

Report to the Legislature

Improving Behavioral Health & Suicide Prevention in the Agricultural Industry: Pilot Program Results and Recommendations

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Prepared by
Injury & Violence Prevention Program
Division of Prevention & Community Health



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Executive Summary

In 2018, Second Substitute House Bill 2671 directed the Department of Health (department) to convene a task force and establish a pilot program that would address behavioral health and suicide rates in Washington state's agricultural communities. The pilot program was implemented by Washington State University Skagit County Extension (WSU Skagit) in March 2019 based on the task force findings and recommendations. Two prior legislative reports on suicide prevention in agricultural communities have been published (see the [2018 report](#) and [2019 report](#)). This third and final legislative report shares results and recommendations based on WSU Skagit's pilot program's accomplishments and lessons learned. Unexpectedly, it also demonstrates the severe impact of a major event such as the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic downturn on the state's agricultural industry and workforce, and the unforeseen urgency of expanding and uniquely tailoring behavioral health supports to the essential workers in these communities.

Within 17 months, WSU Skagit has taken long strides toward building an expandable and sustainable framework for improving behavioral health and preventing suicide across Washington's agricultural communities. Washington is an emerging leader in understanding the gaps, needs, and strategies to improve behavioral health and prevent suicide in agricultural communities.

Key Pilot Program Recommendations

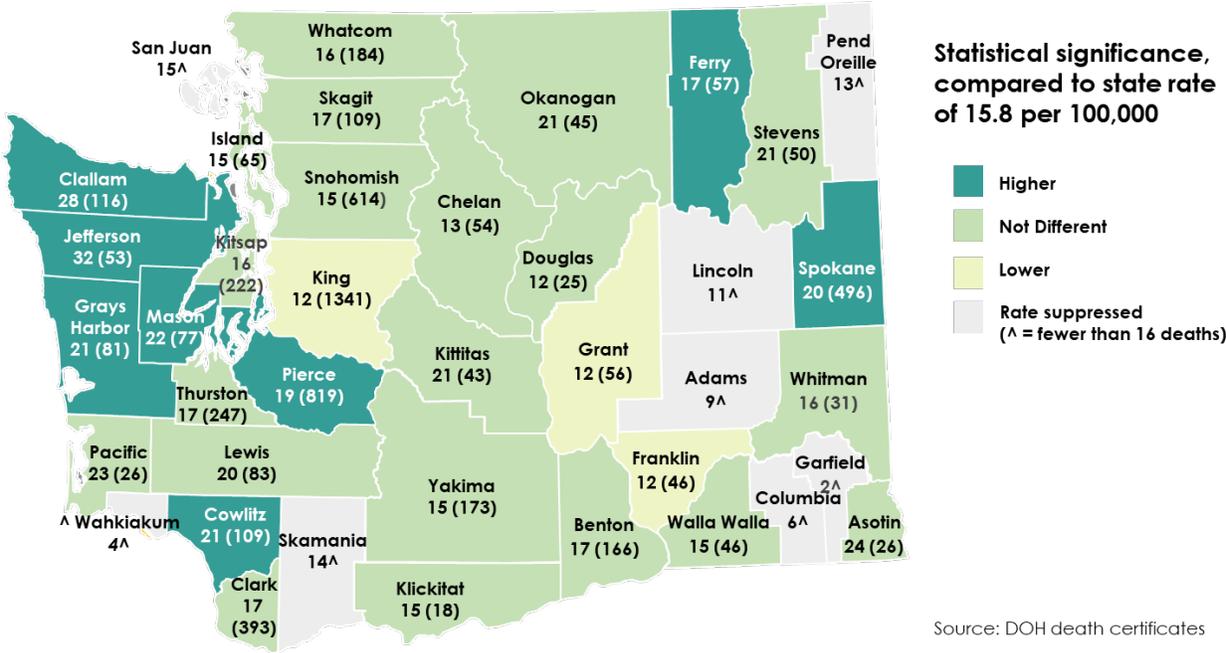
- Expand rural community-based education via trainings, resiliency workshops, and public awareness campaigns to combat stigma around behavioral health, and connect specific stressors with behavioral health risks;
- Address COVID-19 stressors uniquely impacting agricultural communities (e.g. adequacy of government and community resources, behavioral health service barriers);
- Develop a competency training for use at the state's crisis line call centers to increase its use and improve crisis service delivery for the agricultural community;
- Build stronger partnerships with faith-based communities, agricultural worker organizations, community health workers, and *promotores*, who provide community health resources to Latinx agricultural worker populations;
- Create culturally appropriate materials and trainings for the Latinx agricultural community, including public service announcements (PSAs) and a state-recognized training curriculum for *promotores*;
- Educate physicians and workers about the risks of toxic pesticide exposure and possible interactions with medications to treat depression to address possible neurological side effects;
- Build a cadre of extension-based farm financial advisors across the state to help agricultural workers facing financial stress and refer to resources.

Background

Agriculture constitutes the second largest export category in Washington’s economy, accounting for 12 percent of the state’s revenue and 164,000 jobs statewide.¹ State agricultural workers include farm and ranch owners, laborers, and those working in the forestry and fishing industries. With almost 36,000 farms, Washington is the third largest food and agricultural exporter in the United States, and ranks third in the nation in total and per capita employment in the farming, fishing, and forestry occupations (excluding self-employment).^{2, 3} In 2018, the agricultural industry yielded more than \$9.4 billion in cash receipts for all commodities in Washington.⁴

In 2018, 1,254 Washingtonians died by suicide, a rate of 16.2 deaths per 100,000.⁵ Between 2014 and 2018, the suicide rate was 15.8 deaths per 100,000 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Age-Adjusted Suicide Rate by County (per 100,000 WA residents) 2014-2018



Source: DOH death certificates

Data show that people working in the agricultural industry are at a higher risk of suicide than the general population. According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study, the 2016 suicide rate for males (ages 16-64) working in the agriculture, forestry, fishing,

¹ <https://agr.wa.gov/washington-agriculture>
² <https://wsfb.com/agricultures-contribution-to-washingtons-economy/>
³ <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes450000.htm>
⁴ https://data.ers.usda.gov/reports.aspx?ID=17844#P856ece7d74bb4bb68368c602c10d07f8_4_34iT0R0x0T0
⁵ Community Health Assessment Tool (CHAT) data

and hunting industries (based on census code major industry and occupation group) was significantly higher at 36.1 per 100,000 than the average male rate of 27.4 per 100,000 for all industries and occupations.⁶ In 2018, the Washington suicide rate for males (ages 16-64) was 38.0 per 100,000 in the farming, fishing, and forestry industries (based on Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) major group).⁷ The state suicide rate for males (ages 16-64) was 29.8 per 100,000.

