

## Andria Jones-Bitton & Briana Hagen



In 2015, Andria began researching farmer mental health in Canada. Until this point, research on this topic was sparse and understanding of the state of Canadian farmer mental wellness was lacking.

Andria was motivated to better understand Canadian farmer mental health out of a growing concern for their welfare. She decided to start researching the issue when she discovered little published research on this topic. Due to this, she conducted a national survey in which over 1100 Canadian farmers participated in to provide essential baseline statistics.

Briana conducted 75 in-depth interviews to explore the lived experience of farmer mental health to better understand the impacts and to learn first-hand what farmers need for mental health support. Learning that farmers felt they lacked mental health literacy, this team created the *In the Know* mental health training program to help farmers learn the knowledge, skills and tools they could use to help deal with mental health issues.

The *In the Know* mental health literacy program was recently piloted with 6 different groups and formal evaluations showed that it was effective; improving knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. Andria and Briana are collaborating with agricultural, veterinary, and mental health organizations across the country to ensure the *In the Know* program is available to groups who want it. A farmer support infographic, developed by the *In the Know* stakeholder team, was released on Twitter and has received terrific feedback and sharing. Most recently, they have partnered with farmer mental health experts in Quebec to have this sheet translated for further impact.

Their research results are being used to inform the work of groups like the Do More Agriculture Foundation and the federal and Ontario provincial governments to inform their discussions on farmer mental health.

Together, Andria and Briana have deepened understanding of the lived experience of mental health on-farm. Importantly, the work that Andria and Briana do is practical, resulting in tools that the agriculture sector can use to better support Canadian farmers.

Farmers are the cornerstone of the work being done by Andria and her team. In fact, the entire research program is structured around participatory action – where all stakeholders are involved in the entire research process – from development of the research objectives up to results dissemination.

With the help of this research, the *In the Know* program was created with farmers, along with veterinarians, government and industry representatives, social workers, psychologists, and adult education/extension specialists, because Andria believes best results come when stakeholders work together.

Since this research program began in 2015, the agriculture community is more engaged in the discussion around farmer mental health; Do More Ag has been formed and the federal government is studying the issue. Andria and Briana receive many requests to speak at farmer meetings, and produce articles on farmer mental health for various agricultural news outlets. Three of their articles have been published in open access academic journals. Importantly, Andria and Briana are most motivated when farmers and people who work with farmers contact them for help, “because they read about their work somewhere.”

After completion of the program pilot, Andria and Briana have received many requests for the delivery of the *In the Know* program, which they are working on distributing on a national level.

Andria and Briana have been active locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally in sharing the results of their work. Since 2015, they have publicly presented at over 40 events and given over 70 media interviews. Briana Hagen recently won the poster competition at the International Society for Veterinary Epidemiology and Economics Conference. They are also active on social media and supporting and informing the discussion around producer mental health in Canada and beyond. A clear link can be made between their knowledge transfer activities and farmer willingness to start talking openly about their mental health struggles.

Andria and her team are continuing to analyze and report on their data, through traditional means (e.g. public presentations, media, scientific papers), and have several ideas for research initiatives to build on what has been done. In addition to this, it is essential that they work together with stakeholders to produce practical, effective, evidence-informed, and sustainable approaches to support farmer mental health. To this end, Andria has been actively collaborating with several agricultural organizations to lobby the federal government for a national strategy for farmer mental health in Canada.