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FARMRes Report, GERMANY

Farmers Assistance Resources for Mental Health

German young farmers social and labour situation and its
relationship with mental health and wellbeing

FARMRes

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Mental health in agriculture: Germany's perspective

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1. Introduction: mental health issues in the German agricultural sector

There are often reports about animal welfare and species protection, but how are farmers faring? Many are burdened with work, possible debts or family worries. The risk of mental illness has been increasing for years. But there is help available.

Mental health is a very important topic and is also increasingly discussed in the media in Germany - not least since the Covid19 pandemic.

A press article in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) of 14.01.2022 introduced with the following text: about 80 percent of all farmers suffer from psychological problems. But only a few seek help: Because if the profession is a life task, any weakness is seen as failure.

What most people don't know is that mental health can be even more difficult for farmers given the nature of their work.

On farms, private life and work mix easily and it is difficult to break away from work. Agriculture is widely related to many things, which makes agriculture sensitive to crises. Farmers face many challenges every day such as stress, financial worries, tighter regulations, unpredictable weather, disease outbreaks and long working hours.

The fact that it can be a very lonely job doesn't help either. Work pressure, plummeting prices, drought, bureaucratic madness, generational conflict, fear of the future - many farmers are at their nervous limit.

The consequence of this situation: mental distress in agriculture has been increasing for years, as confirmed by studies and surveys at home and abroad. But many farmers wait a long time before they seek help. Sometimes too long.

In Figure 1 you see the reasons why farmers call the emergency hotline offered by the social security assurance for farmers (SVLFG) in Germany.

- 32,5%: family issues
- 31,2%: psychological issues
- 8,7%: Stress
- 7,5%: health issues
- 3,85: economic issues
- 2,7%: social issues
- 2,0%: unsolved succession issues
- 0,3%: addiction
- 9,8%: other reasons
- 1,6%: reason not clear

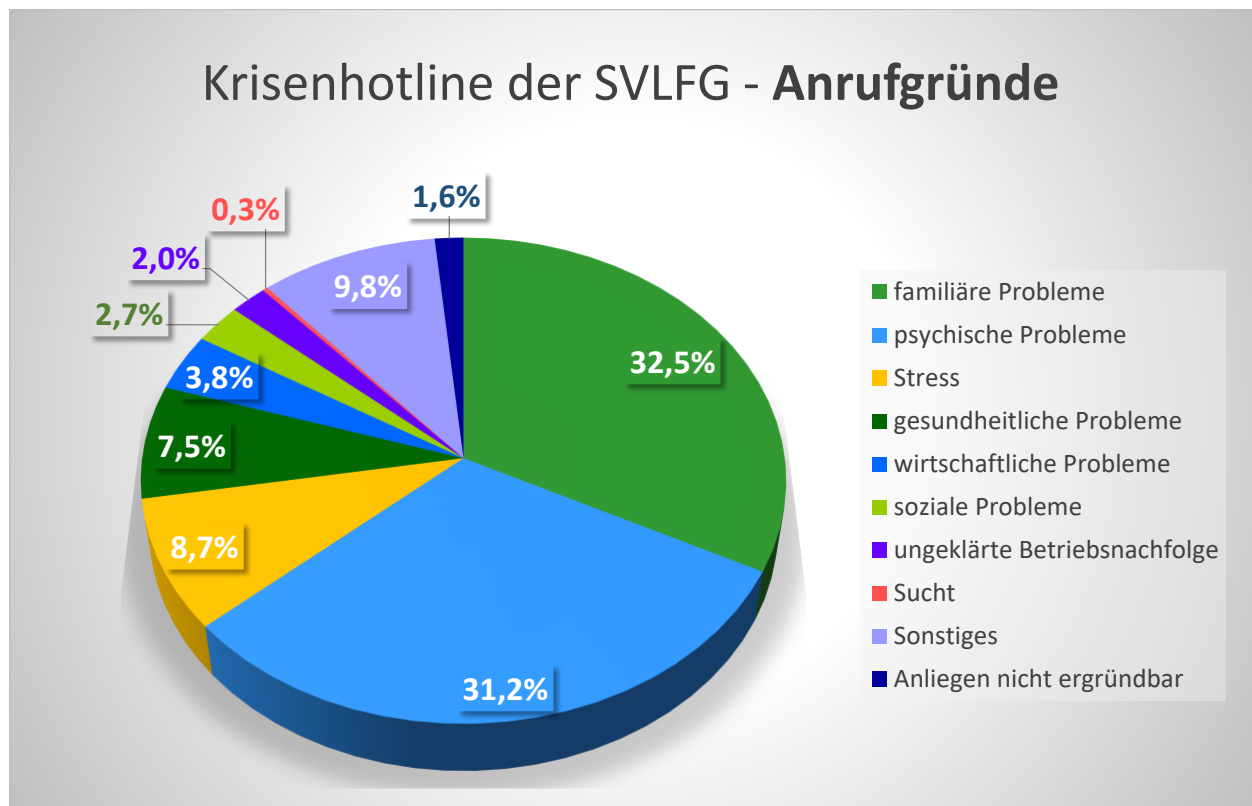


Figure 1. Reasons for calling the emergency hotline of SVLFG by farmers; received in 07/2022

It is widely reported that poor mental health can also be a risk factor for agricultural accidents. If you can't concentrate properly on the work, it will affect your judgement.

By normalizing the conversation and creating awareness of mental health problems and how dangerous they are, there is an opportunity for more farmers to learn that there are support services that can help in times of crisis.

In addition to the situation of family farms in general, this national report specifically addresses the issues and questions of mental health.

2. Farming sector of Germany

The latest official report and data referring to agriculture can be found in “Agrarpolitischer Bericht 2019”, which is mainly referring to 2016. Further insight is given by the German association of Farmers – Deutscher Bauernverband – within its annual report about farmers situation: Situationsbericht 2021/22 – Trends und Fakten zur Landwirtschaft, published in December 2021. In 2016, the agricultural holdings farmed about 16.7 million hectares of agricultural land.

Farm size and structure

The average area of agricultural land thus reached around 60 hectares compared to 56 hectares in 2010. 59 percent of agricultural land is managed by farms with more than 100 hectares. Nationwide there is an east-west and north-south gradient in farm sizes. However, data on land availability alone do not allow statements on farm competitiveness of agricultural holdings by Länder 2016.

