UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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BEHIND THE MASKS THEY WEAR:
Exploring the Factors Contributing to Farmer Suicide

BACKGROUND

Globally, suicide claims the lives of **OVER 700,000 PEOPLE EACH YEAR.**

And in Canada, it is estimated that **12 PEOPLE** die by suicide **EVERY DAY**

While suicide represents a serious public health concern, some populations are **more disproportionately affected than others**.

Studies have found that **farmers and agricultural workers** have **higher** suicide rates than those working in other occupations

Unique personal & occupational stressors experienced by farmers place them at an elevated risk for suicide.

The **chain of events** that may lead a farmer towards the path of suicide, and any **counteractive factors** against the stressors they face **remain unclear**. Further, there is **no existing framework** that captures the dynamic and complex interplay of variables associated specifically with suicide among farmers.

PURPOSE

The main goals of our study were to:

- Understand the **risk and protective** factors associated with farmer suicide from the perspectives of those closest to them

- Develop a **conceptual model** to explain the chain of events that may lead a farmer **towards or away** from the path of suicide
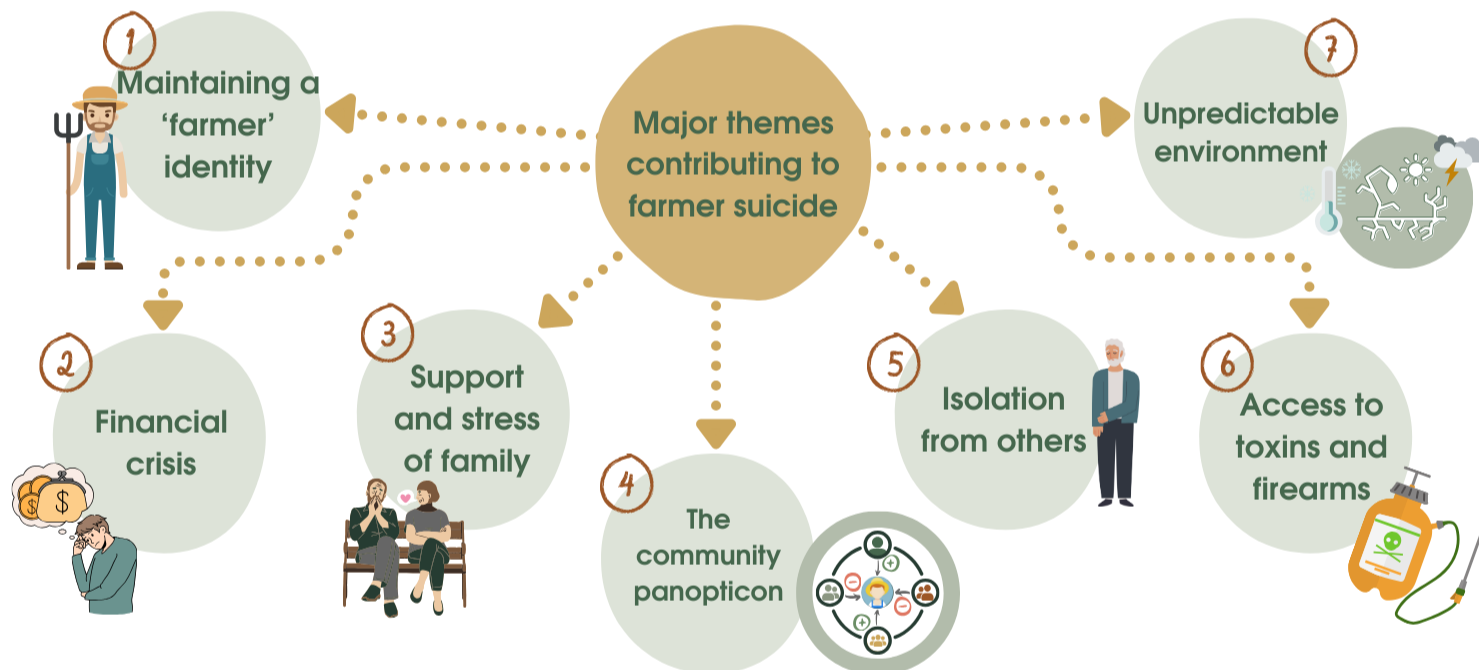
METHOD

Synthesis of qualitative research using meta-ethnography to produce a conceptual model

- A comprehensive literature review was conducted to find all existing research relating to farming and suicide.

