

SUCCESS STORIES

Empowerment through self-knowledge

This case tells the story of a new farmer who moved to the countryside with his family to realise his dream. The demands of the business, his workload and the unexpected serious illness of his son, collectively these situations impacted on family relationships which led to divorce.

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Having to take care of his sick son, running the farm with debts and living in a rural area became a situation that became a barrier for him to the point that he felt he could not cope or manage. However, thanks to finding the right people he started to attend therapy sessions. This supported him to work on his negative thoughts and helped him to reorganise a life for which he felt he had not been fully prepared.

Name of the interviewed	Promoter 1
Type of farming activity	Olive Grove
Mental health issue and affecting factors	<p>MH issue: Anxiety and Depression.</p> <p>The main factors that led to this situation are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity uncertainty. • Extreme dedication to the activity. • Indebtedness. • Living in a rural area. • Family reconciliation: family life and activity.

What is your story?

This case is about a farm worker who had the opportunity to buy a farm in the Sierra de Segura area. He decided to leave his job and move with his family from Jaén (Capital of the Province) to Segura (rural area). To do this he got a loan, leaving him with a serious debt with the financial institution. For him it was to fulfil his dream of being independent and becoming a businessman. At the same time as he began to take over his new farm, he also had the opportunity to work as an employee on another farm as a foreman. This job would complement his family's income, so he decided to accept this opportunity.

A few years after starting this process, his son began to develop a liver disease, and after many visits to the doctor, it was decided that a transplant was necessary. The farmer had to devote time to his sick son and began to have problems in the company where he worked, as well as continuing to manage his farm. The situation became so complicated and demanding that he had to stop working as an employee. He had to continue caring for his son while managing his farm. The farmer is in debt for the purchase of his farm and cannot give up farming.

This situation ended up undermining the couple's relationship, his wife often complained that she feels alone in looking after the child and the trips they have to make to the doctor far from their hometown. He cannot always go with them to the doctors or stay for long periods in hospital. This situation becomes entrenched until his partner decides that she wants to separate because she has met someone else.

After the separation, the farmer finds himself with the responsibility for the farm and his son, which leads to anxiety and frustration crises, he feels tied to the farm and the municipality where he has moved to, which does not offer him solutions to manage a situation in which he feels trapped..

He feels useless, in his difficult situation, without solutions or resources to cope with the situation, and experiencing depression and anguish. He stated

"I am not able to manage my day-to-day life".

The opportunity to receive help and to attend therapy sessions arose through the schoolteacher who identified that the son is depressed. After talking to the farmer and identifying the situation that father and son are going through, the school teacher gives them the opportunity to attend a Psychologist with whom the school usually works,

Handling the situation

As the work began, several signs of a mental health problem were identified. Phrases such as, "I am not responding as I used to", were common. Other signs associated with this condition are behavioural change and emotional change. If anger is more present (very connected with anxiety), or I am frustrated, more irritable (I get angry often), changes in sleep patterns, or changes in eating (I eat more or less). These are all warning signs that something is wrong. Frustration (I can't) or negative emotions can be a sign (I can't, I'm tired, I can't stand it,..). Another sign is to stop doing things such as going out, not meeting friends, not tolerating noise, avoiding effort, and voluntary isolation. Being aware of these signs can help a person to realise that something is not right.

When a person is in the middle of the problem or difficult situation it is not easy to identify these changes, so social support from family or friends can help to identify these changes. The environment and the people that live in it can recognise the emerging difficulties and alert the person to it and be supportive.

Symptoms: Lack of attention, distractions. Saying things like I am NOT capable, I can't, I am frustrated, I am not the same as before. With limiting thinking, all or nothing, I will never do well in life.