Although agriculture exists across the state, it is the backbone of many rural areas in Washington.⁸ For example, Figure 2 portrays the distribution of farms by county.

Figure 2: Distribution of Farms in Washington by County



The table below also demonstrates a higher suicide rate for those living in small towns and isolated rural areas, where agriculture is more prevalent, compared with urban and suburban populations.

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6903a1.htm>

⁷ DOH death certificates

⁸ <https://walandtrusts.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Future-of-Farming.pdf>

Table 1: Comparison of Washington Suicide Rate by Urban/Rural Classifications (2018 residents)*

Geography	Age-adjusted rate** per 100,000	Number of suicides	Population
Urban Core	15.0	874	5,581,510
Suburban	17.9	100	549,754
Large Rural Town	19.0	78	418,956
Small Town/ Isolated Rural	20.9	193	877,350
State	16.2	1,254	7,427,570

*This table uses the Rural Urban Commuting Areas (RUCA) classification system, which is based on population density at a census tract level.

**Age-adjusted rate allows for the comparison of communities with varying age groups. Age adjustment ensures that differences in rates are not attributed to differences in age distribution.

Washington’s agricultural communities experience a variety of unique stressors that can increase risk of death by suicide, including stigma surrounding seeking help for behavioral health issues, financial burden, weather and climate change, on-the-job injuries, and geographic obstacles in rural areas.⁹ While the stressors vary, the impact of extreme stress in the agriculture industry reveals itself in the high occupational suicide rate among agricultural workers. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has created additional hardship across Washington’s agricultural industry, marked by severe economic decline and exacerbated health disparities among people of color.

In 2018, the Washington State Legislature enacted [Second Substitute House Bill 2671](#) directing the department to convene a task force and establish a pilot program to improve behavioral health and prevent suicide in agricultural communities. Based on the recommendations of the task force, the department established the pilot program in Skagit County through a contract with Washington State University Skagit County Extension (WSU Skagit). This work supports [Washington State Suicide Prevention Plan](#) recommendations to create and maintain programs improving connectedness, focusing on high-priority populations and groups experiencing serious stressors, and to make recognition and referral training available to the public and designated professions.

⁹ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/natural-resources-environment/climate-change/>

2018 Legislative Report Highlights

The task force convened in October 2018. Its general findings included the need to identify behavioral health and suicide risk factors specific to agricultural communities, identify community members knowledgeable about and connected to the agricultural industry, and consider the unique culture and diversity of agricultural workers and their families in behavioral health and suicide prevention efforts. Specific recommendations were to launch the pilot program in Skagit County, professionals who engage with agricultural workers on suicide risk and local resources, culturally and linguistically appropriate materials incorporate community-based supports and focus on reducing stigma surrounding behavioral health. See the 2018 report [here](#) or in Appendix A.

2019 Legislative Report Highlights

The department contracted with WSU Skagit to establish the pilot program in March 2019. WSU Skagit developed and distributed behavioral health and suicide prevention materials, trained community leaders on suicide prevention skills and resources, and formed partnerships with key stakeholders. Major program accomplishments included creating an agriculture industry-specific publicly available suicide prevention website, conducting evidence-based trainings in suicide risk recognition and referral skills for agricultural industry leaders and prevention specialists, and creating and disseminating model marketing materials. See the 2019 report [here](#) or in Appendix B.

This is the third and final report required by SSHB 2671 (2018) containing information about results of the pilot program and recommendations for improving the program and expanding its availability to other counties.

COVID-19 Impacts on the Agricultural Industry

Although the pilot program began before the pandemic, COVID-19 has significantly impacted rural communities across Washington. Agriculture and produce packing were among the leading industries in terms of highest number of COVID-19 outbreaks among all non-health care settings as of September 2020.¹⁰ Impacts can be seen in decreased access to in-person health care resources and a shift to online and telehealth services. This shift has increased access for some people, however others have expressed concern about the loss of personal connections with their health care providers. Although behavioral health difficulties were an existing issue before COVID-19, they have been further exacerbated by the pandemic among the agricultural community, as indicated by task force members. Thus, these prevention efforts are even more timely and critical.

¹⁰ <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/StatewideCOVID-19OutbreakReport.pdf>

It is estimated that the national agricultural industry will lose approximately \$20 billion in revenue in 2020 due to COVID-19.¹² Farm bankruptcy, an ever-present threat, has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Nationally, farm bankruptcies increased by 23 percent from March 2019 to March 2020. This rise is expected to continue.¹³

Many Washington agricultural operations are unable to repay loans due to COVID-19, contributing to extreme financial burden and stress. Major disruptions in the supply chain have occurred, requiring drastic changes in processing and distribution, and reduced demand for certain products resulting in major crop and supply waste. For example, Washington is the second largest potato producer in the country.¹⁴ However, task force members say the extreme decrease in the frozen potato demand due to COVID-19 slashed production contracts and created such a potato surplus that farmers in Eastern Washington were pressured to till their crops under in spring 2020.¹⁵

COVID-19 & WA Tulip Industry

Established in 1984, the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival brings hundreds of thousands of visitors to Skagit County each year. In spring 2020, COVID-19 drastically impacted the bulb farmers who rely on agritourism for their livelihood. In a typical year, an estimated 90 percent of business occurs in April. In 2020, Tulip Town, a Skagit Valley bulb farm, lost an estimated 95 percent of that revenue.



Andrew Miller, Tulip Town

Reflecting on the farm stressors posed by COVID-19 on Tulip Town, Angela Speer, co-owner, says in a New York Times article, “Part of the great thing about our group is that there are five of us, and we take turns having our moments of stress or anxiety or sadness because we all went through all of those feelings.”¹¹ However, not all agricultural workers have peer support.