- Selected studies were critically appraised and screened, and qualitative data was analysed to identify underlying themes related to suicide.

- Original meanings from each study were retained and combined with new interpretations to produce the conceptual model.
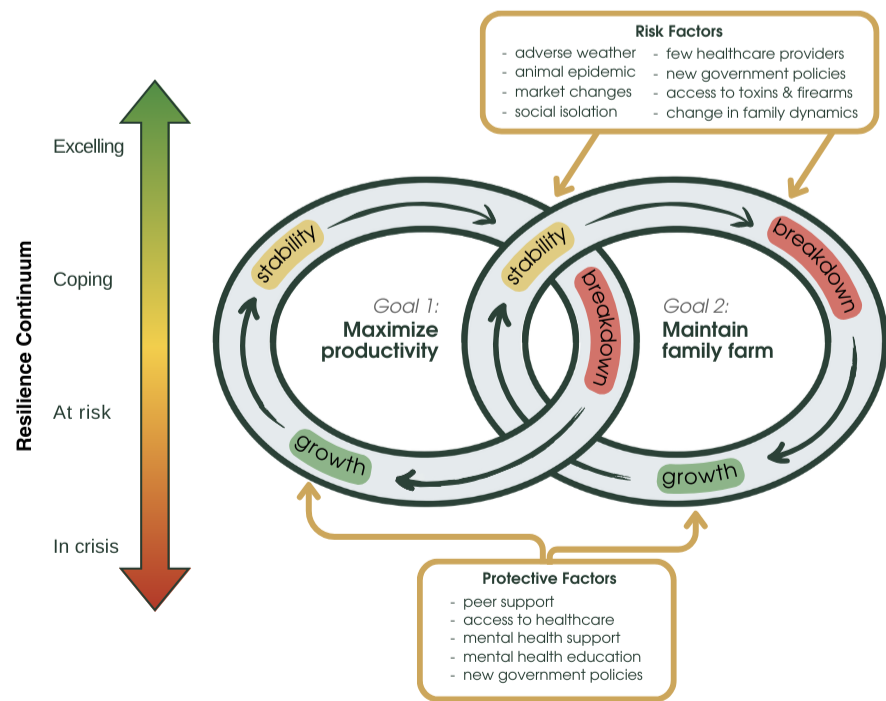
RESULTS

From 14 final studies, we identified **seven main themes** that contributed to farmer suicide:

1. Maintaining a 'farmer' identity
2. Financial crisis
3. Support and stress of family
4. The community panopticon
5. Isolation from others
6. Access to toxins and firearms
7. Unpredictable environment

Major themes contributing to farmer suicide

THE FARM FRAMEWORK

Understanding the nature of farmer suicide requires moving *beyond the individual,* and situating the farmer within the *broader social context*

Risk Factors
- adverse weather
- animal epidemic
- market changes
- social isolation
- few healthcare providers
- new government policies
- access to toxins & firearms
- change in family dynamics

Resilience Continuum:
- Excelling
- Coping
- At risk
- In crisis

stability — breakdown — growth

Goal 1: Maximize productivity
Goal 2: Maintain family farm

Protective Factors
- peer support
- access to healthcare
- mental health support
- mental health education
- new government policies

By connecting the themes identified in our analysis, we developed a conceptual model called the **Farming-Adversity-Resilience-Management (i.e. FARM) Framework.**

This model highlights the cyclical and dynamic pattern of farm culture, and illustrates the *risk factors* contributing to increased vulnerability, poor mental health, and suicide.

Additionally, it highlights a variety of *protective factors* that can improve farmers' resilience to such stressors.

The intersecting nature of the rings symbolise how one system can impact the other, and vice versa.

CONCLUSION

This is the first study to synthesise qualitative data about farmer suicide. While enduring challenges and stressors of farming in rural areas may never be eliminated, there may be ways to help farmers build resilience to these stressors.

Our FARM framework presents a new way of understanding farm culture, the occupational stressors, and farmers' wellbeing, while also providing direction for future research and guidance for practical interventions