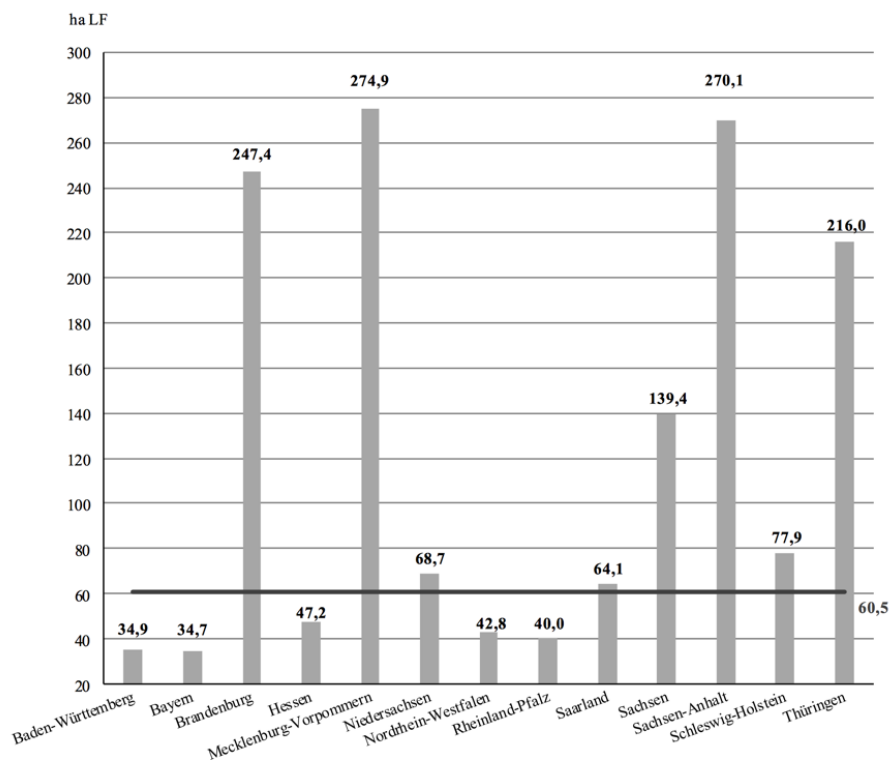


Figure 2. Average size of agricultural holdings by Bundesland (NUTS1-Region) 2016 (Agrarpolitischer Bericht der Bundesregierung 2019)

Betriebsgröße von ... bis ... unter ... Hektar LF	Betriebe		Fläche	
	Anzahl in 1.000	Anteil in Prozent	Hektar LF in 1.000	Anteil in Prozent
unter 5	21,5	8,2	36,6	0,2
5 bis 10	44,8	17,0	324,8	2,0
10 bis 20	52,6	20,0	781,7	4,7
20 bis 50	61,1	23,2	2.034,8	12,3
50 bis 100	44,7	17,0	3.171,7	19,1
100 bis 200	24,9	9,5	3.398,3	20,5
200 bis 500	9,4	3,6	2.721,2	16,4
500 bis 1.000	2,4	0,9	1.703,8	10,3
1.000 und mehr	1,5	0,6	2.422,1	14,6
Insgesamt	262,8	100,0	16.595,0	100,0

Quelle: Statistisches Bundesamt SB22-T33-1

Figure 3. Scale of farms in ha of size of German farms (Situationsbericht 2021/22; p. 89)

Main crops and production

From the agricultural production point of view, Germany is active in all kinds of production which are feasible in this climate zone. From highly specialized animal husbandry or only land management up to mixed farming concepts and highly diversified family farms: you can see all this in Germany. The same variety occurs in organic or conventional production.

Additional to traditional fields of action of agricultural production like production of food and fodder, new branches came up during the last decades due to worldwide changes as well as specific political-societal framework in Germany: the use of agricultural commodities and crops for industrial or energetic purpose.

Germany In livestock farming, structural changes towards specialised holdings with large stocks continue. In 2016, there were about 185,200 farms with livestock, about 7 percent less than in 2013 and 14 percent less than in 2010, whereas the livestock, measured in livestock units (LU),

has only decreased by 1 percent. This is due to larger herds of dairy cows and poultry, while the number of cattle has remained more or less the same.

Particularly large changes can be observed in the area of pig farming. The number of farms fell by around 18 percent compared with 2013. The number of pigs, on the other hand, has only decreased by 2.5 percent. Also in the area of laying hen husbandry there are about 17 percent fewer farms compared to 2013, but 8.2 percent more laying hens.

The regions differ considerably in the size structure of their livestock. The average stocking density has increased slightly to 79.2 LU per 100 hectares agricultural land. The majority of livestock production is area-based. Only 5.7 percent of the LU or about 734,000 LU are kept on farms without agricultural land.

Market situation

Taking a look to contribution to German GDP of farming it is around 1% only. This small contribution may be interpreted differently if considering all aligned business: processing and logistics of food, feed, fibre and energy with origin in farming.

When choosing the legal form of the business, more and more farmers are opting for a form of partnership. Nevertheless, the majority of farms (89 percent) are still run by individual entrepreneurs. Of these some 244,200 individual enterprises, only just under half (48 per cent) are run as a main occupation. On average, the enterprises with their main occupation had 66 hectares of agricultural land.

Impact of climate change

In recent decades, a general trend towards higher temperatures has emerged in Germany and worldwide as a result of global warming.

The average annual precipitation is about 800 mm. The wettest months are the summer months, when precipitation often falls as comparatively short and heavy showers in thunderstorms and

less as continuous rain. Precipitation varies from well over 1000 mm in the Alps and the low mountain ranges to less than 500 mm in the rain shadow of the Harz Mountains between Magdeburg in the north, Leipzig in the east and Erfurt in the south. In general, humidity decreases from west to east.

Also noticeable is a trend towards spring drought, especially in the east of the country, which in many years favours smaller vegetation fires. Germany's sunniest regions are on the northern and southern edges of the country.

Naturally, the figures and averages given for the whole of Germany cannot adequately reflect the regional differences that exist in the country. These will be determined, for example, by the local landscape and environment as well as by history, economy and legal conditions.

The maps show the daily drought status of the total soil and the topsoil, which reacts more quickly to short-term precipitation events, as well as the plant-available water in the soil.

