



Landscape Ontario Podcast

TALK IT OUT:

Free online mental health support from AgTalk

Host: Karina Sinclair

Guest: Merle Massie, Do More Agriculture Foundation Executive Director

Resources

[AgTalk — The Do More Agriculture Foundation Togetherall](#)

[Mental health support: get help - Canada.ca](#)

[Suicide Crisis Helpline](#)

[Merle Massie](#)

Transcription

Karina: To the listeners of the Landscape Ontario Podcast, I want you to know that if you are coping with depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, or any other mental health concerns, you are not alone. On this important episode of the podcast, you are going to learn about AgTalk, a free online mental health resource, specifically geared towards those working in agriculture, horticulture and the green trades.

Merle Massie is my guest today. Not only is she the executive director for the Do More Agriculture Foundation where she advocates for mental health, Merle also has a doctorate in history, is a published author and operates a family farm in Saskatchewan. She's here to share insights and statistics about mental wellness and the stigma that surrounds it, especially in a professional sector where people feel they may have to tough it out.

Today's conversation is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you are in crisis right now, please call or text nine eight eight or call 9 1 1. You can also visit your nearest emergency department. I'll have links to other resources and supports available across Canada in the show notes.



Feel free to share this episode with anyone who might benefit from the resources mentioned today. Let's meet Merle and learn all about the Do More Ag Foundation, the Togetherall platform and the AgTalk community.

Music

Karina: Welcome to the podcast, Merle. This is so great that you're able to join us to tell us more about the Do More Ag Foundation and the Togetherall AgTalk opportunity for people who are in the agriculture and horticulture industries and who need that little bit of extra. Support and community around the struggles that happen in these different industries. So thank you for coming on the show to tell us more about this.

Merle: Thanks so much for having me. I'm delighted to be here.

Karina: Now you're the executive director of the Do More Ag Foundation. Can you tell me a little bit about what that foundation is and does and how it helps people in this industry?

Merle: Absolutely. Uh, The Do More Agriculture Foundation was founded by Farmers for Farmers, and it was originally founded in 2017 as a nonprofit, became a national charitable foundation here in Canada in 2019. So we've been growing ever since. Our purpose is to cultivate a culture of mental wellbeing with Canadian agricultural communities and however that is.

Defined, it's more than just geography. When Do More Ag thinks about community, we think about anyone who touches sort of that agriculture, food landscape. Everything from Christmas trees and greenhouses all the way to, your classic wheat farming and harvesting in Western Canada and everything in between, as well as everyone who touches all of those spaces. So everyone from agronomists to scientists, to someone in finance, to workers, so many agricultural workers, that we have in Canada in this space.

Karina: And so what are some of the programs or workshops that your foundation provides?

Merle: Our largest program is our community fund, and that is something where communities from across Canada and, whether they're geographical communities or perhaps small scale commissions or agricultural societies, those sorts of places, they can apply to us through the Community fund, which is sponsored by Farm Credit Canada, to host a workshop in their community.

Because one of the things that we know is that we've spent in agriculture so many years not talking about mental health is that, is that people don't necessarily know how to talk about mental health. helping communities to create these spaces, create these workshops where people can come together and learn a bit more, we have four workshops from which communities can choose, and uh, we work with the community to develop these workshops to advertise, bring people in, and so on and so forth, 'cause we do know that at the community level, that's where change happens, and we wanna help and support that change.

Karina: And so I see from the website you have, the Talk, Ask, Listen Workshop.

Merle: That's right. So that's one of our four workshops. Talk, Ask, Listen is specific to the Do More Agriculture Foundation. We also have three other workshops, including Mental Health First Aid, which is a wonderful one day workshop to help people, similar to regular physical First Aid gives you an idea of what to do in the moment if someone is struggling and they're in need right in front of you.

We also can offer Safe Talk through our partners. And Safe Talk is around suicide prevention and the fourth is In The Know, which comes from the Canadian Centre for Agricultural Wellbeing. And it's a literacy program to help people to increase their knowledge around mental health and addictions across agriculture.

So those are the four that we currently offer.

Karina: And in addition to that, you have AgTalk.

Merle: We do, we actually have multiple programs Before I get to AgTalk, we do have our Hey, Are You Okay? Self-assessment website. It's a separate website, but it's linked to our website. It's a really great tool if you just wanna know how you are feeling, yourself. It has 10 questions. Takes a couple, three minutes at the most to complete. Gives you a little bit of a snapshot of how you're doing on a particular day. It's a fabulous resource. And, uh, we do have other things that we have going on. We have a very large website that works to connect people with the resources that they might need.

