

Social Support Mapping Exercise

Background

Social connections are important for good health. People who are connected with friends, family members, neighbors and others experience better physical and mental health. Support networks are particularly important when people are experiencing challenges. At these times, the people you connect with can serve as an informal support network. They can help:

- Listen to your concerns
- Comfort you when you are down.
- Prevent isolation
- Help brainstorm options.
- Find ways to meet your needs.
- Promote emotional and physical health.

With that being said, it is important to take time **to identify** your support network so that you can **build and maintain it**. Doing so will bolster your mental health and your resilience as a farmer. Take some time to identify your social support network by using a pod mapping tool. A “pod” is another term for community, but pod is more specific to those close to you or those can rely on such as a trusted friend, family member, neighbor, coworker, or mentor.

Before you get started, please read a few important notes:

- It is not uncommon for people to have 1 or 2 people in their pod. We reassure people this is not a popularity contest, but rather a chance to reflect on how we can build our support networks.
- Sometimes our pod people don’t fall neatly along traditional lines. Nothing is set in stone here, just do your best.
- Your pod(s) may shift over time, as your needs or relationships shift or as people’s geographic location shift.
- Growing one’s pod is not easy and may take time.

Instructions

- 1) Turn to the back of this handout. Put your name in the middle grey circle.
- 2) The surrounding bold-outlined circles are your pod. Write the names of the people who are in your pod. We encourage people to write the names of actual individuals, instead of things such as “my church group” or “my neighbors.”
- 3) The dotted lines surrounding your pod are people who are “movable.” They are people that could be moved into your pod but need a little more work. For example, you might need to build more of a relationship or trust with them.
- 4) The larger circles at the edge of the page are for networks, communities, or groups that could be resources for you. It could be a farm service agency, a farmer network, a social media group, a volunteer group, or another community group you value.
- 5) As you look at your pod map, reflect on the following questions:
 - What are the areas of strength in your social support network?
 - Do you have social needs that are not being met? Which of these needs are most important to you now?
 - Who could help fill these needs if you took the risk of asking?
 - What specific steps could you take to expand your support network? What things can you do this week? Next week?

Compiled by Fiona Doherty, MSW, 2022.

Sources:

<https://transformharm.org/pods-and-pod-mapping-worksheet/>

<https://extension.umn.edu/stress-and-change/building-social-support-connections#source-808160>

