

Innovative Idea

**The of Use Challenge Coins to Address Teenage Mental Health Among Secondary
Agriculture Youth**

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Introduction

Mental health is a growing concern within the agricultural industry (CDC, 2020). As farmer suicide rates continue to rise (CDC, 2020), conversations on the topic become more important. As a major industry group, Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting is the fourth highest in suicide (2020). In addition, 84% of the group's overall population is comprised of farmers (Reed & Claunch, 2020). Suicide is not only rising within agriculture, but among today's youth as well. Between the ages of 15 and 24, suicide rose to an alarming 14.2% per 100,000 in 2020 (CDC, 2022). That is 6,062 young adults who took their life that year (CDC, 2022).

The branches of the military have a special way to recognize their soldiers through a process called *Challenge Coins*. Although it is unknown when the military challenge coins were originated, historians note the use as far back as the First World War (Bledsoe, 2022). The coin started as a method to represent the branches, units, groups or a specific mission. Today, they are used to express appreciation or thanks to a recipient (Mahoney, 2010). The coins serve as a way to keep members connected and build meaningful bonds that last a lifetime. Each challenge coin is accompanied with a "secret" handshake. The purpose of this handshake is to be quiet and discreet, not to draw attention since this is an intimate award. The commander is to walk up, shake the recipient's hand, place the small coin in the palm, and the ceremony is over (Rodriguez, 2022). Often there is a saying or short speech to go along with the ceremony.

Although the military initiated the challenge coin, many organizations have adopted the concept. Firefighter associations and police accompanies have established their own version, commonly called *first responders challenge coins* (Bledsoe, 2022). Now industries are creating their own challenge coin. They can be used as branding, to feel connected to the business. Organizations may create their own coin to give to their strongest supporters and to show their appreciation.

How it works/Methodology

In an effort to acknowledge the mental health concerns among agricultural youth, STATE created an agriculture mental health challenge coin. The coins are a pocket-sized, circular coin. The front of the coin is stamped with the information about the organization while the back

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contains the state's suicide hotline. The purpose of the coin is to create opportunities for individuals to express to the recipient how appreciated they are and that their life is valued. The coin is to be passed out to an individual that may be going through a rough time, contemplating/contemplated suicide, or someone that has been touched by suicide in some way. Each passing of the coin is presented with a handshake. Like the military coins, it should be as quiet and discreet as possible (Rodriguez, 2022). The handshake is paired with a speech to stress to the recipient their life is valued, and they are appreciated.

In order to give a coin, one must participate in a QPR (Question, Persuade& Refer), a suicide prevention training offered in STATE. The intent of the QPR training program is to improve knowledge of suicide; the ability to identify people in distress and gain confidence; and comfort to intervene when needed (CAFE, n.d.) You will not be able to find the coins on the table at a trade show or in a swag bag. They are intended to only be delivered to individuals who can make a difference or who may be considered in need. Not until a handshake and a face-to-face private conversation occurs, the agriculture mental health challenge coin is not complete.

Results to date/Implications

Since its release in 2021, the agriculture mental health challenge coin has expanded. So far, approximately 1,600 challenge coins are in rotation around the state. In addition, five FFA chapters and five non-profit organizations have created their own coin, with three more in production. To date, 110 coins, handshakes and personal conversations have occurred among the agricultural education community. Recently, agriculture teachers received the opportunity to attend QPR training during the annual teacher's conference and students were able to receive in 2022 during their attendance at FFA Camp. After attending a QPR training, each teacher and/or student receive three coins to hand over to someone who may need it.

A few months later, a group gathered to reflect on the process of agriculture mental health challenge coin. Discussion allowed for the participants to discuss their nervous tendencies, the conversation that occurred, and future approaches. After the reflection, each individual received two more coins, pending their need. One chapter created the slogan, *five for life*, representing the five lives each student potentially saved.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Future plan is to expand the agriculture mental health challenge coin program into more high schools across STATE. Six more FFA Chapters have agreed to receive training and students have begun to develop their own chapter coin. Also, the agricultural education program at the University of STATE is designing their own coin and scheduled QPR trainings to assist agriculture students around campus. Agricultural Education students will participate in the QPR Training and receive their own set of coins to distribute to their peers and hometown community. The students will monitor the progression of the challenge coin.

Cost/Resources Needed

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For the entirety of the agriculture mental health challenge coin, financial resources are needed for the production of the coin and the QPR training of each individual. Each coin costs between \$3-\$5 to produce based upon the size and color needs. In addition, the required QPR training is \$249 per person. In STATE, all coins and QPR Training is paid for through a partnership among the Southeast Center for Agricultural Health and Injury Prevention; the Central Appalachia Regional Education and Research Center; and Agrisafe.

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