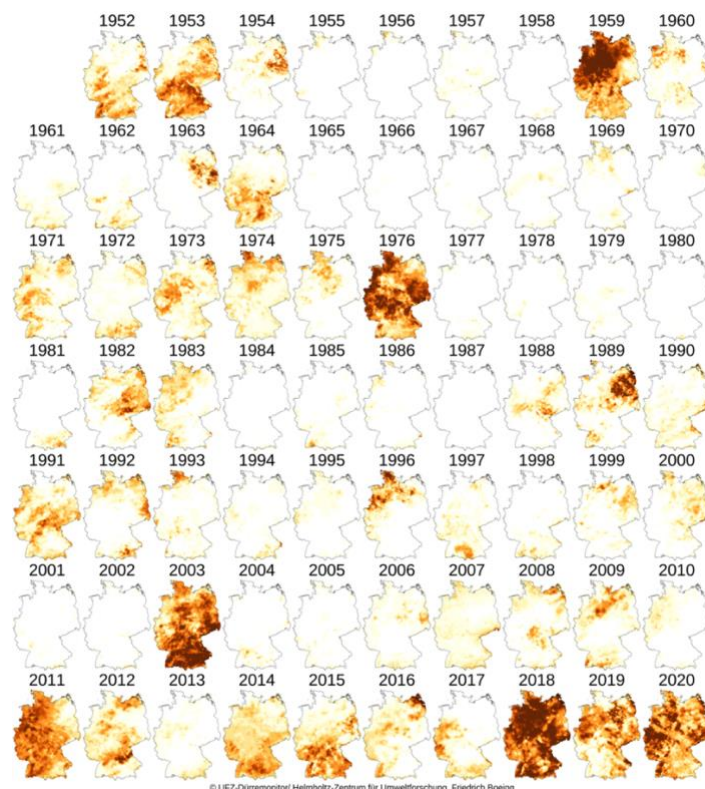


Figure 4. Drought magnitudes in the topsoil in the vegetation period April to October in Germany (UFZ)

3. Social situation and farmer social position

In Germany, according to the results of the **2010 and 2020 agricultural census**, the vast majority of all farm managers have completed vocational agricultural training. Of the potential farm successors, almost all have completed vocational training, half of them agricultural.

Agriculture is systemically relevant. It is the basic economic activity of man. It has made possible the division of labor and the formation of cities and states in the first place and is thus the basis of every civilization. At the same time, agriculture and forestry shape over 80 % of the surface of Germany.

Appreciation and reception, social position of farmers

Inevitably, it has a decisive influence on the environment and nature, on soils, animals, water and biodiversity - and on the appearance of Germany. With constant increases in production, agriculture has enabled a strong growth of the population. At the same time, it has made the supply of food to this population increasingly reliable and cheaper for households. To a large extent, this has resulted in what is now generally perceived as prosperity: Large parts of government, business and household expenditure are available for non-food purposes.

4. Risk-Factors impacting the mental health of farmers

Economic factors

German farmers are nowadays in a position of »choice under pressure«: competing on a world market with standardized agricultural commodities for low price and therefore highly efficient low cost production or finding a niche in high quality products markets or businesses aligned with farming itself.

The incomes of the different types of farms develops unevenly. The different income developments in individual branches of production leads to different income developments for the different types of farming business.

Most regions of Germany are competitive in plant production. In contrast, there are greater risks to competitiveness in livestock production. And as written above agricultural production methods and structures must be brought into harmony with society's requirements for environmental, animal and climate protection as far as possible.

Position on the market within the value chain

All this must ultimately be profitable from an entrepreneurial and economic point of view, if not in the short then at least in the medium and long term. New and innovative ways of farming aiming to untie this Gordian knot will probably face challenges in financing in the phases of starting up and proof of concept.

Taking a look to employment in agricultural sector it could be interpreted from diverse perspectives. Considering the reduced number of people working in agricultural sector – the entrepreneur himself as well as family employees and non-relative employees – there can be seen a lower number of workforces.

This can be interpreted as a step to more efficiency as well as a proof for a reduced number of entrepreneurs staying on the market as a result of ongoing “selection process”. For sure, today's farming is challenging the entrepreneurial spirit as well as entrepreneurial skills and competences more than ever.

Cost for agricultural production: land, labour, capital

Taking a look to some economic data it is clear to see that capital input is on steady increase in German farming. Not only arable Land as well as labour is getting more and more expensive but as well machinery and buildings needed for today's farming.

	Pachtentgelte für landwirtschaftliche Einzelgrundstücke					Neupachtentgelte ¹⁾	
	2007	2010	2013	2016	Änderung		2016
					2016 gegen 2007	2016 gegen 2013	
	€/ha LF				%		€/ha LF
Deutschland	183	204	243	288	57,4	18,5	385
Früheres Bundesgebiet	234	254	294	346	47,9	17,7	493
Neue Länder	122	141	169	203	66,4	20,1	242

Figure 5. Rent to pay per ha in € (Agrarpolitischer Bericht der Bundesregierung 2019; p.75)

Agriculture is among the most capital-intensive of all industries. This also includes forestry and fisheries. This is shown in the situation report of the German Farmers' Association (DBV) 2021/2022. According to the report, the capital stock has increased significantly in recent years. This is defined as gross fixed assets (excluding land) at replacement prices.

From 1991 to 2020 the total capital input added up from 217 billion Euro to 367 billion Euro. Broken down to single workforce it increased from 185.000 Euro to 633.000 Euro per workforce.

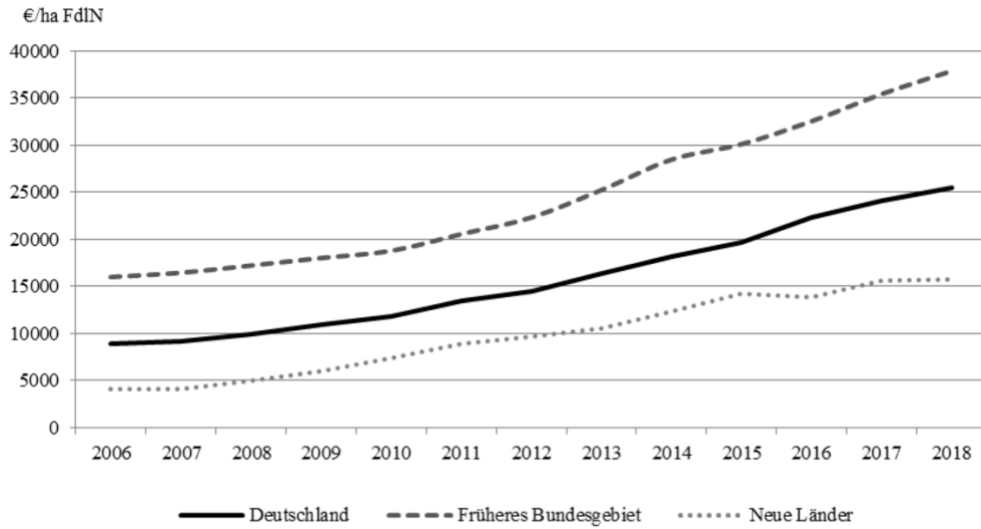
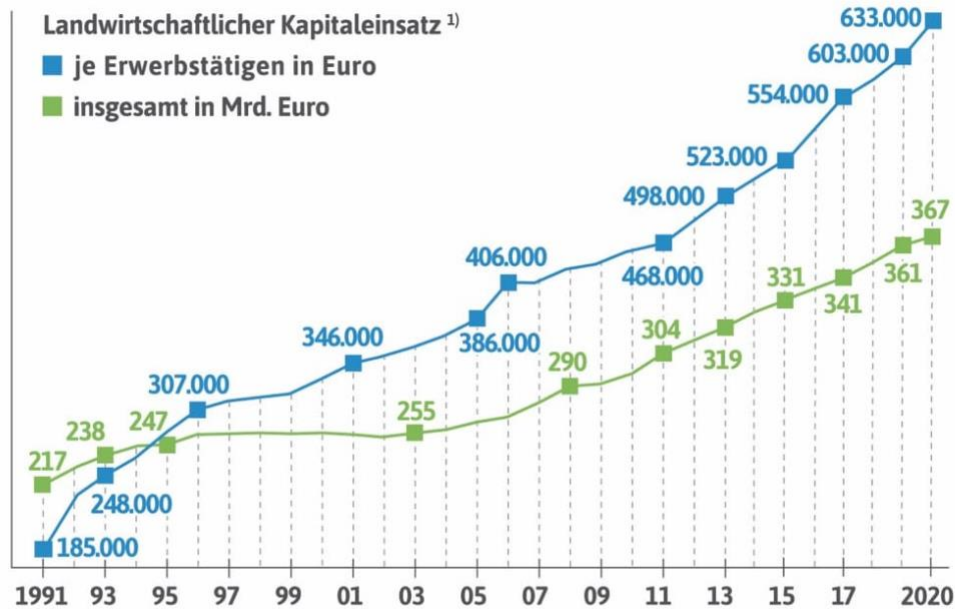