And so we canvas across Canada, connect in with our colleagues across Canada, working right down to the provincial and right down to the regional level so that if people don't know where to go, you can check out our website. And we can help out with that and provide you some direction of things that might help and support you.

And yes, AgTalk, which is what we're here to talk about today. We're so pleased. It was launched in 2023. all three partners, the McCain Foundation, BASF, and RBC came back to the table, really saw it as a valuable added tool that we need across Canadian agriculture. And I'd love to tell you all about it.

Karina: Well, I'm really excited to hear more about it because I know that, people who work in the green trades and in agriculture, there's that sense of isolation and loneliness, especially in multi-generational companies or businesses where it's been passed down from great grandfather, grandfather, and now, the youngest son's running it or, and there's that sense of I don't wanna be the one.

To mess this up. I don't wanna be the one that closes the farm or the nursery or this long running family business. And there's a lot of pressure in that and you're dealing with all those environmental issues as well, like climate change and, and you know, flooding and drought and all these things that are out of your control. So that's a lot for people in this growing industry to manage.

Merle: It is, it is absolutely a lot to manage. I love that you started with that legacy impact, 'cause that's something that we definitely see across the entire agricultural community is that, you know, multiple generations, doing this particular line of work in business, which makes them experts with an enormous expertise, but it also means that that legacy impact. One of the things that I know is that when it comes to mental health, there's a huge range that we can think of because sometimes what you might need in the moment is as easy as stopping, taking a breath, learning how to breathe a little bit differently. Maybe, maybe doing something like opening the conversation with your staff or your colleagues or your family and just talking about mental health as something that's really important to business development. When people in your, in your business, in your farm row or green space business, really understands that good mental health is part of a good business risk management effort, then, then maybe they'll put a little bit more effort into it. This isn't just, bubble baths and breathing and yoga on the side, but this is actually integral to running a good operation, making good business decisions, feeling good about what you're doing, maybe even being able to grow or expand your business.

So the better that people feel, the better their business will be. And there's tons and tons of research that shows this. But when I say that, one of the things that we've done and not just the Do More Agriculture Foundation, but anyone who talks about mental health is that there's a little bit of a shorthand that, "Oh my gosh, you're not feeling well. You need to call a call line. Oh, you're not feeling well. You need to go to a therapist." When in actuality, the chances of people doing those sorts of things, particularly if you're running a really big business, you are in deep harvest season or spring seeding and you're really on the go, or you're a really long way away from the kind of help and support around, you know, therapy or going to the doctor, we need to make sure that we're developing other options. And

that's where something like AgTalk really comes in because what it is is that it's a community. Talking to your peers is a huge part. Being absolutely real and open and honest with your peers about how you're feeling. That you're lonely, lonely, that you're stressed. Maybe you do have some anxiety, maybe you have some depression. Maybe you've got some relationship problems. Those are excellent things to talk about within the AgTalk space. It's an online anonymous community that our three partners have helped us to fund.

It is hosted within Togetherall. Togetherall is an online peer-driven platform. Think of AgTalk as sort of farmer coffee row. Those of us who understand agriculture and that legacy impact of working within the green industry can talk to one another. Be real, reach out, be honest, share what's happening in our own world.

Maybe you might even be able to offer some advice to someone else. Maybe you read someone else's story and you go, you know what? I've been through that. This is what I did. Sharing that becomes really important, and quite helpful. Peer help and support is a critical and much needed aspect of what we can do to break open these conversations and help one another.

Karina: Oh, absolutely, because who understands it better than somebody who has lived a similar experience. Do you find that the people who use this platform--- are there any generational markers within that? I think of my own father. He was, you know, from a farming family, rural community, and kind of from that generation where if you got some sort of injury, like even a physical injury, you just sort of wrapped a rag around it and kept on going until the job was done for the day.

You didn't stop and rush to the hospital or consult anybody. You just carried on and got the job done. Are some people more likely to take advantage of a community like AgTalk over some of those older generations?

Merle: You know, it's been a really interesting journey, Karina, and Togetherall uh, provides us with regular updates on who's using AgTalk and who's coming, who's signing up, who's regularly using it, and who's coming in. And what we find is that it absolutely is hitting right across the generations. And we thought perhaps that it would skew younger.