Lost revenue from the Tulip Festival has had a \$60 million impact on Skagit County’s economy. The 2021 Skagit Valley Tulip Festival is uncertain. The pandemic has hit many farmers in the Skagit Valley hard. Farmers across Washington face unforeseen changes in market demands and increased workforce safety regulations. Before COVID-19, excessive stress and high suicide rates were a known issue in agricultural communities. Andrew Miller, co-owner of Tulip Town, says, “We’re not there but I know a lot of farmers who just don’t need one more thing.”

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/09/us/coronavirus-tulips-washington-skagit.html>

¹² <https://www.fapri.missouri.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/FAPRI-Report-02-20.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.fb.org/podcast/pandemic-likely-to-increase-farm-bankruptcies>

¹⁴ <https://agr.wa.gov/washington-agriculture>

¹⁵ <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/in-french-fry-heartland-spring-turns-bitter-ascoronavirus-cuts-into-global-demand>

Dairy farmers in the Western region suffered economic hardship before COVID-19 due to low prices. Since the pandemic began, dairy prices have fallen by an additional 28 percent. Beef and pork prices have fallen by more than 30 percent.¹⁶ Despite the “Coronavirus Food Assistance Package with \$16 billion in support to agriculture [...] [it is expected that farmers will] face struggles with high unemployment, loss of off-farm income, and with farm debt at a record \$425 billion, that could increase farm loan delinquencies.”¹⁷ As financial burden is one of the factors contributing to suicide risk in the agricultural industry, it is critical that these stressors continue to be addressed.

Farm Workers and COVID-19 Impacts

An original finding of the task force emphasized the critical need for behavioral health and suicide prevention efforts under the pilot program to consider the diversity of the agricultural community. COVID-19 has exacerbated existing disparities in the agricultural industry by disproportionately impacting communities of color nationwide.¹⁸ It is important to recognize that a significant proportion of Washington’s agricultural community includes migrant workers, who may face a number of barriers to maintaining their health, including limited access to health care, lack of insurance, lack of sick leave, limited information and resources that speak to their language and culture, and mistrust of the health care system.¹⁹

Farm workers, although deemed essential workers, have experienced vast disparities in COVID-19 disease incidence compared to the general population. Yakima County is one example of the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 where agriculture is the top industry.²⁰ It is the predominate occupation among Latinx people living in the county,²¹ who comprise half of the county’s total population.²² Sixty-four percent of Yakima County’s jobs are considered essential and “hands-on” where the work cannot be performed remotely.²³ As of August 2020, Yakima County was home to the second highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the state. Thirteen percent of Washington’s population is Latinx, however Latinx people accounted for 44 percent of COVID-19 cases.²⁴ Other agricultural communities across Washington are also disproportionately at risk.

¹⁶ <https://www.fb.org/newsroom/crop-and-livestock-prices-plunge-under-weight-of-covid-19-uncertainty>

¹⁷ <https://www.fb.org/podcast/pandemic-likely-to-increase-farm-bankruptcies>

¹⁸ http://covid19farmworkerstudy.org/survey/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EN-COFS-Preliminary-Data-Brief_FINAL.pdf

¹⁹ http://covid19farmworkerstudy.org/survey/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/EN-COFS-Preliminary-Data-Brief_FINAL.pdf

²⁰ <https://esd.wa.gov/labormarketinfo/county-profiles>

²¹ <https://qwiexplorer.ces.census.gov/static/explore.html#x=0&g=0>

²² <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/yakimacountywashington>

²³ <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/no-were-not-all-in-this-together-look-at-whats-happening-with-coronavirus-in-yakima/>

²⁴ <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Emergencies/NovelCoronavirusOutbreak2020COVID19/DataDashboard>

Pilot Program and Results

The legislature required the pilot program to create a free resource that must:

- Provide a publicly available resource through a web-based portal and/or through linkages to one or more appropriate existing telephone support lines;
- Provide a resource to train agricultural industry management, workers, and their family members in suicide risk recognition and referral skills;
- Provide a resource to build capacity within the agricultural industry to train individuals to deliver training in person;
- Develop model marketing materials and messages that promote behavioral health in the agricultural industry;
- Work with existing crisis lines, current counseling and intervention resources, and new volunteers to develop additional capacity to address behavioral health and suicide prevention in the context of agricultural communities; and
- Ensure these resources are culturally and linguistically appropriate, and available in English and Spanish.

The WSU Agricultural Suicide Prevention Pilot Program launched in March 2019 and has made long strides toward improving behavioral health and suicide prevention in Skagit County. The pilot program consists of dedicated WSU Skagit staff, including a program coordinator, who create and distribute education materials, host trainings, and conduct community outreach. The work is well poised for expansion across Washington.

Key Results

- Work under the pilot program is contributing to the knowledge base of culturally and geographically relevant suicide prevention and intervention strategies for agricultural communities.
- Since 2018, presentations, outreach and education have reached more than 2,000 people on topics of excessive stress and suicide prevention through events, workshops, and conferences. Since 2019, presentations, outreach, and education have reached more than 2,000 people on topics of excessive stress and suicide prevention through events, workshops, and conferences. Radio, TV, and press coverage has reached an estimated audience of more than 1 million people (see Appendix D).
- New and previously unavailable materials have been developed and continuously updated, tailored, and distributed widely, as well as posted to the newly-launched [agricultural suicide prevention website](#), which has received more than 2,500 hits since March 2019.
- Since June 2019, the pilot program has broadcast the [Fishing Buddies PSA](#), adapted with permission from the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, on Skagit21 Television, the Skagit County local access channel. The channel has an estimated daily viewership of 16,000 people.

- Partnerships with organizations serving agricultural workers have enabled the pilot program to embed presentations and suicide prevention materials into existing partner programming (see Appendix E).

Remaining Challenges

- Behavioral health stigma is a persistent and known barrier in agricultural and rural communities. Paths to normalizing conversations around stress and suicide prevention are essential.
- COVID-19 poses threats of decreased access to health care, increased emotional distress, economic decline, and disproportionate impacts on communities of color.
- Messages are less well received if not distributed by peers from the agricultural community.

