinated numerous outreach activities to help alleviate some of the stress our farmers go through as well as to promote overall well-being and health.

A notable event in this initiative was the 2022 Farmer Focus Conference, which was held on June 17, 2022, at the Westin Resort Guam. The conference brought together farmers from all over the island along with regional and national partners to discuss the effects of farm stress and the various avenues through which our farmers can seek help.

In addition to the conference, extension personnel were trained in Adult Mental Health First Aid to equip them with the right skills to properly assist individuals facing mental health challenges. This training took place on June 23, 2022, and was one of the first steps prior to hosting workshops and activities.

The most recently hosted event was the Farmer Focus Wellness Talks Workshop, held on Aug. 30, 2022. This workshop touched on various areas in the world of agriculture, such as pesticide safety and family resiliency, and introduced existing programs and services offered by local organizations like I'Pinangon and the Guam Behavioral Health & Wellness Center. The greatest takeaway from this workshop was knowing that our farmers were grateful for the resources being provided and becoming more accessible to them. They were pleased that the issue of farmer mental health was gaining more attention and that their struggles were finally being recognized and validated.

We hope to bring more events like these to our community to continue increasing the accessibility of resources and shedding light on this long-neglected topic.

Thank you to everyone who has supported this initiative thus far, and we hope to have you all join us as the project continues.

Lee S. Yudin, Ph.D.

Dean, College of Natural & Applied Sciences
Director, Cooperative Extension & Outreach
University of Guam



Supporting Healthy Farmers for a Healthy Guam

A MESSAGE FROM THE GOVERNOR & LT. GOVERNOR

Håfa Adai!

We are pleased to join our community in supporting the first 2022 Farmer Focus Conference, and the improved health and wellness of all Guam's farmers.

Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. Addressing mental health challenges is critical, so that farmers can successfully navigate other stressors common in their day-to-day lives. Our island's farmers are fiercely dedicated workers, often reluctant to ask for assistance. They have demanding jobs that are compounded by economic uncertainty, vulnerability to weather events, and frequent isolation. However, if farmers can grow their community of support, they can better enjoy the fruits of their labor, and they feel more encouraged to seek help if and when they need it.

Guam's community of farmers is an excellent and trusted resource to share both struggles and successes. By sharing these experiences, there can be evolved conversations on the unique perspective, lifestyle, and attitudes of farm families. Our Administration supported the farming industry with financial relief during the pandemic, but we recognize we must also strengthen their well being in order to fully bounce back. The value our agricultural growers bring to our island is immeasurable, and we remain committed to providing for the improved health of those providing us food security, fresh produce and nutritional choice.

We thank the University of Guam-Cooperative Extension and Outreach, Western Region Agriculture Stress Assistance Program, Guam Behavioral Health and Wellness Center, Northern Marianas College-School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, and Department of Agriculture for their collaboration on this initiative.

Biba Farmers! Biba Guam!

Un Dangkulu Na Si Yu'os Ma'åse!

Lou Leon Guerrero
Lourdes A. Leon Guerrero
Maga'hågan Guåhan
Governor of Guam

Joshua F. Tenorio
Joshua F. Tenorio
Sigundo Maga'låhen Guåhan
Lieutenant Governor of Guam







OVERVIEW

The Farmer Focus Project of the University of Guam Cooperative Extension & Outreach service is the Micronesia-focused arm of the Western Regional Agricultural Stress Assistance Program (WRASAP). Funded by the Farm & Stress Assistance Network under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the WRASAP aims to establish a baseline of stress factors that exist within the agricultural communities of the 13 states and four territories in the Western region of the United States.

Inspired by the responses of a Farm Stress Survey, conducted among specialty livestock and crop producers within Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia, this project sheds light on stressors and vulnerabilities uniquely faced by Small Island Developing States, such as pests, financial burdens, and workload.

With local data from the survey and collaborative research, strategic outreach, educational training, and funding opportunities, the Farmer Focus Project and community partners can work concertedly to connect farmers with accessible resources and relevant trainings and build a community conducive to their overall health and well-being.

This project is a collaboration between the University of Guam Cooperative Extension & Outreach, the Guam Behavioral Health & Wellness Center, the Farmers Cooperative Association of Guam, Guåhan Sustainable Culture, Farm to Table Corp., and participating local producers. The study in Micronesia was a joint effort with the Cooperative Research, Extension, & Education Services of Northern Marianas College and the Cooperative Research & Extension service of the College of Micronesia - FSM.