For this type of anxiety-depression, and specifically for this case, several support initiatives have been developed that try to provide solutions to the problems that cause it:

- Doing physical sports activities can help to release neurotransmitters such as endorphins, dopamine that generates joy and satisfaction. Sport helps these processes. For depressions it is also recommended, since depression leads to apathy and not wanting to do anything, sport takes away this predisposition. With activity we get people moving and help them to get out of a phase of inertia and passivity.
- Do pleasurable activities, reproduce stimulating activities that we know they like, or encourage them to do new things that they might like.
- It is important to take care of the diet and nutrition. In the case of anxiety, psychoactive substances such as sugar, caffeine, chocolate, should be eliminated.
- It is very important to control and manage thoughts, in particular irrational thoughts (all or nothing, everything goes wrong,..), using positive mental messages and emotional reasoning. It is necessary to work on such thoughts and feelings to avoid depressive symptoms.
- Muscle relaxation and breathing for anxiety, a way of creating positive mindful moments..
- Generating routines and finding solutions to problems.
- Psychotherapy.
- Psychopharmacology.

Based on this, with this case, we started by generating a list of his needs, trying to ask for help from social work, looking for extracurricular activities for the child, and hiring a support person in the mornings to help him with the child to go to school and prepare meals. Teaching him to adapt to a new situation with the difficulties of being in a rural area.

We had to overcome the negative thoughts after the separation, she had to go through her grieving phase for the loss of her partner and help him to accept his son's illness, generating a therapy for the child's treatment.

Conclusion and tips

In this case, the predisposition of "I can't" has been changed to the realisation that "I am capable, and I can do this", and the tools have been generated that make him feel capable of facing any situation. In addition to controlling the situation, he has created a social network of new friends. He sees himself as capable of doing what he sets out to do. He has the capabilities and only has to put his energy into achieving his goals.

Tips to other farmers

"Farmers are people".

"Self-assessment is fundamental".

"Only by asking ourselves how do I feel? We will know if we are doing well or not".

Farmers tend not to show weakness, they believe they should not show vulnerability. Like everyone else they have insecurities, frustration, and they have fears. They need to evaluate themselves and analyse their attitude to their work situations. They need to get away from the roland perception of the hard farmer, they need to normalise self-analysis and how changes affect their behaviour and emotions.

This case is closely related to some of the factors identified in the Summary Report as factors that can affect farmers' mental health:

- The uncertainties of an activity that sometimes generates indebtedness that ties up the farming enterprise
- The extreme dedication required by the farming enterprise often making it difficult to reconcile and balance work and family life.
- Belonging to a rural community where it is sometimes not easy to find psychological or service support.

But this is compounded by a serious episode that affects the health of his son, generating a situation that is difficult to manage and for which one is not always prepared. This situation put his relationship with his partner to the test, ending in a divorce which was the turning point that plunged the farmer into a situation of grief, guilt, frustration, denial, and blockage.

As our promoter says, identifying the signs, self-assessing and being aware that something has changed in behaviour or emotions can alert us to the fact that we are in the early stages of a mental health problem.

This self-assessment is the best tool for prevention, if we add to this tool for controlling our thoughts, and if we are prepared to recognise whether or not we need help, we will be able to overcome many of the situations that may present themselves to us as farmers. But it is also important to have a social environment that helps us to identify a significant change in our behaviour or emotions.

We have seen how doing sport, pleasurable activities, taking care of our diet, creating routines and planning can help us in stressful and anxious situations. Identifying our needs and defining a route to satisfy them can be a solution, as in this case. For this we can always count on professionals to help us when we feel unable to do so and when we find ourselves blocked.

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A Farmer's Journey: The Greatest Challenge

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This case narrates the experience of a farmer who manages a large family farm, including leasing land from third parties and providing services to other farmers. His separation from his wife, having to manage their family environment with two children in custody and suffering from a degenerative illness, all these situations have contributed to him feeling overwhelmed.



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This case narrates the experience of a farmer who manages a large family farm, including leasing land from third parties and providing services to other farmers. His separation from his wife, having to manage their family environment with two children in custody and suffering from a degenerative illness, all these situations have contributed to him feeling overwhelmed.

The farmer initially came for consultation to overcome the grief of the loss of his wife, and with the aim of organising his new family structure and work situations. But after a short time, his degenerative disease got increasingly worse, resulting in him not being able to work. Also he has to reduce his farm investment and lease his land to other family members.