Pilot Activities

Web-based Portal

In 2019, WSU Skagit launched a [webpage](#) promoting the pilot program. Available in English and Spanish, this resource: promotes events and trainings (e.g. Question Persuade Refer, Mental Health First Aid); links visitors to print materials (e.g. job site posters, brochures, wallet cards); promotes the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline; and provides a confidential self-screening tool that directs participants to local agencies for additional and ongoing support. There is also a [COVID-19 Resources for Farmers](#) page. Topics of embedded resources include General Farm Resilience, Business and Financial Resources, Farmer and Farmworker Health and Safety, COVID-19 Animal Health and Safety, Pesticide Licensing During COVID-19 Pandemic, General/Central COVID-19 Resources, as well as relevant webinar and podcast recordings.

Trainings and Events

The pilot program offered evidence-based suicide prevention trainings, including the Question Persuade Refer (QPR) training in partnership with United General District #304. The one-hour QPR training equips participants with the skills to recognize risks and warning signs of suicide, and how to “ask the question” to intervene and offer support. The pilot program used the QPR curriculum tailored to rural audiences and made additional adjustments to accommodate virtual trainings due to the pandemic.

“Farmers sometimes share a lot about their personal life when I’m doing a site visit. As a state employee, I never really knew how to respond. I feel more equipped now with the brochures and wallet cards, and will keep them in my work truck in case they’re needed.”

– QPR training attendee

The pilot program presented at several Farm Field Days, workshops, and conferences. These events are avidly attended by members of the agricultural industry and are examples of the

pilot program “embedding [the] message into existing programming” where agricultural workers are present, but suicide prevention and behavioral health are not the main focus. Farming is largely a remote activity. Unlike other industries, there are few corporate meetings, mandatory trainings, or other compulsory events for agricultural workers to attend. The pilot program seeks time at such farm-focused events as a means to reach these audiences.

Feedback at events where the pilot program exhibited materials was strong. Examples of the feedback received include:

- *“I didn’t realize how high the suicide rate is for folks working in agriculture.”*
- *“This is a really important issue, thank you for talking about it.”*
- *“I’m really glad someone is finally talking about this stuff.”*

The pilot program actively pursued stakeholders and groups providing services to agricultural workers, allowing WSU Extension faculty and administration to lay the groundwork for expanding this Skagit Extension pilot program into WSU Extension offices statewide. These events identified allied WSU Extension County offices dedicated to confronting excessive stress and improving behavioral health in the agriculture industry. As of 2020, these offices have been identified as partners in the future of the program, extending resources and messaging to agriculturally-dense areas of Washington.

The Washington State ‘Stay Home, Stay Healthy’ mandate cancelled or postponed many planned events to engage the public in conversation about excessive stress and suicide prevention. As a result, the pilot program has pivoted toward increasing collaboration with agricultural organizations and businesses to facilitate conversations about excessive stress, and provide evidence-based trainings, tools, and resources.

Outreach and Education Materials

Extensive outreach has been ongoing since the inception of the pilot program to distribute educational materials and advertise suicide prevention trainings and the new web-based portal. The pilot program observed that agricultural workers agreed stress and suicide are issues in the community, but reported that they were not impacted personally. There was also initial reluctance to engage with some pilot program materials.

Materials created in the initial stages of the pilot program were edited and updated throughout 2019 and 2020, including job site posters, brochures, and wallet cards. While developing materials, the pilot program solicited feedback on the messaging from WSU Skagit staff and the agricultural community, including spouses, siblings, and retired farmers. Candid community-based insight and feedback into how agricultural workers and families would interpret the materials helped find ways to address a highly stigmatized topic without alienating the intended audience. Adjustments were based on agricultural worker and stakeholder feedback, with particular focus on language, imagery, and outreach and distribution methods.

Farm employer and agricultural worker outreach centered around embedding stress and suicide prevention messaging into existing agricultural workshops and field days. Activities

addressed suicide, risk factors and warning signs, and resources (e.g. crisis line, text line) for agricultural workers, and encouraged workshop attendees to save the crisis line number “in case they recognize the warning signs from their friends or neighbors.” WSU Extension audiences and stakeholders received suicide prevention messaging from a data-informed approach, including reports from the CDC on death rates, Chapter 12 bankruptcies, and commodity market figures. Rural community outreach focused on stress and suicide prevention through PSAs and operating resource tables at local fairs (before the COVID-19 limitations on gatherings).

To confront the stigma around behavioral health, messaging was, where appropriate, presented under the umbrella term of ‘health and safety’. The pilot program developed first aid kits for distribution at farm events, workshops, and trainings. Inside the first aid kit is a wallet card that identifies the warning signs of suicide and directs agricultural workers to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the Farm Aid Resource Line. The pilot program is planning similar promotional activities by distributing reusable masks with a crisis support message in winter 2020.

The pilot program created a “Skagit County Crisis Contact” sheet (see Appendix C), a reference sheet of behavioral health resources that provides contact information, languages spoken, and services offered. Available in English and Spanish, the contact sheet is a resource for Extension staff and community service workers who may need to refer someone to behavioral health services. In March 2020, with COVID-19 and the ‘Stay Home, Stay Healthy’ mandate, this resource was widely distributed among listservs and to partner organizations.

Year one of the pilot program revealed that agricultural workers are more likely to engage with resources operated by a fellow agricultural worker (a finding consistent with research).²⁵ The pilot program promotes the Farm Aid Resource Line, a call line operated by farmers trained in suicide prevention techniques, and intended to support agricultural workers on a variety of concerns (e.g. production, finances, legal).

Partnerships

²⁵ <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/79148/j.17496632.2010.05719.x.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

AGRICULTURE CAN BE STRESSFUL

Are you or someone you know experiencing:

- Change in routine
- Decline in care of farm and/or livestock
- Change in mood (anxious, agitated, angry)
- New or increased financial pressures
- Loss of interest in hobbies/activities

Se puede manejar el estrés relacionado con la agricultura.
Acércase a sus amigos, familia, vecinos o su líder de fe.