Figure 6. Price per ha in € for buying (Agrarpolitischer Bericht der Bundesregierung 2019; p.74)

Landwirtschaftliche Arbeitsplätze kosten immer mehr



¹⁾ Bruttoanlagevermögen (ohne Boden) zu Wiederbeschaffungspreisen

Quelle: Statistisches Bundesamt

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Figure 7. capital input per workforce and in total on German farms (Situationsbericht 2021/22; p. 89)

The net fixed assets (gross fixed assets less depreciation, excluding land) of the German agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector amounted to 164.7 billion euros at the end of 2020. Of this, 31 percent is accounted for by equipment (machinery and equipment) and 69 percent by buildings and facilities. The real capital of German agriculture, forestry and fisheries is financed to 34 percent with debt capital and to 66 percent with equity capital. Compared to commercial enterprises, the share of debt financing is relatively low.

The debt capital stock in the German agriculture and forestry sector reached 56.0 billion euros at the end of June 2021, an increase of 1.2 percent compared to the previous year. A good 84 percent of the loan portfolio are long-term loans and thus serve to finance long-term investments. Short- and medium-term loans with a term of less than 1 or 5 years play a subordinate role with a share of just under 16 percent. The German agricultural and forestry sector mainly uses debt capital to improve its economic results. The favorable interest rate level also contributed to this.

Since winter 2021/22 however, there has now been a significant turnaround in interest rates. Here, concrete concerns arise for the farms due to increased capital costs. Both for new investments and for the extension of existing loans.

Even if we see Producer prices have risen, the price increases are not able to cover the increased production costs. The economic situation in agriculture has been difficult for a long time. The current cost crisis driven by energy prices for energy itself as well for energy-dependent products like fertilizers has deepened the economic plight of agricultural entrepreneurs.

Over all economic factors can be seen as a significant risk factor for an agricultural entrepreneur's mental health. Financial uncertainty causes prolonged, burdensome stress. If farms do not develop their operations, it weakens the farm's chances of survival.

Climate change: Water, Soil

Some adaptation processes to climate change are already underway. Agricultural breeding research, for example, has been working for years on varieties that are better adapted to the

changed conditions such as drought, longer growing seasons and heat. Breeding efforts are also increasingly focusing on new crop varieties that have not yet played a role in Germany.

However, breeding also has its limits. For example, it is possible to develop particularly drought- or heat-tolerant varieties that serve their purpose in corresponding hot and dry years. But what good is that in cold years with heavy and continuous rain?

The problem in agriculture is that there are very different extreme weather events that influence agricultural production in very different ways. It is usually difficult to predict when which event will occur.

Personal, family and social factors

The agricultural entrepreneur's work is at home: it is not only family business but in most cases working place and living place are the same. So there is a difficulty to make a break, to get some distance. Separating home and work is difficult. On family farms, members of family are involved in the work to be done. This brings two sides of a medal with it of course. The quality of interpersonal relationships is important for the mental health of an agricultural entrepreneur. Interpersonal relationships can be a great asset or a great burden factor.

The succession of a farm is one of the greatest challenges in the lives of farmers, which is often experienced as a crisis on the part of those handing over the farm, but also on the part of those taking over the farm. It is becoming increasingly rare for the farm succession to be secured by family members. Surveys have shown that on two-thirds of farms in Germany the farm succession is not secured. The transfer of farms within and outside the family is a problem that will determine the future of agriculture in Germany.

Based on possibly not the best communication among farming sector and society farmers are increasingly criticized, which leads to injured honor, insecurity, stress and anger among those affected and their families. Farmers themselves feel made responsible for a lot of urgent issues of today's reality.

The image of agriculture and the public's understanding of it is perhaps worse than ever at the moment. Factory farming, insect mortality, over-fertilization, the use of pesticides - all these are the issues that repeatedly make the headlines and cast farmers in a bad light. But not only that. They affect farmers and their families personally, and often in full force.

The pressure that some farmers feel today grows to such an extent that their bodies and souls fall ill. Farmers feel misunderstood, they are also held responsible for things for which they cannot do anything. If other factors are added, this leads to sheer despair and triggers an "I just can't anymore". But there are ways to get out of this stressful situation.

Heavy and increasing workload together with decreasing social time in the society mixed with these prejudices and fears ends up in increasing loneliness which can be seen as a risk factor for mental health. There are fewer and fewer people who understand agriculture and neighbors live far away.

There is a risk of social exclusion, and social exclusion is seen to be already happening. A larger group than before is estimated to be at risk of social exclusion. The situation is perceived to be polarized. Exclusion develops slowly. At first, the farmer experiences, for example, exhaustion or financial challenges, for which they do not dare to ask for help. Many farmers work alone, which increases the risk of social exclusion. Especially farmers without family and those who do not have close interpersonal relationships are easily unnoticed.