It's not, it's almost even right across the board from age 16, which is when you can sign up for AgTalk all the way up through people in their seventies and even early eighties. So that's been quite a fascinating thing and what I know is that because it's anonymous, that's a huge and powerful draw because people do feel exactly what you said.

Maybe they feel like they don't have time, but this is something that you can access from your phone or your iPad, right? And so that's how you access it, is online. And so that really helps it sort of opens up, you're not limited by driving to, you know, a local therapist's office or whatever.

And plus you're just talking to your neighbours. You're just talking to your peers. That anonymous component though, that does make a difference because if it's been embedded in you for years and years that you don't talk about those things, then it becomes very hard to do So

Maybe you still don't feel comfortable talking about those sorts of things, but you know that you should, or you feel like you would like to. Then AgTalk really steps up and helps you out with that and gives you a space to have those conversations.

Karina: So if somebody goes onto AgTalk and they're part of the. Community and they post a concern, and it's the sort of situation where other people can respond to your posts. Now, these may be similarly, your neighbours or other people within the growth industry, but how do we know that giving good advice or are there qualified people also on this platform who can give actual clinical advice?

Merle: Yeah, there absolutely are. There's a couple of pieces to this, actually, Karina. Number one, to sign up for AgTalk, there is a little bit of a question and answer sort of thing. It's different than a social media site where you basically just give your name and if needed your credit card and that's it, you're in and you can create your profile. People don't typically sign up for AgTalk unless they feel that this is a tool that they could actually use and that will be of benefit to them. So that's the first thing to keep in mind. This isn't necessarily a space where people just, you know, rant and rave about anything. This is a curated online space where people are welcome to talk about what's happening in their life. It is a mental health, mental wellness, uh, space. So keep that in mind.

For a second, there are actually clinicals. So there are wall guides and they're all trained clinicians who are there 24/7. They're able to interact with you, so you can actually reach out to and talk to a wall guide and have a one-on-one conversation, um, which is different than something let's say that that's happening in our modern society, a lot more people are using ChatGPT or other AI, uh, to have those conversations. And in fact, more and more people are using AI for those mental health conversations and we know that this is happening. The difference here is that it's actually a real trained clinical person on the other end.

Uh, and that makes all the difference. We're already starting to see a few horror stories around AI, some good stories as well, but some problematic ones as well. So yeah, the wall guides are there. They're also

able to, if they notice during that conversation or if they notice on somebody's post that they feel that someone is actually showing signs of being in real trouble, they will reach out to you directly and they will initiate that conversation with you just to check in with you and make sure that you're okay.

We've had two escalations Togetherall has reported back to us that we've had two escalation events where a wall guide has seen that someone needed an additional clinical level of care. One received care sort of within Togetherall and was provided with some guidance, by the wall guide and some additional resources within Togetherall that helped them work through their problem.

There was one that needed some outside help and they made sure that they were able to connect them with therapists outside so that they could go forward and access that higher level of care. When we set up AgTalk with Togetherall, we made sure that Togetherall had all the Canadian resources and connections to all of the resources.

So all of their wall guides have that in place as well. It is, primarily, that peer-to-peer platform, so the people who show up on AgTalk, they're also experiencing some of those ups and downs of regular life and just are looking for a place to talk about those.

Karina: Okay. That does make a huge difference. It's not just an anonymous social network. It's not a replacement or an alternative to Facebook or LinkedIn or anything like that. But because there are those trained clinicians as part of that community, you can count on getting legitimate advice and not just from bots or trolls or people who are there to stir up trouble, that seem to be prevalent on some other sites.

Merle: It's true. There's actually another, so one of the things that Togetherall is doing and we here at the Do More Agriculture Foundation are delighted to participate, is that there have been a number of people who've stuck up their hand and they said, "You know, if you have additional training on how to be a good peer, we're very interested in taking that training," and we've had a number of people come through the AgTalk site, go to Togetherall and receive some additional training. In fact, there's a new cohort going through this fall as well. And so Togetherall knows the power. There's lots of research on the power of peer support.

It is an excellent thing that all of us can do is to receive that little bit of extra training. What does it look like to be a good peer?

Karina: And so what would an example of that training look like? What would somebody learn if they took part in that?