Recursos **GRATIS**, confidenciales y siempre disponibles:

La red nacional de prevención del suicidio:
 1-888-628-9454 

Para recursos adicionales visita a:
<https://extension.wsu.edu/skagit/recursosdelapreenciondelsuicidio>

Pilot Program Wallet Cards

Pilot program activity centered heavily on building partnerships with aligned organizations to engage agricultural workers in topics related to behavioral health and suicide prevention. Partners form the backbone of the pilot program's success. Pilot program partners include (see Appendix E):

- [Safer Homes, Suicide Aware](#)
- [Pacific Northwest Agriculture Safety and Health Center \(PNASH\)](#)
- [United General District #304](#)
- [Latinx Advisory Committee](#)
- [Farm Aid](#)
- [Washington Department of Veterans Affairs \(WDVA\)](#)
- Skagit County Farm Bureau
- [Washington State University \(WSU\) Farmers Network](#)
- [WSU Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine](#)

Community Support & Leveraged Funding

In the short time since the pilot program launched, WSU Skagit skillfully sought ways to leverage state funding and its growing expertise under the pilot program. The Washington State AgrAbility Project (WSAP) is a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)-funded project offering consultation services and education to injured or disabled agricultural workers to promote well-being in the workplace and reduce risk of secondary injury. Housed in WSU Skagit, WSAP and the pilot program combined efforts to co-present at many community workshops and trainings addressing both physical and behavioral health and safety. WSAP was awarded \$720,000 for September 2019 - 2023. The goals of this collaboration include:

- Educating members of the agricultural community about practices, accommodations, and available tools to ease the return to work for people with disabilities ranging from arthritis to paraplegia, and reduce the rate of secondary injuries through workshops, conferences, and on-farm demonstrations.
- Collaborating with partners, providers, and agencies equipped to support people with disabilities to create a network of information and services. The sought outcomes are increased operational capacity and non-duplicative outreach.
- Assisting more than 100 injured or disabled farmers to remain in the workforce through consultative and direct services, including on-site assessments and access to a lending library of assistive technology. In partnership with Northwest Access Fund, financial programs are available to acquire necessary assistive technology, build credit, and create an economically resilient population of farmers with disabilities.
- Creating Washington state's general public awareness of the AgrAbility project for those in need by marketing through PSAs, press releases, media coverage, a bilingual website, and promotion at fairs and agricultural conferences.

AgrAbility partners include Washington Assistive Technology Act Program, Northwest Access Fund, Viva Farms, and Growing Veterans.

WSU Skagit received \$480,000, one of four regional grants, from the USDA-funded Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network (FRSAN) to develop a clearinghouse of resources and establish diverse regional networks to support farmers and agricultural workers in Washington and Oregon facing excessive stress and economic pressures. Partners include Oregon State University Extension, Volunteers of America - Western Washington, Viva Farms, and Growing Veterans. The project runs September 2019 - 2021.

Pilot Program Recommendations

Statewide expansion of the Skagit County pilot program's successful behavioral health promotion and suicide prevention efforts would benefit all of Washington's agricultural communities, and further the Legislature's goals in (2018) SSHB 2671. Sustained funding is necessary to build the infrastructure to continue and expand this work.

With the approved funds from the 2020 supplemental budget, the pilot program will take the first step toward expansion to other WSU Extension offices, collaborate with the Washington State 4-H Youth Development Program, pursue partnerships with Latinx farmworker organizations, and collaborate with state crisis hotlines to develop agricultural-specific competencies for call operators. In addition to the WSU Skagit County Extension, the Adams and Stevens County Extensions will incorporate suicide prevention resources, messaging, and trainings into existing programming.

Additional funding is required to further enhance the expansion and support of culturally and geographically appropriate agricultural industry-specific suicide prevention education, training, warning signs recognition, and tailored referral resources to suitable local and statewide resources.

Structural recommendations for state expansion include funding to:

- Expand rural community-based education via trainings, resiliency workshops, and public awareness campaigns to combat stigma around behavioral health, and connect specific stressors with behavioral health risks, such as opioid, stimulant, and alcohol misuse, and suicide;
- Address COVID-19 stressors uniquely impacting agricultural communities (e.g. adequacy of government and community resources, behavioral health service barriers);
- Develop a competency training for use at the state's crisis line call centers. Call center staff would be trained to use a resource designed specifically for members of the agricultural community to increase utility and improve crisis service delivery;
- Build stronger partnerships with faith-based communities, agricultural workers organizations, community health workers, and *promotores*, who provide community health resources to Latinx agricultural worker populations;

- Create culturally appropriate materials and trainings for the Latinx agricultural community, including PSAs and a state-recognized training curriculum for *promotores*;
- Educate physicians and workers about the risks of toxic pesticide exposure and possible interactions with medications to treat depression to address possible neurological side effects;
- Build a cadre of four to six extension-based farm financial advisors across the state.

Leading voices in the field of agricultural suicide prevention, including the task force, recognize “financial stressors unique to the industry as among many factors that put people working in the agricultural industry at a higher risk of death by suicide, as compared to the general population.” The pilot program recommends using farm financial advisors, based in WSU Extension offices, modeled after [Michigan State University’s TelFarm program](#) (TelFarm). TelFarm is an educational service program designed to assist agricultural workers with farm financial records and decision making, and keep farm owners in control of their finances.²⁶ Like TelFarm, the WSU Extension-based farm financial advisors would assist in maintaining financial records, provide benchmarking data that is commodity-specific so agricultural workers can make informed financial decisions, and identify agricultural workers facing stressful financial situations and refer them to appropriate resources.

Conclusion

The pilot program has made strides in implementing behavioral health and suicide prevention efforts in Skagit County’s agricultural community. Results and feedback from the program demonstrate the need, as well as the necessary actions to expand suicide prevention supports to agricultural communities beyond Skagit County. The pilot program has identified stigma of behavioral health as a significant barrier to suicide prevention efforts among agricultural workers, so addressing stigma must be integral to suicide prevention programming moving forward. Agricultural workers are disproportionately at risk for suicide compared with the general population, making sustained suicide prevention efforts essential. The COVID-19 pandemic heavily threatens the well-being of people working in Washington’s agricultural industry and must be at the forefront of strategic actions to improve behavioral health and prevent suicide deaths.