Professional factors

Due to the developments described there is a huge competition for arable land from different point of view:

- between farmers and society: about the intensity of agricultural use of land
- between farming and other use of land due to consumption of land due to traffic, settlement or other land use reasons
- between farming and nature/environmental protection demands: Related to German regulations (compensating areas for infrastructure projects) and/or international agreements (Ramsar etc., climate etc.), transformation from grassland into forest

- within the farming sector itself: agricultural production for food/ fodder vs. agricultural production for energetic/ industrial use

The struggle for land has led to enormous increase of prices for land in Germany.

5. Mental health and wellbeing in German farming sector

Farm work is binding and it is difficult to get away from it. In case of illness, it is not easy to find a substitute, which is why farm entrepreneurs work even when they are sick.

In Germany, livestock farmers who fulfil the legal requirements for a substitution scheme have the possibility to be substituted in case of illness. The substitution services are organized by the machinery rings in close touch with SVLFG. However these services are short of labour forces which leads to situations where there are entitlements for farmers to receive help, but help can not be offered due to missing work forces in the so called “Betriebshilfe”.

In agriculture, there are many professional factors that cannot be influenced, such as weather conditions and the seasonal peak of work in spring and autumn. Professional factors affecting mental health are seen to be competence. The concept of competence is broad. It includes production and financial know-how, change know-how and forecasting and risk management know-how. Planning is seen as important. The constant need to react is considered a way of working that puts a strain on mental health. Planning and risk management help get out of the cycle of constant reacting.

Business Planning and Decision Taking

All businesses have an internal and external environment, and so does agriculture and farming. The internal environment is very much associated with the human resource of the business or organization, and the manner in which people undertake work in accordance with the mission of the organization. To some extent, the internal environment is controllable and changeable through planning and management processes.

The external environment, on the other hand is not controllable. The managers of a business have no control over business competitors, or changes to law, or general economic conditions. However the managers of a business or organization do have some measure of control as to how the business reacts to changes in its external environment.



Figure 8. Strategic Planning; Source: <http://www.leoisaac.com/planning/strat016.htm>

Every day, the farmer as CEO of the family business, is confronted with the challenge of having to make good decisions as leader. A good decision, of course, requires foresight in the literal sense: those who can better assess how the future will develop have an advantage. However, it is also clear that absolute certainties do not exist - the crystal ball that tells us what will happen in the future if we choose one option has yet to be invented.

Strategic planning on paper and in theory seems easy. In practice and daily life and work it is very challenging to keep focus, to be able to distinguish between important and non-important issues as well as issues that are under the real influence of the farmer and which are not.

But farmers can use existing concepts and tools for leading as well as for decision making.

A very helpful tool to decide on the options of Do, Decide, Delegate, Delete is the famous Eisenhower-Box.

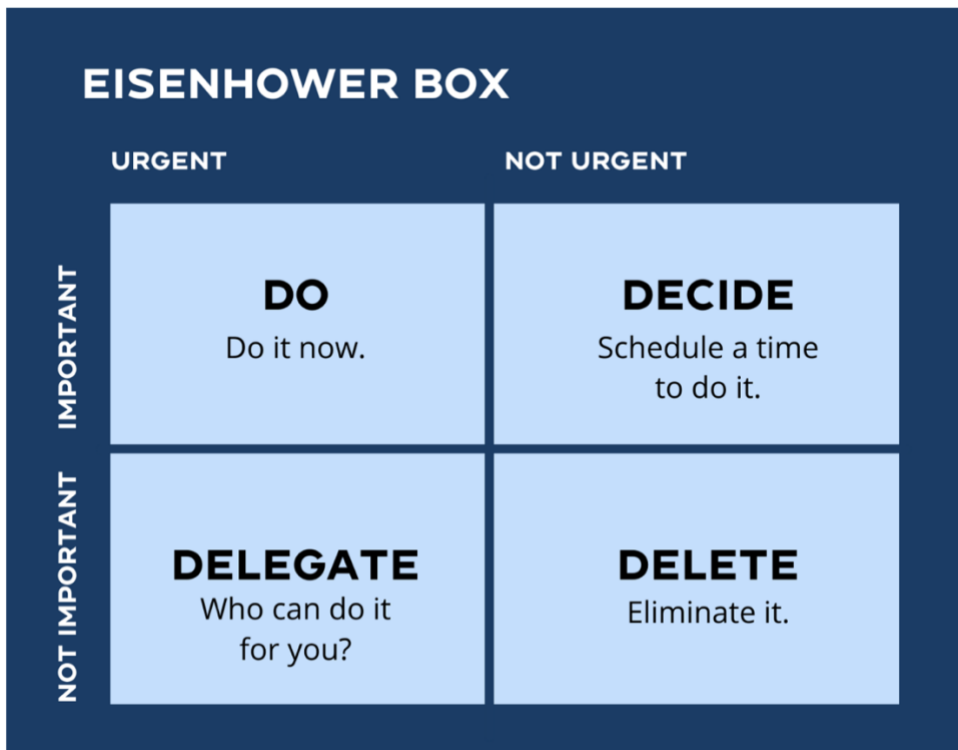


Figure 9. Eisenhower Box; Source: <https://medium.com/@leadingtwin/the-eisenhower-box-4fe9b065f96f>

Many plans are made at farms, for example in connection with investments. Calculations may be made for different alternatives, but nevertheless in such a way that the different alternatives mean, for example, price risks concerning the investment. In order to support acting in changing situations, it is suggested that plans should also be made for completely separate alternatives.

However, the existence of data and statistics is no guarantee for good decisions. The assessment of data quality and the interpretation of statistical analyses for good decisions require risk literacy (also: statistical literacy). In practice, this means first and foremost the ability to assess whether the data collected, the calculations made actually measure what is important.

Just because figures are available does not mean that they measure everything that is actually relevant for the family farming business or adequately reflect this. The availability of "hard" figures can give the deceptive impression of certainty.

Even when the available data are useful in themselves (that is, they measured what they wanted to measure and the data collected are not biased), thinking traps lurk that can lead to poor decisions. The Prospect Theory presented by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky (1979) founded behavioral economics, which in recent decades has documented many of these systematic cognitive biases. These "biases" are often the "by-product" of perfectly sensible thinking tendencies of our brain, which can, however, lead astray in situations of risk with abstract, contextless information.

It can be concluded that without entrepreneurial spirit and the sense for market situation as well as the sense within the basic agricultural production it is very difficult to have always good decision making. Pressure within daily business is huge, and farmers are challenged to take a step back to give focus to their strategic development of their family business.

Comprehensive Management

Professional farm management can be seen as a protective factor for mental health. Comprehensive farm management is seen to consist of three different areas: Self-management, work management and network management.