Don McMoran, Ph.D.
Agriculture & Natural Resources
Extension Educator / Skagit
County Extension Director

Washington State University

Håfa Adai from the Western Region Agricultural Stress Assistance Program!

I grew up on a 2,000-acre diversified potato farm in Skagit County, Wash., which is where I learned how difficult farming is. I witnessed firsthand the stress farming placed on my parents and our employees. Unfortunately, in 1996 we lost a great employee to suicide, and fast forward 25 years, I am now working in the mental health field to help people in agriculture with suicide prevention. This loss is still painful to me and is a major influence in the work we are conducting in WRASAP.

We started with a small grant from the Washington State Department of Health to start a pilot program for suicide awareness in Skagit County. We began seeking more funding through a USDA FRSAN grant for Washington and Oregon state followed by an additional grant to expand the program to 13 Western states and four territories with the WRASAP grant. We were fortunate to connect with Dr. Kuan-ju Chen of the University of Guam and his amazing staff, who connected us with the Western U.S. territories. Once our funding arrived, we hit the ground running by getting our internal team together: Baseline Studies - Dr. Michelle Grocke, Montana State University; Networking - Esmeralda Mandujano, California State, Davis; Outreach - Alison Brennan, Montana State University; and me in Direct Services at Washington State University (BNOD).

In June 2022, my team and I had the pleasure of traveling to Guam for the Mental Health for Farmers Conference hosted by Dr. Chen. We are thankful to have established life-long friendships through our work in preventing agricultural stress-related suicides in Guam. We are excited to replicate this format for the Northern Marianas and hope to use local experts to reduce farm stress and suicides there as well.



Virendra M. Verma, Ph.D.
Program Leader and Scientist,
Agriculture Production Program

State Coordinator, Sustainable
Agriculture Research & Education

Northern Marianas College
Cooperative Research, Extension
& Education Services

Håfa Adai and Tirow, Guests, Farmers, Colleagues, and Friends!

I would like to offer my sincere appreciation for the outstanding work that WRASAP is doing in 13 states and four territories, including Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. We know that work in agriculture can be stressful, and we believe that the unique needs of agricultural communities must be addressed. By acknowledging the diversity of the Western region and the changing demands of the agriculture industry, as members of WRASAP, we are committed to working together so that everyone has the right tools and resources to cultivate resilience and promote mental health among agricultural communities.

Our project team understands that farmers and farmworkers are a vulnerable population and thus more susceptible than others to the psychosocial effects of environmental factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the current increase in the cost of fuel. In fact, the pandemic has made an already challenging situation worse as it has intensified both mental health needs and the gaps in mental health services provided to the farmers and farmworkers.

The mandate of our project is to focus on improving understanding and acceptance of mental health conditions, issues for vulnerable populations, and the use of innovative technologies to increase access to care. I hope this program will help you become more aware of your own mental health and provide you with some strategies to help meet your mental health needs.

Si Yu'os ma'åse', olomwaay, and thank you! We look forward to learning alongside with you in this conference!



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THERESA C. ARRIOLA
Director
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Buenas yan Háfa Adai, Guam Farmers and Conference Participants,

The Guam Behavioral Health & Wellness Center is pleased to work in collaboration with the Western Region Agriculture Stress Assistance Program (WRASAP), the University of Guam's College of Natural & Applied Sciences, Northern Marianas College, and the Department of Agriculture in hosting this inaugural conference tailored to the unique needs of our agricultural community. As the state-agency for behavioral health services on Guam, it is our mission to provide culturally respectful and quality behavioral health services to our community. This initiative is one way of providing these resources to an important part of our community.

The work of our local farmers has been challenged in recent years. The pandemic, rising fuel prices, and unpredictable weather patterns can create stress and anxiety for those whose livelihood is on the land. Still, our farmers show up to work and prepare many of the foods that find their way to our dinner tables. While vacations are not always possible and self-care might be a foreign term, it is through initiatives like this conference that we can get the resources to a vital part of our community.

I hope that the information you have received is valuable to you and your families. Should you or anyone you know need someone to talk to regarding your mental well-being, our Crisis Hotline is available 24/7 at (671) 647-8833/34. Please familiarize yourself with all the resources that are available and we hope to continue to strengthen this initiative in coming years.

Un Dangkolo Na Si Yu'os Må'ase',

Theresa C. Arriola, MBA
Director
Guam Behavioral Health & Wellness Center





Don McMoran, Ph.D.

