



# Engaging Community-Based Farmer Mental Health Advocates to Support Farmer Wellbeing

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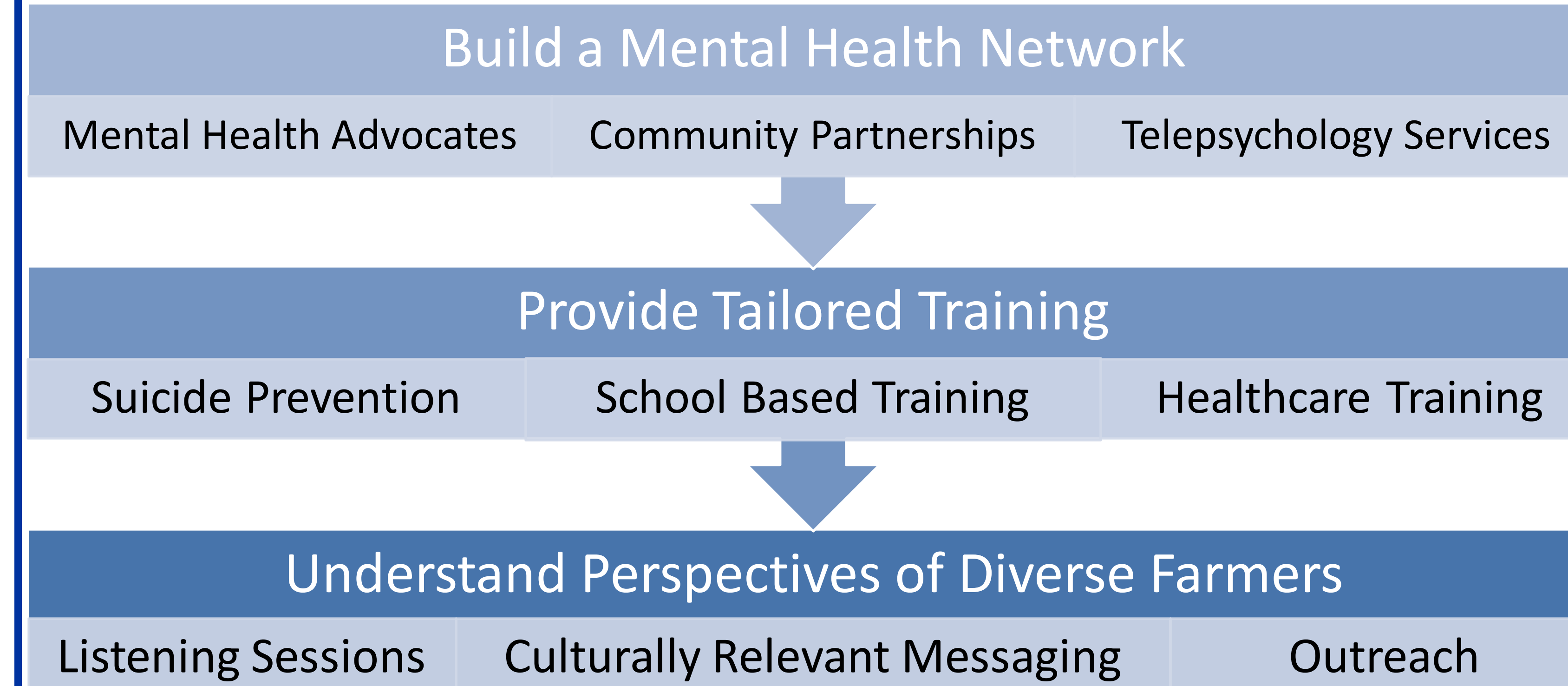
## Abstract

Building Bridges to Farmer Mental Health is an innovative project focused on developing and piloting a farmer mental health navigator network in seven Kentucky counties aimed at helping farmers and their families in crisis and preventing suicide. To date, we have recruited our first cohort of Mental Health Advocates (MHA) who will serve as community-embedded mental health support. MHAs will disseminate our trainings, support and screen farmers/families in crisis, and provide referrals to our farm-centric ECU telepsychology service. To synthesize lessons learned through our process, we will showcase strategies used for outreach and discuss leveraging assets in the Kentucky agricultural community.

## Farmer Mental Health

- Farmer suicide rates parallel or exceed the US suicide rate (Norrod et al., 2023).
- Living in rural areas, farmers face many barriers to mental healthcare – including a significant shortage of and limited access to healthcare professionals (Parish, 2020).
- “Widespread stigma toward mental illness and deeply held cultural values of stoicism, hard work, and self-reliance further limit access to traditional forms of mental healthcare” (Yunker & Radunovich, 2021).
- Stress and exhaustion can also delay help-seeking behaviors in farmers (Daghagh Yazd et al., 2019).