Good self management allows the farmer to respect his and his families daily schedule. Good work management and leadership of workforce ensures that the work is done from quantity and quality point of view. Good network management enables and ensures good access to market information as well as entries to markets.

Further more and very important to be mentioned, the result of good management and leadership is possibilities and time slots for family and for social activities. Taking a look to both sides of the medal the downwards spiral is the exact reverse of the upwards spiral in the interaction of the farmer and his family business: family and business.

Professional management of an agricultural enterprise as a protective factor for mental health

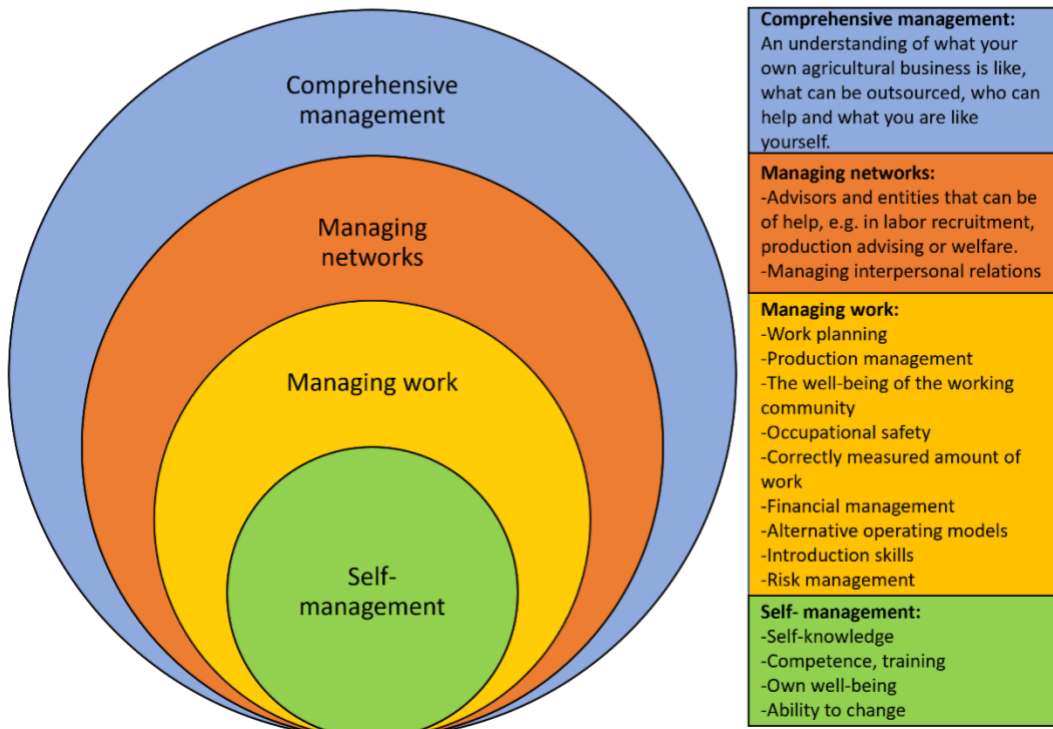


Figure 10. Professional farm management

Impact of professional life on mental health

Clarity and satisfaction with the farm's and one's own future is the result downstream of the actions. However, it is neither the farmer alone, nor his family: rather, the person, the social environment and the farm all play a role in determining this outcome.

Many bodily functions reach their maximum functional capacity between the ages of 20 and 30. In contrast, the duration and severity of illnesses and impairments increase from around 40 years of age. In contrast to physical health, cognitive performance remains largely constant in middle age. Women and men reach their highest cognitive performance between 50 and 60 years of age (cf. Willis & Schaie, 1999). The prevalence of dementia as well as the need for assistance and care are only increased at an older age (cf. Schneekloth & Leven, 2003).

Subjective health" is the individual experience of health. This decreases with age, but less than the objective state of health. As a result, the subjective experience of health is better at an older age

than the objective state of health would suggest. Similarly, the health-related quality of life decreases with age. This mainly concerns aspects of the physical quality of life (e.g. more frequent experience of pain). Psychological well-being, on the other hand, hardly changes.

The value of work for human health was addressed early on. For Benedict of Nursia, "ora et labora" was the best way to achieve inner satisfaction. For Sigmund Freud, health was essentially defined by work ("health as the ability to love and work"). For Martin Luther, a satisfying job, characterised by wholeness, continuity and longevity, makes a person a personality and a satisfying job is an essential factor for good health (cf. Weber & Hörmann, 2007).

The WHO first described references between work and health in 1946 in the "Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion". There, special importance is attributed to the organisation of work and the design of working conditions as well as the development of personal competences. "The way a society organises work, working conditions and leisure should be a source of health, not disease. Health promotion creates safe, stimulating, satisfying and enjoyable working and living conditions" (WHO, 1946b, p. 3).

In view of physiological processes, attention to a health-promoting work situation becomes increasingly important with increasing age. There is essentially agreement on the basic features of a health-promoting work situation and on starting points for health-related interventions in the world of work. In detail, however, questions remain unanswered: Which individual working conditions are relevant to health and how? Are non-existing stresses the same as health-promoting working conditions?

Preconditions of farmer in mental health

The legal framework in Germany is set by workplace health promotion, occupational health and safety and workplace integration management. An age component is not formulated. With regard to workplace health policy, there is a deficit in implementation, especially in the small company setting.

According to a survey conducted as part of a master's thesis in the field of psychology, half of German farmers are severely mentally stressed.

Burnout: Farmers have a 4.5 times higher rate; Anxiety: Farmers have more than twice as much additional anxiety; Depression: 3 times higher probability of suffering from depression compared to the general population. To date, there are no reliable figures on suicide in Germany.

One-sided specialised farms have a higher risk and are generally more dissatisfied (feeling that they have no alternatives in everyday life). The smaller structured farms with diversification and different sources of income are more satisfied and see more alternatives. Lack of future prospects. Regarding age, there may be an increased risk group 50 plus - decreasing physical capacity, children go other ways, investments no longer make sense.

A general remark happening as well in agricultural setting: Women see problems more quickly, more openly and more honestly - they are also more willing to get help. Men swallow longer because they find it difficult to show weaknesses.

Existence of stigma associated with mental health

There is still stigma about mental health, especially in rural areas. Mental health is not yet seen as that we all have a vulnerable mind and for others, the threshold for seeking help is high. This may be even stronger in a farming sector, used to crisis and led through tough times by strong men and women.

Of course all farmers know that their family farm is in immediate additional and existential crisis as soon as the leader needs to rest due to physical or psychological restrictions. This may not be a good reason to avoid listening to warning signals but it explains the underestimation of the possible danger on personal, family and business level.