Knowing that his illness was getting worse, he had to maintain constant treatment. With this worry about his illness he also had to overcome his fear of death, rebuild his emotional life, plan the future for his daughters and fight against thoughts of incapacity and frustration, building upon the idea and the thought of living his life to the fullest.

Name of the interviewed	Vanessa Pérez (Psychologist)
Type of farming activity	Olive Grove
Mental health issue and affecting factors	<p>MH issue: Anxiety and Depression.</p> <p>The main factors that lead to this situation are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of family relationships. • Degenerative illness that incapacitates him. • Activity as a constraint to escape from the rural world. • Lack of fulfilment in the activity. • Feelings of not being socially valued.

What is your story?

The Farmer with two daughters in the process of a divorce by mutual consent. He decided to attend consultation sessions because his marriage has failed, he feels frustrated and unable to take joint custody of the two girls, and his rural environment located in a very small village makes him feel restricted. "I have no one to go out with and distract me" and the farmer has a degenerative disease.

We started working with the issue of routines to learn how to manage household activities, farming activity and having his daughters. In order to help the girls who have not adapted well to the changes brought on by the divorce proceedings, an agreement is reached between the parents to include them in their legal consultations.

Despite this situation and his degenerative illness, the farmer continues to run his farm, which is a large property that provides him with a comfortable economic situation.

Initially, work began on adapting to the new situation, but after the first few months in which everything was going quite well, he underwent a medical check-up and it was found that there had been an upturn in his degenerative process, which resulted in the total loss of sight in one eye and partial loss of sight in the other. This led to the recognition by the medical authorities of a permanent incapacity for work.

As a result, he is divorced, must manage a large property, has two daughters aged 6 and 10 and is permanently disabled as a result of a degenerative disease. This represents a radical change in his life, saying "what am I doing with my life", "I feel evicted": socially, because he feels that his friends have left the village, familiarly, because he feels alone after the separation, physically, because of his degenerative illness and the disability he has been recognised as having.

He recognises that he must give up work, cancelling the leases he had, he stops doing work for third parties and has to rent his property to a relative. He went from being an active and self-employed farmer with plans and objectives to a person with physical limitations that prevented him from working. His professional opportunities are very limited, he said "what's left for me to sell coupons at the age of 40", he wants to feel active "I can't be unemployed". He has gone from being an active person to being passive by obligation.

In this case, having his legacy in the countryside obliges him to remain in a rural environment. In this case, even as a farmer, he does not feel satisfied, he does not feel gratified by the contact with other people, he does not find satisfaction in the work he has done.

Handling the situation

Everything began with a process of mourning after the separation and divorce, going through the normal phases of denial, and not accepting what has happened, then moving into a phase of rage, which ended in a depression when he realises that his wife will not return to his life. Added to this is his degenerative illness, the limitations he encounters, generates an anxiety crisis, mainly due to the fear and frustration of the future that awaits him.

We focused on resolving his problems with his ex-wife and to make plans for custody arrangements for their daughters and we encouraged him to rebuild his emotional life by helping him to find a new partner. He met a lady from London, and they began a relationship regularly, seeing each other.

Faced with his feelings of frustration at going from being an active person to being disabled, he considers taking a training course in key competencies in search of a job opportunity, but he considers that the opportunities that may arise are temporary and that at any moment he could have a relapse that could incapacitate him even more. This makes him feel frustrated because he does not feel fulfilled.

However, the farmer knows that the status of his health is going to become increasingly worse, and that sooner or later he will end up in an assisted bed or in a hospital, with little chance of seeing his daughters and probably dying alone. Therefore, as time goes by, he requires continuous treatment, as he relapses into negative thoughts from time to time, which is why he needs regular support.

The development of the therapy is based on these activities:

- Active maintenance of family and social support (friends).
- He feels that his daughters will be married when he is gone.
- Management of fear of death and how to die.
- Reducing his anxiety with relaxation, pleasurable activities.
- Distract the mind and activate the body with exercise.
- Setting short-term goals, making plans with his family and girlfriend.
- Cognitive therapy to manage thoughts and reduce symptoms.