Merle: It is really about how to ask really good questions, how to ask active listening questions, how to ask questions that really validate what somebody has brought to the table. So these are things that really matter and how to listen. What does good listening look like? I tend to listen because I'd love to help them fix it. Right? you've just shared your problem with me. Well, did you try this? Did you try that? So that's something that I'm learning not to do. Learning to sit within the listen and say, "You know, that sounds really hard. Can you tell me more about that? I'd really love to hear how that's impacting you," and sit within the listen. That's something that a good peer support person will really spend some time developing those skills.

Another thing that we often do, when we listen to someone else, when it comes to mental health is that we cheerlead.

And what that means is, Oh, but you're strong. You got this, right? We cheerlead and we think of cheerleading as being such a good thing. But those within the mental health industry tell us that actually what it is, is that it, it pats people on the head and says, "No, your problems aren't really that big. You should just move through them," when actually maybe their problems are quite large. Right? And really hurting them sitting on their heart. So if we can find other ways to host those conversations, to be a good peer, to create those spaces of listening for one another, we're gonna change the culture of agriculture to one that is listening and supportive and that people feel safe and that they're still welcome even if they are going through a particular challenge.

Karina: That's a really great distinction of taking that time to just listen and to let somebody know that they've been seen and heard. We all manage our stressors in different ways and what might be a big deal for somebody isn't for somebody else, but because maybe they've already had support to get through that problem and it, to them that's, easy but when you encounter something new or repeatedly, that just intensifies. I think we do tend to want to help people fix things and really all they might want in that moment is for someone to go, "That must be really frustrating. You know, that must be really difficult for you right now." And just acknowledge that that's a hard time.

Karina: And when we're cheerleading people to say, oh, you're so strong you can do it. Maybe they're not feeling so strong in that moment and feel like now they're letting you down because they're not as strong as you say they are.

Ugh, what a complicated situation for people.

Merle: It can be. And a third thing that we often do is that we say, "Oh, what can I do to help?" Well, oh, you just piled a bunch more work on them. Right? They just shared with you that they're struggling and now you're making them struggle more to come up with something for them to do.

Karina: Because if they knew they would just do it, right?

Merle: Well, that's right. If this was easy, they'd have solved it long ago.

Karina: Oh man. So let's talk about some of the statistics that I've seen in the research posted on your websites that, so far AgTalk has had over 10,000 interactions on the platform, and you've got over 13,000 users. Are these from all across Canada and in different sectors within the growing sectors?

Merle: Yeah, so 10,000 interactions is within AgTalk, the 13,000 users is actually across all of Togetherall. So those numbers have gone up even since then. But yes, over 10,000 interactions since the start, in 2023. We've been seeing tremendous growth in 2025, and we think it's in part because as more people learn about AgTalk more people are starting to realize what it's for and how it can help.

Because it isn't the only tool that you might require. It's an additional tool that could help you, particularly if you can't access some of your other tools or you're just needing to let off that bit of steam and share what's happening with you. That's where AgTalk really shines.

One of the things that we know is that the AgTalk statistics around when people who join AgTalk and they tell us that they have no other formal support or no other support outside of AgTalk, that tells us the depth of the need.

That tells us that the people who are showing up for AgTalk really don't feel comfortable within their own community. Maybe they're living on a rural remote farm and they're quite far from that additional level of therapeutic or medical support and they really, really need it.

Some of the statistics are quite scary. The latest statistics that we received from Togetherall that haven't yet been published on our website is that 33% of the people who use AgTalk have considered suicide. One in three. These are really high statistics. Keep in mind though that those who sign up for AgTalk generally recognize that they have a higher level of need, that they are feeling unwell and need some extra help.

So keeping that in mind, these are still scary statistics and we also know that one in 10 have actually made an attempt.

Karina: Hmm. So that's way too high.

Merle: Way too high. Way too high. And so anything and everything that we can do to help people feel connected to one another and feel less alone. So the top five reasons why people use AgTalk are stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and relationships. All really, really big issues.

Karina: And you might be dealing with one or all five or any combination of, right. It's not like you only have one and the rest are okay. They usually go side by side. Those are of the people who have registered for AgTalk and are participating in this support system. So all of those who aren't, we don't even know the statistics of the rest of everyone else who hasn't found their way to your platform yet.

Merle: There are good statistics out there and there will be a new study. So the University of Guelph has led two studies, and they run it every five years. And so the most recent one is from 2021. And in those studies, 25 per cent of farmers have considered suicide. They are really high statistics, especially when you compare them to sort of regular people.