²⁶ <https://www.canr.msu.edu/telfarm/>

Appendix A: 2018 Legislative Report

Report to the Legislature



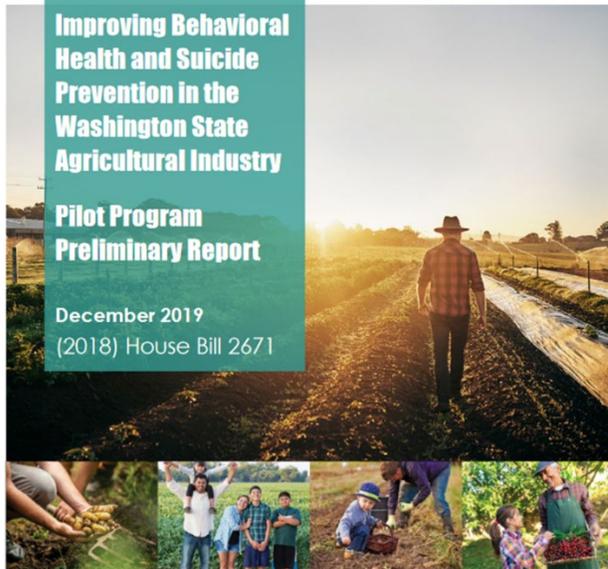
www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/8390/971-028-BehaviorHealthSuicidePreventionAgriculturalIndustryReport.pdf

or visit:

www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/InjuryandViolencePrevention/SuicidePrevention

Appendix B: 2019 Legislative Report

Report to the Legislature



www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/8390/140-219-AgriculturalSuicidePrevention.pdf

or visit:

www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/InjuryandViolencePrevention/SuicidePrevention

Appendix C: Pilot Program Marketing Materials & Spanish Web-Based Portal

Skagit County Crisis Contacts

Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Resources [updated 04/02/20]

Always call 911 in a life threatening situation.

Crisis Line 101: What to Expect

Whether someone is thinking of suicide, or is in need of someone to talk to, the lifeline is available 24/7 even during the holidays. Calling the crisis lifeline for the first time can be accompanied with feelings of uncertainty or doubt. The crisis line is available to anyone at any time with someone on the line to listen and offer support. Please note that an experience and conversation through the hotline can be different for each person.

- After dialing the number there is an automated message:
 - "You have reached the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, also servicing the Veterans service line. If you are in emotional distress or suicidal crisis or are concerned about someone who might be, we're here to help. Please remain on the line while we route your call to the nearest crisis center in our network."
- In the automated message there will be options for a translator or specialized support (i.e. Veteran). The call is then directed to the local crisis center, usually in under a minute.
- A trained individual will answer the phone and will stay on the line for as long as needed.
 - If the individual is calling for a friend or family member, resources and guidance on offering help to the loved one is provided.

Regional/Statewide/National Resources			
Organization/Contact Information	Languages	What resources & services are provided?	When to Contact?
Natl. Suicide Prevention Hotline English Line: 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) For texting: text 838255 Spanish Line: 1-888-628-9454 Hours: Available 24/7 and during holidays	English Español	Free and confidential phone support with a trained crisis worker to listen to problems and provide information about local mental health services.	If you feel you are in a crisis, whether or not you have thoughts of suicide. If you are concerned about someone who is in crisis.
Crisis Text Line Text Home to 741741 Hours: Available 24/7 and during holidays.	English	Free and confidential support 24/7 with a trained crisis counselor.	If you feel you are in a crisis, whether or not you have thoughts of suicide.
SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline English Line: 1-800-985-5990 Texting: text TalkWithUs to 66746 Spanish Line: press "2" Texting: text Hablanos to 66746 Hours: Available 24/7 and during holidays	English Español	Free and confidential support 24/7 with a trained crisis counselor including how to recognize stress and its effects in individuals and families, tips for healthy coping, and referrals to local crisis call centers for additional follow-up care and support.	If you or someone you know is experiencing emotional distress due to natural or human-caused disasters, infectious disease outbreaks, and other traumatic events.



WSU AGRICULTURAL SUICIDE PREVENTION PILOT PROGRAM

WSU Extension programs and employment are available to all without discrimination. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local WSU Extension Office.

Local Resources			
Organization/Contact Information	Languages	What resources & services are provided?	When to Contact?
Skagit County Crisis Line 1-800-584-3578 Hours: Available 24/7 *Volunteers of America Online: www.carecrisischat.org	English Español	• Brief interventions. • Trained professionals. • Next day appointment or connection to access line depending on the situation.	When an individual feels unsafe or unhappy, when it is hard to get through the day.
Compass Health Mt. Vernon 360-419-3500 Hours: 8:30am-5pm, M-F	English Español	• Continued counseling over phone and site referral if necessary for existing patients *Only accepting existing clients as of 04/02/20, new clients pending	When adults, adolescents, and children in Skagit County are experiencing a behavioral health crisis or chemical dependency issue.
Skagit County Crisis Center 360-757-7738 Hours: Available 24/7	English Español	• 3-5 day stabilization for mental health • Mental health professionals. • Monitoring of where patients are and what they may need. • Connections with county resources.	For detox, screening, and stabilization.

Continued Care			
Organization/Contact Information	Languages	What resources & services are provided?	When to Contact?
National Alliance on Mental Illness NAMI Help Line: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) Hours: 7am-3pm PST, M-F	English Español	• Helpline staff and volunteers answer questions about mental health issues including: symptoms, treatment, local support groups and services, education programs, and helping family members.	To get questions answered about mental health issues regarding yourself or a friend or family member.
Sunrise Services 360-336-3762	English	• Offices in Mount Vernon, Sedro Woolley and Concrete. • Mental Health counseling for adults.	When you or someone you know has stabilized and looking for on-going services
Sea Mar Mt. Vernon Behavioral Health Clinic: SUD Services: 360-542-8920; Hours: 8am-5pm, M-F Mental Health/Child and Family Behavioral Health Services: 360-542-8810 Hours: 8am-5pm, M-F	English Español	• Addiction recovery • Mental health counseling for children/families • Need Apple Care (Medicaid). Does not accept private insurance. *All appts. incl. new patient MH assessment over phone/Zoom (as of 04/02/20)	When you or someone you know has stabilized and looking for on-going services for SUD, mental health, and/or child and family behavioral health.
Catholic Community Services 360-856-3054	English Español	• Community mental health services for Medicaid eligible children & their families. *All appts. incl. new patients over phone, video services forthcoming as of 04/02/20	When you or someone you know needs licensed mental health services and/or addiction recovery

National Agriculture Resource Line			
Organization/Contact Information	Languages	What resources & services are provided?	When to Contact?
Farm Aid 1-800-FARM-AID (1-800-327-6243) Hours: Available Mon-Fri, 6am-2pm PST	English	Connect you with services, resources and opportunities specific to your individual or farm needs.	If you feel you are in a crisis, or need someone to talk to.