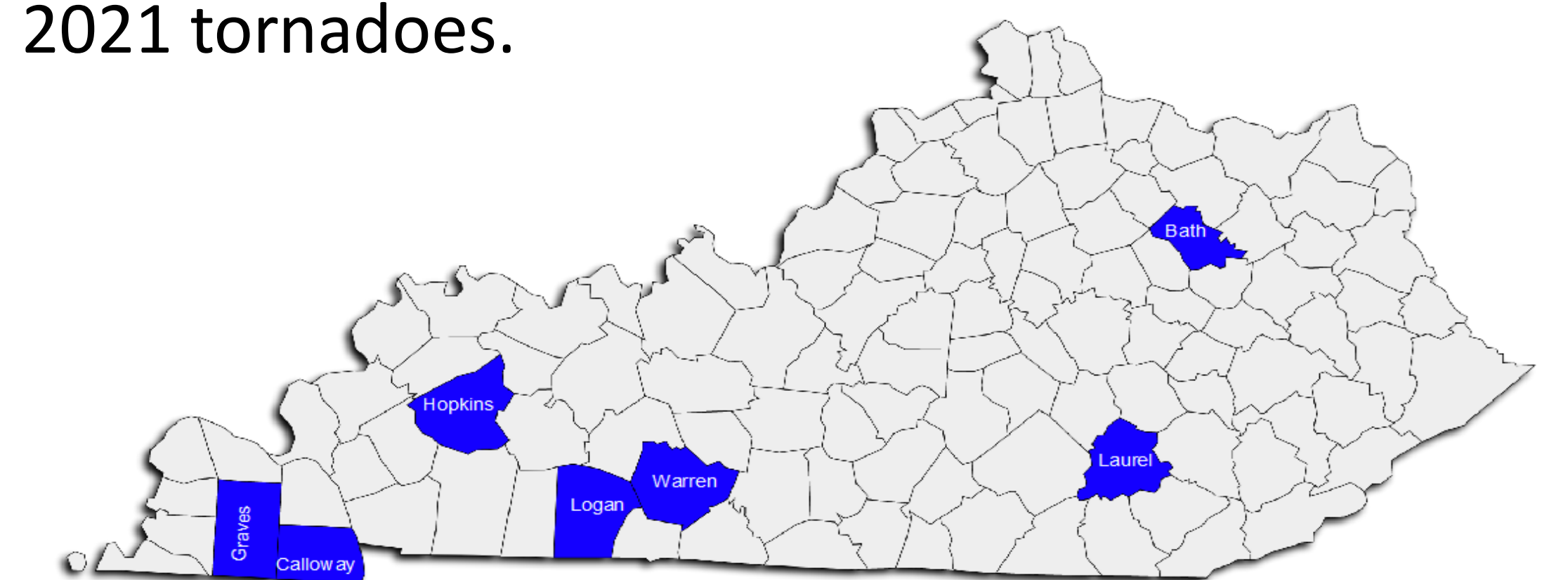
## Project Aims



## Mental Health Advocates

### Recruitment

- MHAs were recruited from Bath, Calloway, Graves, Hopkins, Laurel, Logan, and Warren counties. These counties were chosen based on Kentucky farmer saturation, suicide rates, and areas affected by the 2021 tornadoes.



### Expectations

- Attend suicide prevention trainings.
- Monthly Zoom Check-Ins with project team.
- Engage community in Agriculturally Responsive QPR.

## Training and Evaluation

### Trainings and Purpose

- *Question-Persuade-Refer Training for Trainers* – to develop MHA self-efficacy and training skills so they can train their communities in suicide prevention.
- *Agriculturally Responsive Peer Support* – to give MHAs a foundational knowledge of farm stress, risk for suicide behaviors, and how to respond to farmers and their families in crisis.
- *Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training* – MHAs will attend this 2-day in-person training to further hone their suicide intervention skills and improve their willingness to intervene in suicide.

### Evaluation of Trainings

- *Willingness to Intervene Enhanced* – this questionnaire measures participant attitudes (both self and other) toward suicide, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and intention (Aldritch & Cerel, 2023).
- *Focus Groups* – during monthly Zoom check-ins questions to encourage MHA engagement, assess agricultural responsiveness, and feasibility of trainings are posed.

## Approach



## Lessons Learned

### Baseline Data

- Pre-training data showed most MHAs previously participated in suicide prevention training besides QPR.
- Prior to receiving training, MHAs were confident in their capability to intervene in instances of suicide to some extent.
- Before undergoing training, MHAs expressed concerns that intervening could be intimidating or uncomfortable—a challenge our training programs aim to overcome.

### Qualitative Data

- Based on feedback from our focus groups, MHAs believe they require additional targeted training on how to effectively handle suicide interventions within the farming community to gain complete confidence in their skills.

## Acknowledgments

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