One statistic that stands out for me really relates to that shame and fear that often goes with mental health. We know from that research that 40 per cent of primary producers feel uneasy asking for help. That's twice as many regular Canadians, one in five reports. So 20 per cent report that they feel uneasy asking for help, twice as many producers feel uneasy.

Almost half, in fact, 40 per cent feel uneasy asking for help. So exactly what you said, Karina, to start with. And you know when people say, "Oh my gosh, you know, maybe they should just tough it out, right? You know, that they should just put on their boots and just get down to work and they'll just get through it, right?"

That shame and fear about asking for help stops people from getting help. And the reason why I bring it up is that it's actually considered a social determinant of health. So basically there's research that says that how people think about mental health is a mental health problem. 'Cause it will stop people from getting help.

It will stop people from recognizing what's happening with them and so they don't even know that they should reach out for help and that help is available.

Karina: Right. Okay. So I imagine, when you're in the depths of it, it feels like there is no hope or nothing available, nobody's going to understand. You don't wanna be a burden to others. Hopefully with conversations like this and through the work that you're doing with the Do More Foundation, we can

reduce that stigma and get people understanding that it's okay to want to consider their mental health as a priority.

Merle: It's more than, okay, it's actually a good business risk decision. The better you look after your mental health, the more proactive, I mean, people go to learn about the latest agronomy or the latest fertilizer information or the latest adaptations to a greenhouse or the latest farm machinery to harvest your corn differently, whatever it is.

Right. They show up in droves, right? Producers and those involved in the green industry writ large, they show up in droves for that kind of business development. And yet, when it comes to business development, how well you feel impacts your business. There can be no higher goal.

Karina: Right. And so if we circle back a second to the opportunities for people to become better peers, if a business owner or, property owner, they look and want to become a peer and get the training in that, and then that opens up the door to them recognizing when perhaps their staff or their friends and their neighbours or other family members may also need these services.

So it not just opens up the door to that first individual, but to anybody else within their network and circle who may be having difficulties as well. So it's, it's this whole holistic view that it's um, it's a big picture thinking to make sure that the whole community is doing well.

Merle: Absolutely. And one of the things when it comes to mental health that people like, "Oh, that's your individual private business, right? You need space while you go and, and you know, fix your issue." And yet people ask us all the time, "Merle, how do we do more? Like here you are at the Do More Agriculture Foundation, how do we do more?"

Well, the more training you take on yourself, go take Mental Health First Aid, go take Safe Talk, join the Guardian network, join, get some additional peer training, We've got a whole list of additional and peer training, that you can do, that we recommend to anyone because the more we know, the better we will do, not just for ourselves, but for everyone around us, whether it's family members, whether it's friends, whether it's neighbours, there's more that we can do and should be doing, and I encourage everyone to step up.

Karina: And there might be that fear that you don't wanna say the wrong thing, you know, somebody brings an issue to you and like you said, they might feel like that's private. How do you help people bridge that gap of knowing when it's appropriate to bring that up to somebody else?

Merle: You know, that's an interesting question. I, I wanna put it back to you. If somebody came up to you and said, "Oh my gosh, I have a cancer diagnosis, or I just got diagnosed with diabetes, or, did the stress test at the doctors and I have a heart condition." Do you go to them and you say, "Oh my gosh, that's your private information. Why are you sharing that with me?" Right. So when I talk about the culture of fear and shame when it comes to mental health, it's so embedded in us that we automatically go, "Oh my gosh, that's such private information," and it is. However, it is still health information, right? And so if you know that you've got a colleague who's got a broken leg and is gonna be in a wheelchair, everyone else who works with that colleague all of a sudden re shifts everything that's happening across your business so that you can accommodate.

And so they get a lot of desk work for the next six weeks while they're recuperating, no one thinks twice about those sorts of things. And yet, when it comes to mental health and someone shares that, "I've got these crises, I've got higher levels of anxiety. I've got depression going on."

Whatever it is that they're working through, there are things that we can do as colleagues, as friends, as neighbours. Can you go and show up and mow their lawn? Can you drop casseroles off at their house? Can you send them a card? Can you send them a text and say, "Hey, I'm thinking of you."

We know that communities, particularly rural communities, can wrap themselves around a family that is going through some kind of adversity. How can we harness that energy to help someone who's also experiencing mental illness and illness of the mind?