¿Necesita ayuda urgente?

Red nacional de prevención del suicidio **1-800-273-8255**

Recursos de la prevención del suicidio

In English

Proveedores & profesionales

AUTOEVALUACIÓN

La agricultura pueda ser estresante- Usted no está solo

Enfrentar el estrés excesivo

Agricultura es conocida por ser una ocupación peligrosa llena de factores estresantes potenciales, como el clima, los cambios en los mercados económicos y los problemas de maquinaria. Cuando estos comienzan a aumentar, muchos agricultores padecen el estrés en exceso, lo que dificulta avanzar con soluciones positivas.

Debido en parte al estrés que enfrentan en la agricultura, los trabajadores agrícolas tienen altas tasas de suicidio. Esta pérdida de padres, hermanos/as, hijos/as y esposos/as se puede evitar – si usted o alguien que conoce sufre de estrés excesivo o pensamientos suicidas,

Appendix D: WSU Pilot Program Outreach Tracking Log

Outreach Events and Trainings

Event	Attendees	Notes
Fall 2018 - Summer 2019 Events Total:	1,314	
Fall 2019 - Summer 2020:		
Question Persuade Refer (in-person)	12	
Question Persuade Refer (virtual)	80	Audience: WSU Extension Staff, 4H members
Spokane Farm and Food Expo: Addressing Excessive Stress in Agriculture	50	
Western Washington Seed Workshop	90	
Country Living Expo: Addressing Excessive Stress in Agriculture	10	Tabling at event: 1,100 attendees
Skagit Ag Summit	110	
Western Washington Potato Workshop	85	
Western Washington Berry Workshop	64	
Skagit Farmers Breakfast	72	Monthly Meeting
WSU All Extension Meeting	100	Presentation to WSU Extension Directors across the state
AgrAbility: Using Assistive Technology	16	Safer Homes, Suicide Aware – guest presentation
Department of Veterans Affairs: Intro to WSU Skagit Extension Farmer Health Programs	18	
Skagit Farm Bureau: Intro to WSU Skagit Extension Farmer Health Programs	12	
Growing Veterans: Intro to WSU Skagit Extension Farmer Health Programs	18	
Skagit County Commissioner Meetings	25	Televised audience estimated 16,000
Question Persuade Refer for Rural Communities	6	In partnership with United General District #304

Washington State Farm Bureau; PPE Giveaway Skagit County	21	Coordinate to distribute materials including first aid kits with suicide prevention wallet cards: Over 500 kits distributed, “one for every farm truck”
Washington State Farm Bureau; PPE Giveaway Thurston County	22	
Total	2,125	

TV and Radio

Event	Date	Audience
Fishing Buddies PSA on Skagit Access 21	Daily since 6/1/19	16,000 daily
King 5 News	7/16/19	1,000,000
KSVR 91.7 fm	9/12/20, 20 times weekly	Spanish Speaking Radio
Total		Over 1,016,000

Web Traffic – Google Analytics

Webpages	Page Views, March 2019 – August 2020
Main Webpage (English)	1,807
Providers & Professionals Webpage (English)	590
Main Webpage (Spanish)	126
Providers & Professionals Webpage (Spanish)	40
Total	2,563

Appendix E: Pilot Partnerships

- [Safer Homes, Suicide Aware](#) presents practical skills that help change public behavior on locking and limiting unauthorized access to firearms and medications. As firearms are a daily tool for many agricultural businesses (especially those raising livestock, e.g. predator control), potential limitations to firearm access is a highly charged topic. Partnering with Safer Homes, Suicide Aware successfully allows the pilot program to address firearm safety as suicide prevention without engaging in debate around firearm ownership.
- [Pacific Northwest Agriculture Safety and Health Center \(PNASH\)](#) conducts research and promotes best health and safety practices for Northwest producers and workers in the farming, fishing, and forestry industries. The pilot program added five questions to the PNASH survey for Washington dairy producers related to behavioral health and preferred resources. Results will inform the pilot program on appropriate referral resources to promote and prioritize for the dairy industry.
- [United General District #304](#) provides community outreach, wellness, fitness, nutrition, and bereavement services. The pilot program hosted a series of trainings with United General trainers experienced in facilitating QPR activities within rural communities.
- [Latinx Advisory Committee](#) provides guidance on serving and developing leadership among Latinx community members. The pilot program coordinated a suicide prevention radio program PSA for National Suicide Prevention Month in September 2020.
- [Farm Aid](#) has over 30 years of experience working with and providing support for agricultural workers. The pilot program and Farm Aid are working to bring the Farm Aid, [Farmer Resource Network](#) to Washington. The Network supports agricultural communities in matters that can lead to excessive stress through connections to appropriate, local resources, such as financial risk management, meeting contractual needs, pest management, and family mediation. The pilot program is promoting the Network's call line at events, workshops, and by extension staff. It is anticipated that use of the Resource Line will increase in Washington, because it is a peer-operated resource.
- [Washington Department of Veterans Affairs \(WDVA\)](#) hosted a three-hour webinar on August 7, 2020 in which the pilot program and other WSU agricultural health programs presented their collective activities and resources, and set the stage for further collaboration. WSU Skagit staff also completed the WDVA Veteran Cultural Competency Training, enabling them to promote a wide range of health and safety programs to veteran communities engaged in agriculture. The pilot program follows WDVA and national Veterans Affairs best practices regarding suicide prevention, including stigma-reducing efforts, outreach methods, and innovative approaches to peer support groups and community resilience.