„Heat Map“ of Today's Farming

In this respect, the agricultural and food system is characterized by numerous contradictions and tensions. It is in the midst of the global change that has completely engulfed our civilization and at the beginning of a far-reaching transformation process. Out of responsibility for present and future generations, there is only a very short deadline for this process.

One thing is certain: the transformation is a task for society as a whole. Ecological action must be translated into economic success and thus also into social recognition. In all efforts to achieve the strategic EU goals of biodiversity and farm to fork, agriculture cannot and must not be left on its own.

Drought, heavy rain, storms: increasing extreme weather events can quickly endanger the stability of an agricultural business. But uncertain market conditions can also reduce liquidity. Individual and adapted risk management is therefore important, especially when using borrowed capital, and is also becoming more and more of an issue in loan discussions.

Farmers find themselves in the middle of accelerated crisis of their surrounding and working environment such as:

- markets
→ pressure to lower production cost
- society and politics
→ pressure to comply with the wishes of society and needs of states
- climate, soil, water, weather
→ pressure to keep up agricultural production together with maintenance of landscape, biodiversity and environmental protection
- family and personal issues
→ pressure to keep a work-life-balance and to offer sufficient family income

Farmers are faced with multiple challenges. There may be some positive aspects as the other side of the coin, but the problems seem to have far more weight. It is not easy to find ways to eliminate threats to the mental health of agricultural entrepreneurs.

The increase in mental health support and the mental health know-how of agricultural entrepreneurs, increase in appreciation, a fair price from the market, the increase of influence opportunities, and digitalization could be seen as basis to create opportunities to support the mental health of agricultural entrepreneurs - but the basis appears weak at the moment.

5. Mental health in the German policy making: agenda-setting initiatives

The reasons why mental illnesses have accounted for an increasing share of the diagnosis and treatment spectrum in Germany over the last ten years are complex and are currently being intensively discussed by epidemiologists.

In order to improve the data basis on the mental health of the population, the Federal Ministry of Health has funded a comprehensive supplementary survey on mental health as part of the Robert Koch Institute's study on the health of adults in Germany. In addition to a differentiated recording of mental disorders, information on the utilisation of facilities of the care system should also be obtained. Currently, the data from the survey phase are being evaluated.

The increased demand for psychiatric and psychotherapeutic health care services that goes hand in hand with the epidemiological trend poses great challenges for the health care system and social insurance. For the effective and future-proof design of the complex health care system, well-founded scientific findings are needed. For this reason, mental illnesses are also the subject of many funding priorities in the Federal Government's health research programme.

With the increase in diagnosed and treated mental illnesses, the importance of prevention and health promotion in this area is also growing. The promotion of mental health primarily takes place where people live together, i.e. in families, in day-care centres and schools, at the workplace or in retirement homes. Accordingly, the promotion of mental health and the prevention of mental disorders is a cross-policy task that affects all areas of society.

As mental illnesses are still taboo in many places in parts of the population, they trigger uncertainty and fear. Accordingly, those affected feel stigmatised and marginalised. Such a social climate of fear and taboo in dealing with mental illnesses hinders the use of preventive potential.

In this sense, prevention and health promotion are closely linked to the problem of stigmatisation of mental illness. The Federal Ministry of Health therefore promotes public education about the

nature and treatability of mental illnesses and works to protect those affected by them from stigmatisation and exclusion.

To this end, it promotes a variety of measures, including the **Action Alliance for Mental Health**. The Alliance is committed to educating and informing the population about mental health and against the stigmatisation of mental illness. To this end, it networks nationwide and regional initiatives and implements its own projects in cooperation with its alliance partners. More than 70 organisations, associations and institutions are now involved nationwide.

More information can be found on the internet at www.seelischegesundheit.net.

Action Alliance for Mental Health

The Action Alliance for Mental Health is a nationwide initiative that was launched in 2006. In the meantime, more than 140 member organisations are involved, among them mainly self-help associations of those affected and relatives of people with mental illnesses. Numerous associations from the fields of psychiatry and health promotion are also involved and network for the common cause - the destigmatisation of mental illness. In order to achieve this goal, the Action Alliance initiates projects and campaigns that are passed on to the public and the member organisations. In this way, all forces are bundled for the greatest impact.

The Action Alliance

- promotes a nationwide network of anti-stigma initiatives, education and prevention projects.
- coordinates the annual Mental Health Week around the WHO World Mental Health Day on 10 October.
- advocates for objective and non-stigmatising media coverage.

The Alliance initiated as well the Green Ribbon campaign in Germany. Since its foundation, the Mental Health Action Alliance has been sponsored by the German Society for Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Psychosomatics and Neurology (DGPPN) and is largely financed by donations.

Quality of the therapeutic relationship

The quality of therapeutic relationships is of particular importance in psychiatric treatment and help for participation. The expert contributions in this volume of the "Aktion Psychisch Kranke" AKP (Action for the Mentally Ill) address criteria of good relationship quality and optimisation possibilities from the perspectives of various experts from science, medical care and politics.

6. Strategies and initiatives to improve farmers' mental health

As in all companies, farmers and their employees are exposed to psychological stress at work. These can include, for example, lack of time, frequent disruptions or lack of support from superiors.

Work without mental stress is inconceivable. However, their effects can be influenced. Well-designed working conditions can promote the health of employees and reduce stress. Optimal working conditions are also an economically significant factor, because they mean an increase in productivity and in the attractiveness of the employer.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act also requires a risk assessment of mental stress.

Training on mental health

At the moment, there are trainings available for agricultural entrepreneurs that addresses mental health issues based on varying situations.

Within the meetings and phonecalls related to the projects topic it was highlighted that it is very important not to put everything in one basket. For instance often depression is not recorded as an explicit illness but it requires professional help and the usual processes: Diagnosis and therapy; doctor-psychiatrist-psychological therapist.

Within this project as well as in offers from SVLFG, Farmers associations, other institutions as well as private initiatives it seems to be common understanding that it is worth to raise awareness and enable people to be sensitive for themselves as well as people around them. It is very good and helpful to stay close and in touch, to care for. At the same time therapy needs to be kept in the hands of experts.

For the farmers and farmers families there are plenty of offers for the first stages:

- prevention of crisis
- first contact points in the event of urgent crisis

For example SVLFG set up a training and seminar offer in Bavaria (NUTS1) specifically addressing succession from perspective of the succeder as well as of the donor: from a wholistic health perspective.

