

Pierrette Desrosiers



Pierrette Desrosiers is the first occupational psychologist, lecturer, author and specialized business coach to work in Canada's agricultural community. For over 20 years, she has been devoting her career to farmers and their families.

Desrosiers began her career in a completely different climate in terms of attitudes towards stress and mental health.

"Twenty years ago, I was just doing this by myself. People didn't want the word "Stress"

in the titles of my keynotes. They didn't want people knowing I was a psychologist, saying it would frighten people," said Desrosiers.

She was advised that her business plan of providing psychological support to farmers would fail due to the farming community's "traditional values". But she knew, as a daughter, sister and a wife of agricultural producers, that there was a silent need for support that was going unmet.

Studies at the time clearly showed that farmers share values such as hard work, courage, strength and independence. They were very reluctant to talk about their emotions and acknowledge any kind of emotional or physical suffering.

Being aware of the challenge, Desrosiers gave her first lecture to farmers. Afterwards, she received several requests from producers reaching out, asking for help. That cemented for her that there was an urgent need for these clients to have access to a professional who is familiar with their reality and needs. She suddenly understood that her greatest contribution as a psychologist would be to help agricultural producers.

Today, she realizes how much psychological distress is increasing in rural areas and has become a serious concern.

Being immersed in farm family issues for most of her life, Desrosiers has an innate understanding of those in agriculture, and also the variety of issues they deal with that could affect their mental health.

"No one was addressing the human aspect of it. No one wanted to speak about that," said Desrosiers.

"What's unique about the farm family business is that intersection between family and farm. Everything is intertwined. You work with family, you live on the farm itself. It's constant. It makes it very difficult to make distinctions,"

"Farmers will weather through extreme stress and hardship because their operations are passed down from generation to generation and there is a high level of emotion invested in every part of the business. Not just emotion from the owner, but all the relationships of the families that work on the farm."

The farmers she spoke to were quick to open up to her when they recognized this bond, as Desrosiers attempted to address some of the more taboo topics in farming: lack of succession, debt, stress, work/life balance, suicide risk and more.

Through her lectures, training sessions, business coaching and articles, Desrosiers equips farmers with concrete strategies for improving their daily well-being and productivity, reducing psychological distress.

“We need to be developing skills in managing stress, knowing ourselves and managing time. These allow you to prevent serious mental health issues, and it is always much easier to prevent rather than to cure,” said Desrosiers.

By providing her clients with tools to deal with stress and a variety of coping mechanisms that are both helpful and beneficial, Desrosiers works to make farmers more resilient.

“It’s like a carpenter, if I give you a big box of tools and you don’t know what to do with them, not much is going to get done. But if I give you a hammer you can only approach problems in one way,” said Desrosiers.

Desrosiers has worked throughout her career to distribute her knowledge of mental health issues to help destigmatize the subject. She has done training sessions and coaching for over 65,000 people across Canada and France, written more than 200 blogs posts, conducted hundreds of media interviews, has a monthly newsletter and has written five books. Over the past 15 years she has provided many workshops and training sessions in partnership with various agricultural organizations.

Of all the initiatives mentioned above, Desrosiers’ largest effort in destigmatization and awareness was her book *Survivre à la réussite*. The book follows one of Canada’s most successful egg and poultry farmers, who’s success hid childhood injuries and tremendous suffering that followed him throughout most of his life. It unveiled the pain that can be hidden behind success, and helped to break down some taboos in the entrepreneurial world that were letting people suffer in silence.

Desrosiers also works within her field to try and get more psychologists and social workers to be interested in working in the agricultural community. She pushes to increase the resources available to those who are often isolated in rural communities.

Desrosiers has led an amazing career, pushing for farmer mental health when no one even wanted to discuss the topic. Unveiling a hidden world of suffering that most hid behind the tough, cowboy image that people expect from farmers. She continues to push the issue forward, and is a tremendous asset to the agricultural community.