*Agriculture and Natural Resources
Extension Educator /
Skagit County Extension Director
Washington State University*

Dr. Don McMoran is responsible for planning, conducting, and evaluating educational programs to address concerns of crop producers and allied industries at Washington State University Skagit County Extension. He provides crop farmers in Skagit County with technical assistance and educational opportunities. In addition, he also provides vision, leadership, and organization for the Master Gardener, Entomology, Small Farms, and Latino Agriculture outreach programs. McMoran supervises the Master Gardener and Pest Board Program and is an affiliated faculty in the WSU Department of Horticulture & Landscape Architecture.



Michelle Grocke, Ph.D.

Health and Wellness Specialist
Montana State University Extension

Dr. Michelle Grocke-Dewey holds a Ph.D. in medical anthropology and a B.A. in both economics and modern languages. She serves as the health and wellness specialist at Montana State University Extension as well as an assistant professor in the Health & Human Development Department at MSU. Her research involves using anthropological methods to uncover existing health disparities and finding practical solutions to improving health outcomes, particularly for individuals living in rural areas. Grocke's current projects include providing the farm and ranch communities with resources to better manage their stress, working with adolescents to implement harm reduction strategies against opioid and stimulant misuse, uncovering COVID-related health outcome disparities across Montana, and creating easily accessible physical activity programs for older adults.



Julie Jesmer, MSW

Project Coordinator
Western Region Agricultural Stress Assistance Program

Julie Jesmer grew up in Denver and spent her childhood running around in the city park raising all kinds of pets and growing plants in her parent's garden. She was raised in the city by parents who were raised on high country cattle ranches. She has been a clinical laboratory technician, a research scientist, a case manager in a juvenile prison, a community college instructor, a nonprofit organization manager, and a perpetual student. She has bachelor's and master's degrees in social work and is working toward a master's in agriculture.



Virendra M. Verma, Ph.D.

Horticulture/Crop Scientist

Program Leader of the Agriculture Production Program

Northern Marianas College Cooperative Research, Extension & Education Services

Dr. Virendra M. Verma is the program leader of the Agriculture Production Program of the Northern Marianas Islands. He is also a scientist of horticulture/crop, a state coordinator for the Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education program, and an adjunct professor of agriculture and food science at Northern Marianas College. Verma is a recipient of the prestigious Pacific Excellence in Extension & Outreach Service Award for the Micronesian region. He has inclusive experience in plant molecular biology and plant biotechnology techniques related to abiotic stresses and development of stress-tolerant plants for various purposes. He also has broad experience in teaching and supervising diverse student populations in formal and informal classroom settings within sustainable agriculture and agricultural plant biotechnology programs.



Jesse P. Bamba, M.S.

Extension Agent II

University of Guam Cooperative Extension & Outreach

Jesse Bamba obtained his B.S. in agriculture in 1997 and his M.S. in environmental science in 2008 from the University of Guam. He has more than 20 years of working experience in Guam's agriculture industry. He is an active UOG adviser to the Farmers Cooperative Association of Guam and collaborates with them on several projects and grants.



Kuan-ju Chen, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Agricultural Economics
University of Guam Cooperative Extension & Outreach

Dr. Kuan-Ju Chen is the Director of the Asia Pacific Studies Center and Assistant Professor and of Agricultural Economics at the UOG College of Natural & Applied Sciences. He obtained his Ph.D. in economics from Washington State University, M.S. in finance from the University of Arizona, and MBA in international business from Southeast Missouri State University. He has more than 10 years of working experience in economic analysis and statistical modeling with extensive academic and practical experience in policy-driven economic analysis published in distinguished peer-reviewed journals, such as *Food Research International*, *Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*, *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, and *Criminal Justice and Behavior*. Chen's research interests lie in the fields of agricultural, environmental, and natural source economics. His recent work mainly focuses on consumer demand analysis, economics of policy change, survey implementation in ethnically diverse regions, and innovative agribusiness and sustainable agriculture in minor outlying islands. He leads five research projects funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food & Agriculture and serves as an advisor for the Taipei Economic & Cultural Office in Guam; the University of Guam chapter of the Omicron Delta Epsilon International Honor Society for Economics, the Guam Soil & Water Conservation Districts, and the Farmers Cooperative Association of Guam.



Rita Sharma, Ph.D.

*Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychology
Director of I Pinangon Campus Suicide Prevention Program
University of Guam*

Dr. Rita Sharma worked in community behavioral health programs in Guam and San Diego for more than 15 years before joining the University of Guam. She works both as an assistant professor training master's level students to provide mental health services and also as director for UOG's I Pinangon Campus Suicide Prevention Program. She received her Ph.D. in clinical psychology and a sub-specialization in cultural psychology from Alliant International University (Calif.). Her research focus has been exploring socio-environmental risk factors in the onset of schizophrenia and other psychological disorders in Guam's populations. She is looking at the role of epigenetics and effects of intergenerational trauma among indigenous groups on mental health outcomes. This past year, she partnered with the Farmer Focus work group to understand Guam farmers' struggles and needs and to help conceptualize a holistic model to help alleviate some of their ongoing, post-pandemic stressors while promoting mental health and suicide prevention among the regional farm communities.



KristiAnna Whitman, Ph.D.

*Project Director of Guam Focus on Life
Guam Behavioral Health & Wellness Center*

Dr. KristiAnna S. Whitman is the project director for the Guam Focus on Life youth suicide prevention grant, administered through the Prevention & Training Branch of Guam Behavioral Health & Wellness Center. She is a licensed professional counselor and serves as adjunct faculty in the University of Guam's counseling program. She has previously been involved in training and managing crisis services, including the GBHWC Crisis Hotline. Her lived experience has been instrumental in promoting access and stigma reduction in mental health services.



Tim de La Cruz, Ph.D.

Extension Agent III - Family & Consumer Sciences
University of Guam Cooperative Extension & Outreach

Dr. Tim de La Cruz holds a Ph.D. in human services with a specialization in social and community services. He has more than 20 years experience working in social services and more than 12 years experience in extension. He has experience with nonprofit work focused on HIV/AIDS, substance use, non-communicable disease and suicide prevention among LGBTQIA and other minority populations. He co-founded an HIV/AIDS service organization and has led several advocacy/community efforts that address social injustice and health disparities among the local LGBTQIA community. He has co-authored a Chuukese and CHamoru culture-based curriculum on personal wellbeing and sexuality. His current extension work is focused on family resiliency, healthy aging, and behavioral health.



Glenda S. George, Ph.D.

Clinical Services Officer
Commonwealth Health Care Corp. (Saipan)

Dr. Glenda S. George serves as a clinical services officer for the Community Guidance Center under the Commonwealth Health Care Corporation in Saipan. She oversees the behavioral health services of the CGC and provides supervision and consultation to staff clinicians. George provides patient assessment and treatment, supports clinical program development, and coordinates collaboratively with other medical and behavioral health providers to ensure holistic, quality, patient care. Prior to joining the CGC, she performed mental health assessments for active-duty service members, veterans, and other federal government and private agencies.



Mary Catherine Wiley

Extension Assistant

University of Guam Cooperative Extension & Outreach

Mary Catherine Wiley joined the Cooperative Extension & Outreach service of the University of Guam in 2020 with an interest in extension's mission of linking research knowledge with emerging community-based issues. As an extension assistant, she took on the role of study coordinator for Guam's Agricultural Worker Stress Survey with the Western Region Agricultural Stress Assistance Program. The experience moved her to earn certificates in Mental Health First Aid and QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Suicide Prevention. Wiley holds a bachelor's degree in accounting with a dual focus on economics and finance from the University of Guam.



Elvira Gisog

Extension Assistant

University of Guam Cooperative Extension & Outreach

Elvira Gisog joined the University of Guam in November 2014 as a research assistant primarily focusing on topics in crop production and sustainable farming practices. In 2020, she had the opportunity to work for the nonprofit organization WestCare Pacific Islands working with youth behavioral health services. These experiences led her to assisting with the Guam Agricultural Worker Stress Survey under the Western Region Agricultural Stress Assistance Program. She also coordinates outreach events and training through the university's Farmer Focus Project. She holds a bachelor's degree in tropical agriculture production from the University of Guam and an instructional certification for Mental Health First Aid.

DIVE INTO CNAS - Issue No. 19

FARMER FOCUS: CULTIVATING HEALTH & WELLNESS WITH OUR FARMING COMMUNITY



Dr. Michelle Grocke presents farmer stress information at the farmer focus conference. June 2022.

On Friday, June 17, the College of Natural and Applied Sciences (CNAS) held its first farmer-focused conference to cultivate health and wellness within Guam's farming community. The conference was held at the Westin Resort Guam and provided insight on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the health and wellness of farmers and overall agriculture on Guam.

Assistant Professor of Agricultural Economics, Dr. Kuan-ju Chen says that farmers and their families are always the priority at Cooperative Extension & Outreach, as they are the ones who put food on our tables. The pandemic ushered in stressful situations for all including farmers and Dr. Chen and his team collaborated with agents outside CNAS to address the circumstances.

