

THE SLICE

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Breaking Down Barriers

PIE Center Partner Programs Impact Rural & Agricultural Mental Health

By Shelby Thomas

Two PIE Center partner programs have made strides to provide meaningful mental health resources for the agricultural community.

With the help of the PIE Center, the Southeastern Coastal Center for Agricultural Health and Safety (SCCAHS) and the Florida Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) are working to break down the stigma surrounding mental health in the agricultural industry.

SCCAHS worked with the PIE Center to develop a mental health resource guide to address the unique mental health needs of rural communities and farm workers.

“Farmers and agricultural workers face immense pressure and challenges that impact their mental health, including finances, weather uncertainty, loneliness and overall stress,” said Ashley McLeod-Morin, SCCAHS associate director of strategic communication.

“Often, these individuals may not be aware of resources or may face stigma related to seeking resources.”

The guide contains mental health resources for Florida producers, farm workers and the general public. To extend the impact beyond the state of Florida, the guide also includes national resources individuals in other states can utilize.

“We want to help remove as many barriers as possible so more people will seek help,” McLeod-Morin said. “We know the future of agriculture depends on a healthy workforce, and being mentally healthy is an important part of that.

“This project is a great example of the outcome of the partnership between SCCAHS and the PIE Center. The PIE Center was instrumental in collecting data and feedback that resulted in a useful resource.”

“

We want to help remove as many barriers as possible so more people will seek help.

- Ashley McLeod-Morin

Florida EDEN is also working to provide mental health resources to farmers and rural communities impacted by natural disasters. Following Hurricane Irma in 2017, Florida Extension agents began requesting mental health resources for their communities, creating an opportunity to help the agricultural sector in a new way.

“We know how to plan for a disaster, and I think planning for mental health should become a part of our disaster plan,” said Angie Lindsey, UF/IFAS associate professor of family, youth and community sciences (FYCS) and PIE Center affiliate faculty member.

To equip Extension agents with resources to address mental health needs, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) and the State Agricultural



<https://sccaahs.org/>

Response Team (SART) funded the development of an in-person mental health workshop. The workshop was created by UF/IFAS FYCS faculty members Lindsey, Heidi Radunovich and Emily Johnson, with support from the PIE Center.

Lindsey said the primary topics she hopes participants take away from the program are to know there are people who can help and to reach out when they feel the need.

“Reach out to talk to someone,” Lindsey said. “Recognize the professionals that can help, but also recognize the importance of talking through your feelings after a disaster.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, the PIE Center assisted Florida EDEN in making the training accessible online. The Online Disaster Mental Health Training, also funded by FDACS and SART, allows participants to complete the program at their own pace and access course materials from any location.

“Awareness will help build resiliencies and make people become more comfortable asking for help and hopefully make some individual and family behavior changes,” Lindsey said.

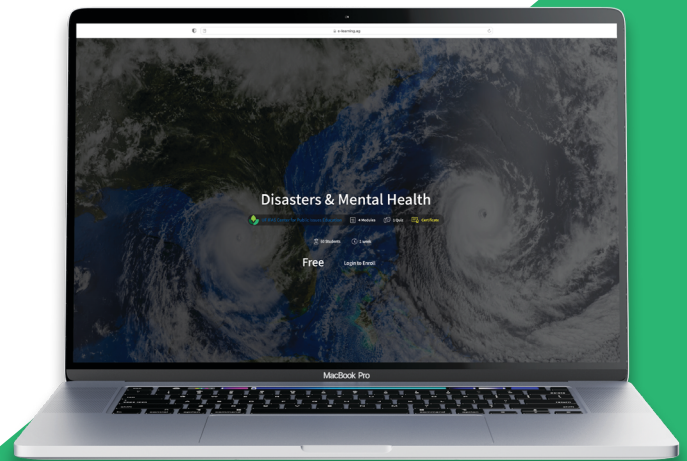
Florida EDEN is leading a new project funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture focused on documenting the impact of Hurricanes Ian and Idalia through photos. Lindsey said she hopes the project will help paint a picture of what recovery looks like and lead to the development of more resources, including materials related to mental health.

For more information about Florida EDEN’s mental health efforts, visit the link below.



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- Angie Lindsey



<https://piecenter.com/fl-eden/>

Identifying Florida ANR Issues

To effectively address challenges faced by the agricultural and natural resources (ANR) sectors, the PIE Center has been working closely with stakeholders to identify and understand critical issues.

In October 2023, the PIE Center attended the Florida Farm Bureau annual meeting to facilitate an issues identification session. With firsthand knowledge and experiences in ANR, Florida Farm Bureau members possess valuable perspectives that can guide the direction of PIE Center programs.

During the session, participants were prompted to describe challenges currently impacting the ANR sectors, while also considering what emerging issues are on the horizon. The discussions revealed many topics of

interest, with the following issues regarded as the most pressing to Florida ANR: labor, water, land availability and agricultural education/literacy.

The PIE Center also sought to receive feedback on which audiences should be targeted when communicating about these issues. Participants noted that youth, consumers, regulatory agencies and policymakers would benefit from ANR communication efforts.

The issues identification session represents a pivotal step toward refining the PIE Center’s strategic plan initiatives. By engaging with stakeholders like Florida Farm Bureau members, the PIE Center can proactively respond to complex ANR issues through research, outreach and education.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Caitlynn Youmans

Caitlynn Youmans is a first-year master's student in the UF/IFAS Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, with a specialization in communication. She is from Keystone Heights, Florida.

As a graduate assistant, Youmans works jointly with the PIE Center and the Program Development & Evaluation Center (PDEC). Since joining the PIE Center team this fall, she has assisted with data analysis for a project with University of Maine Cooperative Extension and developed promotional materials for the 2024 Association for Communication Excellence conference.

In her free time, Youmans enjoys photography, blogging, reading, traveling and spending time with her dogs and cat. She read 13 books in 2023, and aims to double her goal next year.



This new professional journey at PIE with a team that fosters collective brilliance, dedication and a positive work environment has been one of the best parts of my graduate school experience so far.

- Caitlynn Youmans



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