In this project it is stated that Health concepts in the setting of Bavarian agriculture and forestry are important because they hold transfer potential for family businesses in other sectors of the economy and for socio-political approaches to demographic change. Because:

- Nowhere else in society is there an occupational group like farmers¹ who work far beyond the statutory retirement age. Probably no other social insurance scheme has proportionately insured as many older people as the Social Insurance for Agriculture, Forestry and Horticulture.
- Small family farms are characteristic of Bavarian agriculture and forestry. Characteristic of this is the overlapping of family and business affairs. This holds opportunities for individual health, but also risks. Small family farms also predominate in other sectors of the economy.
- The social insurance for agriculture, forestry and horticulture, especially in Lower Bavaria/Upper Palatinate and Swabia (LSV NOS²) is a health actor with special advantages. On the one hand, the individual social insurance institutions are united under one roof and thus are likely to have comparatively fewer interface problems.

Among other offers more related to physical health SVLFG is offering the following trainings in year 2022:

Business handover - a health issue

- The arrangements for the transfer of a business have a major impact on health.
- For women and men who are handing over or have already handed over a business.

Topics:

What will become of my life's work?

What do I expect from the handover?

Four-day seminar led by social educators/therapists.

Own contribution: Accommodation and catering costs of the respective seminar institution.

Training and recovery week for caring relatives

- One-week stay in a seminar facility.

Topics:

Tips and tricks for caring
offers for one's own health
information from the agricultural care insurance fund

Prerequisite: The family member providing care or the person in need of care are SVLFG-insured or Need for care due to an agricultural accident at work.

Personal contribution: 99 euros

Seminar "Talking to people after traumatic events"

- Two-day seminar led by psychologists/social pedagogues
- For persons who have contact with traumatised people from the agricultural sector due to their voluntary and/or professional commitment and can imagine approaching them in difficult situations.

The task of the seminar participants is not to act therapeutically, but to offer help in everyday matters.

Seminar "Stress Management"

- Four-day seminar led by social therapists.
- How do you learn to deal with stressful situations in everyday life and keep life and work in balance?

Aim:

avoidance of stress consequences
improvement of health-related quality of life

Own contribution: Accommodation and catering costs of the respective seminar institution.

Individual case coaching by telephone

- Support in times of crisis by specially trained psychologists by means of telephone or, if necessary, personal conversations.
- An offer for the prevention of mental disorders and the promotion of mental health.

Aim:

Individual help
support in the event of mental stress.

Prerequisite: You must be of age and registered as an entrepreneur, a family member or a insured with the SVLFG.

Crisis hotline

Quick telephone help for particularly stressful moments. Experienced psychologists are on hand to advise callers. Available daily around the clock.

Furthermore SVLFG offers in close cooperation with the Bavarian Farmers association (Bayerischer Bauernverband, BBV):

Related to farmers: Pilot project "Mit uns im Gleichgewicht" ("With us in balance") of the SVLFG as a health service. Following the introduction of extended preventive benefits as part of the 2017 Pension Flexibility Act.

Thereby promoting health-promoting counselling such as mediation and socio-economic counselling.

Mediation:

Bridge to conflict resolution in the family and the workplace

Socio-economic counselling:

Plan your future sustainably

These two offers are subsidised with 10 hours as part of the SVLFG's prevention benefit after the insurance law requirements have been checked.

Relevant institutions caring for mental health:

Caritas:

<https://www.caritas.de/hilfeundberatung/onlineberatung/behinderung-und-psychische-erkrankung/adressen>

and help for relatives of mentally ill people:

<https://www.lapk-bayern.de/> Tel.: 089 51086325 (Bavaria)

<https://www.bapk.de/angebote/seelefon.html> (Germany)

<https://www.krisendienste.bayern/>

<https://www.svlfg.de/krisenhotline>

<https://www.svlfg.de/einzelfallcoaching>

<https://www.svlfg.de/online-training>

<https://www.bayerischerbauernverband.de/Zukunftsplanung>
Bavarian Farmers' Association: Monday telephone

7. Conclusion

The psychological strain on people in the "green sector" is sometimes very high. In this context, the Social Insurance for Agriculture, Forestry and Horticulture (SVLFG) as leading actor as well as other institutions and initiatives offer support and services available for those affected.

The offers include stress management seminars, training and recovery weeks for caring relatives, various online health trainings, individual case coaching by telephone as well as a crisis hotline that is available around the clock 365 days a year.

The stresses in workplaces are shifting more and more from physical to psychological. Deadline pressure and workload are increasing. Family challenges, such as caring for relatives, are often added to the mix. Constant physical and mental overload can endanger health. In our fast-moving and demanding times, a balanced relationship between tension and relaxation, between demands and freedom, between work and leisure time is an important prerequisite for mental well-being and health.

If this balance gets out of whack, the mental life also gets into an imbalance - which can then also have consequences for the physical health. If such an imbalance has occurred, farmers should not shy away from seeing a specialist. The first point of contact is always the attending doctors, with whom farmers can then seek the right way of treatment.

It is very important for a wholistic overall health that farmers exercise and train. It is important that all farmers know that they can rely on others and ask for help when they notice that they are not doing well. Farmers should be aware that they are not alone and it is important to always keep this in mind.

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Basic Interviews in 06/2022 and 07/2022:

Representative of NGO for help in depression

Representative of SVLFG

Representative of Bavarian Farmers association

Main Content and feedback additional to the content included above:

- missing awareness for mental health issues
- Conflicts between partners, divorce, neglect of the animals, lack of motivation for the daily has a negative effect on the economic figures.
- often depression is not recorded as an explicit illness, but it requires professional help and the usual processes: Diagnosis and therapy; doctor-psychiatrist-psychological therapist.
- depression is per se very treatable: anti-depressants & psychotherapy
- typical symptoms of depression: Tired but not sleepy; Hopeless, hopeless, listless
- Rural areas may tend to be at greater risk, as access to professional treatment is more difficult here
- possible: even greater stigmatisation in rural areas
- Possibly especially in agriculture: low willingness to talk about own feelings
- Important: differentiation between illness vs. reaction to life circumstances
- There is a predisposition to depression, which can manifest itself through work overload. However, the predisposition is the basis/cause.
- described in very practical terms: The predisposition is there, I am in a situation of work overload and economic difficulties: this may trigger the depression.
- "mental health" could be a useless term in German language, since almost everything falls under it: from dementia to arachnophobia to addiction.
- Illnesses - disorders - predispositions
- Remarkable: 8% of the population had a depression in the last 12 months (annual prevalence); roughly extrapolated, 5 million people in Germany are affected, but not all of them are in treatment.
- Women tend to suffer from depression twice as much as men.

- 2021: 9,000 suicides; 200,000 suicide attempts; 50% based on depression, i.e. 100,000 suicide attempts in combination with depression. So 2% of 5 million depression sufferers