

SUCCESS STORIES

Breaking the Silence: Agrisentinel Network for Farmers well-being.

The Agri-Sentinelles Network is a multi-partner network that aims to raise awareness, train and equip volunteer women and men who work in contact with farmers to get involved in suicide prevention, in order to: better identify farmers who are experiencing serious difficulties or who are in psychological distress; orient farmers to facilitate their access to an existing support system; develop attitudes adapted to farmers in fragile situations, without playing the role of social worker or psychologist.



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Name of the interviewed	Réseau Agrisentinelles - Stéphane Devillers from Elliance and Quentin Pauchard from La Coopération Agricole (coordinators of the project)
Type of farming activity	Le Réseau Agrisentinelles is an initiative that was launched by organisations working with farmers (advisor, researchers, chambers of agriculture, cooperatives, farmers representatives, Agri sector social insurance, etc.) in France.
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Suicide prevention initiative.

What is your story?

The Agrisentinelles network initiative was a response to the increasing prevalence of suicide among farmers, a problem that emerged only in the last 5 to 10 years. Previously, mental health issues within the farming community were often disregarded or attributed to occupational hazards and psycho-social risks. The approach to addressing suicide among farmers was primarily focused on periodic reporting, similar to accounting practices, with reports being generated every 7 years or so. While some small-scale initiatives were starting to emerge to support farmers once identified, the crucial aspect of early detection was missing.

Recognizing the need for a proactive approach to mental health in the farming community, the idea of the Agrisentinelles network was born. Several organizations came together to address this pressing issue. The Ministry of Agriculture in France played a significant role by providing funding to establish the project. At that time, the conversation around animal welfare had gained momentum in France, but the well-being of farmers had not received the same level of attention.

The Agrisentinelles network aims to fill the gap by deploying "sentinels" on the ground who can detect early signs of distress or mental health challenges among farmers. These sentinels act as a support system, providing farmers with the necessary assistance and guidance when they need it most. By actively monitoring the well-being of farmers and fostering a culture of openness and support, the network seeks to prevent tragic incidents and provide timely intervention.

The initiative represents a shift from reactive approaches to mental health in the farming community towards proactive measures that prioritize early detection and prevention. By recognizing the unique challenges faced by farmers and addressing their mental health needs, the Agrisentinelles network strives to create a supportive environment that promotes the overall well-being of farmers. With the Ministry of Agriculture's support and the collective efforts of various organizations, this initiative aims to make a positive and lasting impact on the mental health of farmers in France.

Handling the situation

The Agrisentinel Network is a comprehensive initiative aimed at addressing the critical issue of suicide prevention within the agricultural sector. With a focus on France, this network brings together various stakeholders, including agricultural professionals, healthcare providers, and support organizations, to collaborate and implement strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, and support.

The Agrisentinel Network operates based on three key pillars: surveillance, training, and support. These pillars work in conjunction to create a robust system that identifies at-risk individuals, equips individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to intervene effectively, and provides ongoing support to those in need. Let's delve deeper into each of these pillars:

Surveillance: Surveillance forms the foundation of the Agrisentinel Network's proactive approach to suicide prevention. It involves the establishment of a sentinel system comprising trained individuals who act as observers within the agricultural sector. These sentinels, often fellow agricultural professionals or trusted members of the community, are trained to recognize signs of distress and potential suicidal behavior in their peers or colleagues.

The sentinels are provided with comprehensive training to identify warning signs, initiate contact with individuals in crisis, and connect them with appropriate support services. By acting as frontline observers, the sentinels play a vital role in early detection and intervention.

To ensure privacy and data protection, the sentinels are bound by professional secrecy and confidentiality obligations. They sign an "act of commitment" that outlines their responsibilities, rights, and the importance of maintaining strict confidentiality.

Training: Training is a fundamental aspect of the Agrisentinel Network. It aims to equip individuals within the agricultural sector with the necessary knowledge and skills to identify, respond to, and support individuals at risk of suicide.

The training provided to the sentinels consists of several modules tailored to different roles and responsibilities. Module 1 focuses on general sentinel training, enabling participants to identify warning signs, contact relevant individuals, and offer appropriate advice. Module 2 is aimed at clinicians, health professionals, and social workers, providing them with specialized training in assessing suicidal potential and offering guidance. Module 3 caters to specialist clinicians, focusing on crisis intervention techniques and advanced support strategies.

Additionally, Mental Health First Aid evidenced based training is available to all citizens, providing them with essential knowledge about mental disorders, recognizing signs of distress, and offering appropriate guidance and support.

The training is designed to empower individuals within the agricultural sector to play an active role in suicide prevention and intervention, fostering a network of informed and compassionate individuals capable of making a difference in their communities.