It's no different than Alzheimer's. It's no different from Lou Gehrig's disease. These are illnesses that show up in the brain.

Karina: Hmm.

Merle: How can we help them?

Karina: Right. I was almost going to say, you know, the very visible concerns, like the broken leg, some other physical manifestation of an illness and a mental illness being invisible, but you're right, there are other invisible illnesses that we give great consideration to and make accommodations for...

Merle: Grief. Grief.

Karina: Oh, yeah.

Merle: Grief being an excellent example.

Karina: Oh, we know that grief can also be a part of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and all those other things.

Merle: It's all of those things. Exactly. And so, and having these conversations, Karina, it just reminds us that, the stigma around mental health is embedded in our culture, and it's very, very deep, and it's in all of us. I'm in a potentially different place simply because I've, I've been doing a lot of work to think about these things.

What I know though is that, it's so far embedded if we just recognize that it's there and realize that, okay, if we're treating this farm family that has, just had a heart attack differently than we're treating this farm family where there's also someone who's in the hospital for six weeks because of an illness of the mind, why are we treating these two farms differently? What can we do to activate ourselves to think about these things in a similar way? How can we help one another in a way that brings love, hope, joy, connection, and keeps that sense of belonging?

Karina: And you mentioned that you are possibly in a different space because of the work you've been doing with these foundations, and you are a farmer yourself, right? You have a family farm you grew up in Saskatchewan, lots of rural communities, farming agriculture around there. And so you know that this space, it's not like you've come in as an outsider and said, "Oh, everybody should just get their mental health act together." You've actually lived through some of this.

Merle: Uh, yeah, I grew up on a I describe it as an Old McDonald had a farm. You know, chickens, cows, you know, dad hand milked two cows. We had beef cows, so on and so forth. I also grew up with a father who had bipolar disorder, which in the 1970s we didn't even have a word for. We didn't have that diagnosis.

We did see the impact on, in terms of how the farm was managed and how well Dad was able to handle things around the farm. Um, I lost a brother. Uh, he had, he also had bipolar disorder. We lost him, He was an on-farm suicide. And it's, it's, it's, I share these not as a fear factor or shock, but just as a reality check in that we spent a lot of time not talking about these things,

They were hidden, they were not discussed, they were not shared. We certainly didn't solve these problems by not talking about them. So now let's try talking about them and see how that helps.

Karina: Well, thank you for sharing that, that vulnerable part of your story. I mean, hopefully there's not that many people listening that can relate, but if they can, then they know the grief that goes along with that.

So if somebody wants to find AgTalk, I'm actually going to bring up a website. For those who are watching the video version of this, here is the AgTalk website, and this is the landing page where you would want people to go, right? [DoMore.Ag/AgTalk](https://do-more-ag.com/agtalk).

Merle: That's correct. Absolutely. And so, on that page, it describes AgTalk in a little bit more detail. AgTalk is part of a larger online peer platform called Togetherall and you can access it directly through Togetherall. If you land on the Togetherall site, uh, without going through the Do More Ag Site, you will still be able to sign up for AgTalk.

It will simply ask you what is your host organization? And you'll hit the click down and you'll see the Do More Agriculture Foundation and you'll hit that and it will automatically bring up AgTalk. But if you don't wanna bother with that, just find the Do More Agriculture website, and it's under, get help, additional resources, and you'll find AgTalk there.

Click on that follow through. There is a registration and sign up just like there is on any social media site. It will ask you a few questions about your health, about your mental health and how you're feeling. What it does is that it helps Togetherall clinicians and, and AgTalk to sort of make sure that they're providing you with the access and resources that you need. It's one of the reasons we're with Togetherall on purpose because we have this farmer coffee row corner, AgTalk, within the larger site Togetherall. Yes, we farm. We are also so much more. We might be nurses, we might be teachers, we might be working in the oil patch, we might be working in mining.

We might be coaches. We might be athletes ourselves. Volunteers. We might be serving on multiple boards at the local, regional, national level. We are so much more than farmers and that's why we've partnered with Togetherall because of that.

There are other communities within Togetherall that you also might like to join and be connected with. Maybe you are a first responder in your community. For example, there are a lot of first responders on the Togetherall website, and there may be aspects of who you are and what you do that resonate sometimes with farmers and you just wanna talk about farming and that's great. There might be other conversation spaces that might be of help to you.