- **Skagit County Farm Bureau** is a member of the [Washington State Farm Bureau](#), a voluntary, grassroots advocacy organization representing the social and economic interests of farm and ranch families across scale and commodity. The pilot program coordinates with the Skagit Bureau and held a mask giveaway in September 2020. Unlike some other occupations, agricultural workers do not have unions, trade associations or licensing requirements, and mass outreach events can be difficult. This partnership allows the pilot program to reach otherwise inaccessible agricultural audiences.
- [Washington State University \(WSU\) Farmers Network](#) is a statewide network to advance soil and nutrient management, crop productivity, farm sustainability, and profit through collaborative research, extension, and on-farm participatory learning. Within the Network, the pilot program is offering QPR and referral competency trainings, and sharing resources to address farm stress via webinars for extension personnel and agricultural audiences.
- [WSU Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine](#) and the pilot program are currently developing a video series addressing suicide prevention, and how to recognize warning signs and make referrals. Videos are intended for use within existing extension programming and through local access channels across the state. WSU's Floyd College of Medicine provides behavioral health competencies; the pilot program provides agricultural resonance. This partnership ensures PSAs are evidence-based and rooted in best practices.

Appendix F: (2018) Second Substitute House Bill 2671

An act relating to improving the behavioral health of people in the agricultural industry; adding a new section to chapter 43.70 RCW; creating new sections; and providing an expiration date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. Sec. 1. (1) The legislature finds that the agricultural industry is an integral part of Washington's economy and sense of common identity, and that the behavioral health of workers in the industry and their family members is a statewide concern.

(2) Several factors related to the agricultural industry may affect the behavioral health of workers in the agricultural industry, including job-related isolation and demands, stressful work environments, the heightened potential for financial losses, lack of access to behavioral health services, and barriers to or unwillingness to seek mental health services.

(3) A 2016 report from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention studied suicide data from the year 2012 and found that workers in the farming, fishing, and forestry industries had the highest rate of suicide, eighty-four and one-half suicides per one hundred thousand workers, among the occupational groups that it studied.

(4) The legislature finds that there is an urgent need to develop resources and interventions specifically targeted to helping workers in the agricultural industry and their family members manage their behavioral health needs.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 2. (1)(a) The state office of rural health shall convene a task force on behavioral health and suicide prevention in the agricultural industry with members as provided in this subsection.

- (i) The secretary of health, or the secretary's designee;
- (ii) The secretary of the department of agriculture, or the secretary's designee;
- (iii) The secretary of the department of social and health services, or the secretary's designee;
- (iv) A representative of Washington State University;
- (v) A representative of an association that represents counties;
- (vi) One representative each from two different associations representing both farm and ranch families in Washington;
- (vii) A representative of the commission on Hispanic affairs established in chapter 43.115 RCW;
- (viii) A representative of the dairy products commission established in chapter 15.44 RCW;
- (ix) A representative of the grain commission established in chapter 15.115 RCW;
- (x) A representative of the tree fruit research commission established in chapter 15.26 RCW;
- (xi) A representative of an association representing rural health clinics;

- (xii) A representative of an association representing federally qualified health centers;
- (xiii) A representative of an association representing community behavioral health agencies;
- (xiv) Two representatives of associations representing mental health providers; and
- (xv) One representative of an association representing substance use disorder treatment providers.

(b) The task force shall select cochairs, one of which shall be from the department and the other shall be either representative from (a) (vi) of this subsection.

(2) The task force shall review the following issues:

(a) Data related to the behavioral health status of persons associated with the agricultural industry, including suicide rates, substance use rates, availability of behavioral health services, and utilization of behavioral health services;

(b) Factors unique to the agricultural industry that affect the behavioral health of persons working in the industry, including factors affecting suicide rates;

(c) Components that should be addressed in the behavioral health and suicide prevention pilot program established in section 3 of this act, including consideration of components that relate to similar programs funded or partially funded by the federal office of rural health policy; and

(d) Options to improve the behavioral health status of and reduce suicide risk among agricultural workers and their families, including individual focused and community focused strategies.

(3) Staff support for the task force shall be provided by the department.

(4) Task force members are not entitled to reimbursement for travel expenses if they are participating on behalf of an employer, governmental entity, or other organization. Any reimbursement for other members is subject to chapter 43.03 RCW.

(5) The task force shall report its findings and recommendations to the governor and the committees of the legislature with jurisdiction over health care issues by December 1, 2018.

(6) This section expires July 1, 2019.

NEW SECTION. Sec. 3. A new section is added to chapter 43.70 RCW to read as follows:

(1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose not to exceed two hundred thousand dollars per fiscal year, the department shall establish a pilot program to support behavioral health improvement and suicide prevention efforts for members of the agricultural industry workforce. By March 1, 2019, the pilot program shall be established in a county west of the Cascade Crest that is reliant on the agricultural industry.

(2) When implementing the pilot program, the department shall consider the report of the task force on behavioral health and suicide prevention in the agricultural industry established in section 2 of this act.

(3) In implementing the pilot program, the department shall contract with an entity that has behavioral health and suicide prevention expertise to develop a free resource for workers in the agricultural industry. When selecting an entity, the department shall seek to use an entity that has an existing telephonic and web-based resource, including entities that have prepared similar resources for other states. The contracting entity must be responsible for constructing and hosting the free resource and linking the free resource to the web sites of the department, the department of agriculture, and other relevant stakeholders.

(4) At a minimum, the free resource must:

(a) Be made publicly available through a web-based portal or a telephone support line;

(b) Provide a resource to train agricultural industry management, workers, and their family members in suicide risk recognition and referral skills;

(c) Provide a resource to build capacity within the agricultural industry to train individuals to deliver training in person;

(d) Contain model crisis protocols that address behavioral health crisis and suicide risk identification, intervention, reentry, and postvention;

(e) Contain model marketing materials and messages that promote behavioral health in the agricultural industry; and

(f) Be made available in English and Spanish.

(5) A preliminary report shall be made to the legislature on the elements and implementation of the pilot program by December 1, 2019. A final report containing information about results of the pilot program and recommendations for improving the pilot program and expanding its availability to other counties shall be made to the legislature by December 1, 2020.

