Tough times for farming can also mean tough times for marriages. Most husbands and wives recognize they have different emotional needs at times. In fact, the differences can keep a marriage relationship interesting. But when money gets tight or when a couple is facing financial loss and possible lifestyle changes, differences in how each spouse copes can spell conflict.

ISU researchers studied families in the late 1980s and found a husband's behavior becomes more negative toward his wife when there is economic distress. As the husband becomes more irritable, conflicts arise. The study shows that men, more than women, seem to be at risk in showing antagonism toward their spouses as a direct result of economic problems. The wife feels less affection and less satisfaction with the marriage. They are more likely to become angry and irritable as a direct result of their husbands' negative behavior.

We react differently
Spouses react differently to the same situation. One may feel very sad or depressed while the other may express feelings of anger and fear. One partner may display the same emotion most of the time, but the other might have feelings that change frequently. It is normal for partners to react in different ways.

Men’s reactions – Often it seems men find it hard to talk about personal feelings and needs. They would rather do something than deal with feelings. This can translate into working even more hours than usual. A spouse, either husband or wife, who keeps feelings inside might seem to not care, but that's not it at all -- they just don't or can't or would rather not express the feelings.

For people who prefer silence, talk can be hard because:

- They don't want to lose emotional control – talking would hurt too much,
- They can't stand to say or maybe even think some of what they would say – they can't find the right words, or
- They feel that words won't help.

Women’s reactions – On the other hand, a woman is often viewed as the partner who does most of the talking and questioning. She may be on a roller coaster of emotions and wear them on her sleeve. Tears flow easily. A spouse, either husband or wife, who expresses feelings freely might seem too emotional to the other partner. But this easy release of emotion is part of the person's character and often helps that person cope with life.

When partners differ in how openly they express emotion, they have to understand and accept those differences and understand that neither way is better.

Practice communicating
One factor that can help a couple get through tough times is good communication. This involves talking, listening, nonverbal expressions and silence. Listening, with full attention and without distractions, is the first step. It is important to be open and respectful of each other's opinions by listening for words and paying attention to unspoken feelings. Use of phrases like, tell me more about that or how long have you felt that way will encourage further sharing.
Relating feelings simply and directly opens communications. It may be helpful to describe the affect other people’s behavior is having, without blaming or evaluating. Nonverbal communications – facial expressions, tone of voice, and posture -- can speak louder than words.

**Develop an action plan**

An action plan can help a marriage.

- Learn to express sincere appreciation. Concentrate on a partner's individual strengths rather than weaknesses. Don't take each other for granted.

- Arrange to spend quality time with each other doing something fun. Laughter and play are great means of coping with stress.

- Keep the lines of communication open. Be available to listen even when a spouse is not ready to talk. A gentle touch or kiss can show support when there are no words.

- Share responsibility for decisions that affect the family. As a team come up with workable solutions and manage the consequences.

- Maintain flexibility in who does what in the family, share the burdens. Family members must do what makes sense for their family and not be swayed by what others might expect.

- Plan strategies to cope with crisis before it occurs. To maintain some control of the situation, try to anticipate changes and adapt before they happen.

Remember that when money gets tight and times get tough, couples need to show love and affection toward each other. If a marriage is to last, it must come first.