In addition, Togetherall has a lot of extra and very powerful support around things like additional learning. Maybe you wanna keep a journal, maybe you want to just draw and write and, and do what they call a brick, and just do a brick that showcases how you're feeling that day.

If you're looking for additional information about a particular illness that maybe you've just been diagnosed with, or a friend of yours is walking through and you would like to learn a little bit more that's curated and not WebMD, but something that's curated and useful. Right? That's an excellent place to go and do some more learning.

And that's why we've strategically partnered with Togetherall because we know that yes, we love to talk to other farmers and... this is a "yes, and" where else can we receive help.

Karina: I love that. That's such a great realization that people in any situation are wearing a hundred different hats and maybe you are a farmer or manage a greenhouse or a nursery and you are also maybe doing social media. You might be a family person. You might be planning a wedding, you might be having a baby, and all these other milestones within your life that are great and they're highlights, but they also come with their own unique stresses as well.

So it's interesting that AgTalk goes through Togetherall which can support all kinds of elements in an individual's life. And then there's this additional section curated just for people who grow for a living.

Merle: That's right.

Karina: I love that that's got that flexibility but also is so focused for people who really need something specific to them.

I'm just gonna share my screen again. I'm gonna take a look at Togetherall. I had gone ahead and, and set up an account and, interestingly, this is all anonymous, so it's not like you're putting in a name. Nobody's gonna guess who you are. And right away I can see that it comes up with this opportunity to go to the agriculture group. And when we say agriculture, we're also talking about people who work in horticulture as well, right, Merle?

Merle: Absolutely. Landscape, nurseries, greenhouses, anyone. If you grow or support those who grow, you're welcome.

Karina: Okay, so, so here we can go right to the agriculture group and you can see that there's some different categories. These are posts that people have put up. You see people are dealing with addiction, verbal abuse, grief, loneliness, self-confidence.

There's a lot of things on this page that allows people to see what resonates. And then they can read more about it. They can reply, they can create their own posts. And then right up here at the top is to ask a wall guide.

And that is the trained clinical technicians who can recognize if a situation needs to be escalated to further support outside of the platform. So that looks like it's all very easy and intuitive to find.

Merle: That's exactly why we work with Togetherall. We all learn and grow together. One of the things that you'll know is that it's more than just Canadian farmers. We have partners in the US that also use Togetherall. And so their farmers who access the platform are also there on the agricultural platform. So you might be talking to farmers, not just across Canada, but perhaps across the United States or even overseas.

And it's amazing because a lot of those same challenges. Are the same no matter what kind of farming you do, nor where you farm.

Karina: Before we wrap up here, I'd love to ask you, what would you say to any listeners who work in the space and they're struggling with some of those stressors.

They're feeling like they're alone and nobody might quite understand exactly what they're going through. What do you wish they knew?

Merle: I wish that they knew that that is absolutely, we're all in the same boat, that it doesn't make them unique or weird or weak, anything like that, that we all experience all kinds of stresses and strains, that they come at us from all kinds of areas. And that doesn't mean that you automatically need professional level help and you need to, talk to a psychiatrist, you know, who of course is a specialist, just like an oncologist is a specialist in cancer, right? A psychiatrist is a specialist in illnesses of the mind. It is regular and to talk about these things always makes it better. So to share what's actually happening with you, and if you don't feel comfortable sharing with the people that you work with every day, or your neighbours, or you don't feel that this is something that you want to have that conversation with your friends, then that's where AgTalk comes in.

You can still have those conversations. Get it off your mind. Read about other people who are in similar situations. It helps to connect with others and realize, no, you're not alone. You are not alone. And it is more than okay to reach out for help. And there is hope and there is relief.

Karina: I love that and I hope that if people take anything away from our conversation today, it is that — you're not alone and there is hope and relief.

Merle, thank you for taking the time to come in and represent the Do More Ag Foundation and tell us about Togetherall and AgTalk for people who are working in the farm, agriculture, horticulture sectors and spreading that hope and spreading the word that things can get better.

Merle: They absolutely can, and talking it out is always better than toughing it out.

Music

Karina: Thank you for listening to my conversation with Merle Massie from the Do More Agriculture Foundation. If anything from our chat resonated with you, the resources we just talked about will be in the show notes found on this episode's web page at [LandscapeOntario.com/podcast](https://landscapeontario.com/podcast). Don't hesitate to make mental health a priority for yourself and for your friends, family, coworkers and anyone else you encounter in your network.

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