Working with the Guam Behavioral Wellness Center, The Guam Department of Agriculture, Guahan Sustainable Culture, the Southern Guam Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Farmer's Co-Op, Dr. Chen and his team will conduct further research on farm stressors.

"Our goal is to try and help our farmers, not just by sharing our resources, but also by providing them with future workshops that include topics like stress management and financial planning," said Chen.

READ FULL ARTICLE

<https://mailchi.mp/e789bc0b9379/dive-into-cn-as-issue-no-5852939>

DIVE INTO CNAS - Issue No. 20

REDUCING THE STIGMA OF MENTAL HEALTH



Participants of the Mental Health First Aid training. June 2022.

While the topic of mental health can be intimidating, there is an importance of reducing the stigma and negative associations that come with it. And on Thursday, June 23, 2022, the University of Guam's College of Natural and Applied Sciences hosted a Mental Health First Aid training for the local community to do exactly that.

According to the Western Region Agricultural Stress Assistance Program, the training also aimed to enhance the capacity of network partners and community members in the Western region to provide culturally appropriate educational programming, informational resources, and referrals to direct services.

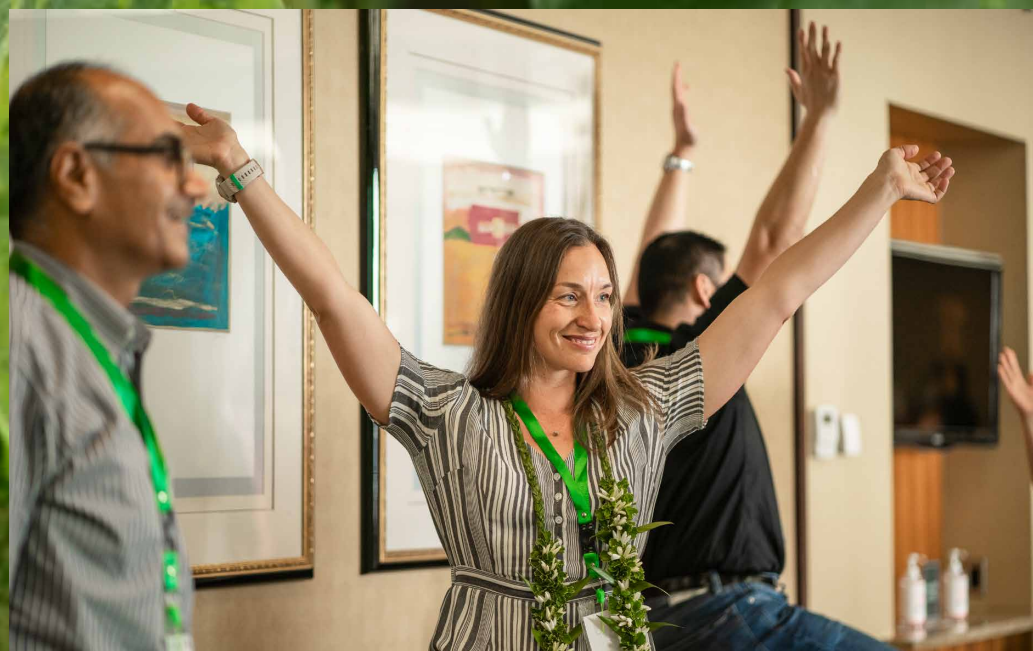
The training, which had a total of 21 participants, to include 13 trained faculty and staff under Cooperative Extension & Outreach, was led by presenters Dr. Alison Brennan, a mental health specialist from the Montana State University Extension and Julie Jesmer, a farm stress and suicide prevention specialist from the Washington State University Extension.

Both Brennan and Jesmer covered topics on how to approach a mental health crisis. They taught participants how to recognize symptoms and signs that may be mental health or substance use related, how to approach the conversation, especially when dealing with substance users, as well as how to refer a person to necessary support services. Other topics included depression and mood disorders, anxiety disorders, trauma, psychosis, and substance use disorders. Films and activities were also integrated into the training to keep their trainees on their toes and to practice their newly learned skills.

READ FULL ARTICLE

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UNIVERSITY OF GUAM

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION & OUTREACH



WRASAP
Western Regional Agricultural
Stress Assistance Program



**GUAM BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
AND WELLNESS CENTER**



UNIVERSITY OF GUAM
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS
& SOCIAL SCIENCES



WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
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