Support: Support forms a vital component of the Agrisentinel Network, ensuring that individuals in crisis receive timely assistance and ongoing care. The network facilitates access to a range of support services, including mental health professionals, helplines, and counseling services.

Sentinels play a crucial role in connecting individuals in distress with the appropriate support services. They are trained to initiate contact with those in crisis, provide a listening ear, and guide them towards the help they need. The network works in collaboration with existing support organizations and helplines to ensure a seamless referral process.

Ongoing support and follow-up are emphasized to ensure that individuals at risk receive continued care. This includes regular monitoring, personalized care plans, and access to resources that promote mental well-being and resilience within the agricultural sector.

To ensure efficient coordination and information sharing, a departmental file is established under the aegis of the Agrisentinel Network. This file consolidates information about the sentinels, their commitments, and the overall functioning of the network. It is declared to the relevant data protection authority, ensuring compliance with privacy regulations.

In summary, the Agrisentinel Network is a comprehensive and collaborative initiative aimed at suicide prevention within the agricultural sector. Through surveillance, training, and support, the network empowers individuals within the sector to play an active role in identifying and intervening in potential crises. By fostering a network of trained sentinels, the Agrisentinel Network strives to create a culture of support, understanding, and well-being in the agricultural community, ultimately reducing the incidence of suicide and promoting mental health.

The Agrisentinel Network provides training through a collaborative effort involving a pair of individuals, including at least one clinician such as a doctor, nurse, or psychologist. This multidisciplinary approach ensures that the training incorporates both mental health expertise and practical agricultural knowledge. To date, the network has successfully trained and activated over 3000 sentinels who are actively engaged in their roles. These sentinels, equipped with specialized knowledge and skills, serve as a vigilant support system within the agricultural sector, contributing to the prevention of suicide and the promotion of mental well-being.

[Example of success stories \(in French with autogenerated english subtitle\)](#)

Conclusion and tips

Tips to other farmers

"Mental Health issues and suicide cannot remain taboo in Agriculture. It is important that everyone in the sector cooperates to stop this harmful situation."

Le Réseau Agrisentinelles, or Agrisentinel Network, serves as a powerful demonstration of how cooperation across the agricultural sector can effectively address mental health challenges. This collaboration is crucial in developing prevention mechanisms to tackle the mental health problems faced by farmers, which are primarily caused by financial uncertainty, societal pressures, and feelings of loneliness. The network has recognized that these factors can be adequately mitigated by various stakeholders who have a direct influence on farmers' well-being, such as professionals who visit farms and engage in invoicing practices.

Through the Agrisentinel Network, valuable lessons have been learned regarding the importance of collective action and shared responsibility. The network has emphasized the significance of bringing together clinicians, agricultural experts, and other relevant professionals to provide comprehensive training to the sentinels. By combining their expertise, these diverse professionals can equip sentinels with a broader understanding of the specific challenges faced by farmers and enable them to effectively identify warning signs of mental distress.

One crucial lesson learned is that the active involvement of clinicians within the training process is instrumental. Their presence ensures that sentinels receive a solid foundation in mental health assessment and crisis intervention techniques. By including clinicians in the training program, the Agrisentinel Network ensures that sentinels are equipped with the necessary skills to identify and respond to mental health issues appropriately.

Moreover, the network's success in training and activating over 3000 sentinels highlights the potential for widespread engagement within the agricultural sector. This achievement demonstrates that individuals and organizations within the sector are receptive to the importance of mental health and are willing to invest time and resources in preventive measures. The Agrisentinel Network serves as a model for other industries to establish similar initiatives that prioritize the mental well-being of their respective communities.

The network's collaborative approach has also shed light on the significant role played by various actors who directly influence farmers' lives. Professionals who visit farms, such as agricultural advisors or consultants, have a unique opportunity to assess the well-being of farmers and provide valuable support. Additionally, invoicing practices and other business interactions can be structured in a way that eases financial burdens and reduces stress for farmers. The Agrisentinel Network recognizes the potential of these actors to contribute to mental health prevention efforts and emphasizes their involvement in training and support systems.

In conclusion, the Réseau Agrisentinelles exemplifies the potential for effective cooperation across the agricultural sector in addressing mental health challenges. Lessons learned from this network emphasize the importance of collective action, shared responsibility, and the inclusion of clinicians in training programs. The network's achievements in training and activating thousands of sentinels underscore the willingness of stakeholders to prioritize mental well-being within the agricultural community. Furthermore, the recognition of the influence of various actors within the agricultural sector highlights the potential for targeted interventions to mitigate factors contributing to mental health issues. The Agrisentinel Network serves as a valuable model for fostering mental health support systems which could be upscaled and replicated at European level.

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