What were farms’ biggest stressors?

Bringing rains and flooded fields, 2019 had the wettest twelve-month period on record for Ohio. Unsurprisingly, farmers reported weather as their biggest source of stress (Fig 1). After weather, farmers reported a “second tier” of stressors, including farmland costs, health care costs, and market prices.

- The stresses facing the farming population don’t stop at the farmhouse door. Health care costs were the third most reported stressor. Affording health care was more stressful for farmers than either market prices or farm input costs.
- Most farm risk management tools focus on weather, yield, and price shocks, but these can miss the risks to farmer and farm household well being that can threaten long-term farm viability.

Supporting farms means supporting farm households

In addition to the market and weather stressors of 2019, farm families’ health and access to health insurance were also quite stressful (Fig 2).

- Almost 60% of Ohio farms have a family member with preexisting or chronic health condition.
- Nearly 30% have a health condition that makes it difficult to farm.
- 10% of farm households have no health insurance, and 25% only have catastrophic coverage.

Ohio Farmers Speak

“I lost my job at the end of 2009. Because I was over 50 and living in a rural area, I can only find low paying, part-time jobs without insurance, unless I want to drive an hour plus one-way. The worst is the health insurance cost – nothing left.”

–Ohio dairy farmer, 61 years old

Fig 1: Percent of respondents reporting a stressor as “stressful” or “very stressful”. Farm household stressors are presented in light blue.

Fig 2: Ohio farm household health and insurance status.