

## Press Release



**For Immediate Release**

**Date: September 2004**

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Harlan Iowa- In keeping with National Farm Safety Week, AgriWellness, Inc. is pleased to announce the launching of an Iowa effort to enhance the early response to mental health issues and drug misuse problems that accompany traumatic experiences caused by disasters and other types of emergencies.

For the past two decades, Iowa's economic, social and human capital infrastructures have undergone significant change. According to Lila Starr, DHS Mental Health Disaster Services Coordinator, one of the results of this change is a weakening of the capacity in communities to respond appropriately to mental health problems and addictive behaviors that are exacerbated by disasters and other emergencies. To address the issue, the Iowa Department of Human Services, with the assistance of the Iowa Department of Public Health, is contracting with AgriWellness, Inc and Iowa State University to develop and deliver training for early responders to disasters and other types of emergencies that occur in Iowa. The project is funded through a federal grant and is intended to train a cadre of natural helpers that are dispersed throughout the state. This cadre includes persons from a variety of backgrounds, including farming. Over the next two years, the project, "Strengthening Iowa's Mental Health and Substance Abuse Response the Disaster 2004" will train approximately 120 Iowans.

Strengthening Iowa's Mental Health and Substance Abuse Response to Disaster is aimed at groups such as emergency medical personnel, social workers, law enforcement officers, fire department personnel, mental health providers, addictions treatment providers, state and county emergency management coordinators and staff, victim advocates, the clergy, agriculturalists and other community volunteers interested in assisting with emergencies. The training is in two parts: 1.) Ten hours of introductory training designed to sensitize participants to disaster and emergency related behavioral health issues, offered via the Iowa Communications Network (ICN) and via DVD to all interested persons; and 2.) Individuals selected from this initial training or equivalent trainings will be invited to attend forty-eight hours of advanced training. The training will take place this fall. Persons that complete the training will be called on to provide crisis counseling assistance for victims of future disasters declared by the Governor or the President. The future health and safety of Iowa citizens will be better assured by this effort.