These initiatives help to manage thoughts of "my life is slipping away", "I am going to die", "I am worthless", "I have no way out", "how my daughters are going to manage my estate when I die". But there is a need for continued support in the daily fight against the disease, and in supporting the idea of a full life and that he has created a legacy to offer to their daughters in the future.

Conclusion and tips

Initially the therapy was very positive with clinical discharge, allowing her to manage the situation after separation. However, the evolution of his illness generates relapses, with negative thinking.

The predisposition to depression in these conditions is likely to lead to periodic relapses. Therefore, even if we have improvements, we know that the treatment is permanent.

For a permanent situation, it is necessary to set short-term goals that get them fulfilled and recognised by their community or society. Farmers are not aware of the importance of their work as food providers.

Tips to other farmers

"We have to focus our lives on the thought that we are satisfied with what we are doing, all jobs have their good and bad sides". Being a farmer has positive aspects such as autonomy and independence that should be valued. It is a physical job that allows farmers to maintain a healthy state, in a pleasant environment that connects them with nature.

"In the case of illness, it is very important to prepare one's thoughts to overcome adversity, to have a permanent fighting attitude, to have short-term goals. "It is important to be prepared for what is to come, to predispose the attitudinal strategy with which we will face whatever the future holds".

Here we can see some factors described in the national reports:

- Lack of social recognition sometimes implies a lack of fulfilment on the part of farmers.
- Life in rural areas can mean a lack of access to support services for dependency.
- Farming life requires the farmer to be in the field, making it impossible to seek out alternative outlets.
- Lack of work-life balance and problems in maintaining stable family relationship.

In this case we have seen the case of a farmer from a large farm, who suffers a marriage break-up, finds himself alone with his two daughters and with a degenerative illness that makes him unable to work as a farmer. Divesting and renting out his land are the only option left to him, making him feel less useful, a person who does not feel fulfilled, and whose expectations for the future lead to anxiety and depression.

In these cases, the help of a professional is essential, knowing that your life is going to be limited by an illness generates constant frustration and therefore the control of negative thoughts must be managed with continuous and permanent support.

Active family support, having a social environment, planning for the future, rebuilding your love life, doing activities, having small short-term goals and feeling that you have a full life in spite of the circumstances, is essential to take your mind off these negative thoughts.

It is important for farmers to find satisfaction in their activity, and to connect with the social function they perform in order to generate an awareness of recognition, beyond the tasks they carry out, for the impact of their work on the life of the society to which they belong. Autonomous work, freedom and connection with a natural environment are also factors to value as a farmer.

In this case, personal attitude is fundamental, maintaining a permanent resilient and fighting spirit, finding satisfaction in daily tasks, exercise and pleasurable activities are core elements to face the future.

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Training as a mental health tool for young farmers

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This case study shows the importance of training in the technical and management areas necessary for successful farming. The more prepared farmers are, the more tools that are made available the greater the opportunities to prevent situations of uncertainty, which should result in fewer situations that are difficult to manage from an emotional or mental health point of view.



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Our promoter is a new farmer who has to take over the reins of the family business due to his father's illness. Having no previous experience in managing a farm causes him frustration and confusion, which leads him to a situation of continuous stress and lack of self-esteem, and he has to hand over many decisions to his workers. The desire for self-improvement led him to enrol in a vocational training programme in which he acquired the knowledge and skills that eventually led him to take over the farm in a satisfactory manner.

This case study shows the importance of training in the technical and management areas necessary for successful farming. The more prepared farmers are, the more tools that are made available the greater the opportunities to prevent situations of uncertainty, which should result in fewer situations that are difficult to manage from an emotional or mental health point of view.

Name of the interviewed	Anonymous
Type of farming activity	Olive grove and cereals.
Mental health issue and affecting factors	<p>MH issue: Anxiety, frustration, confusion, lack of self-esteem.</p> <p>The factors that most affected this case are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolation from activity. • Long self-learning cycles. • Uncertainty of the activity. • Lack of technical knowledge.

What is your story?

Our case study person is a professional with a background in economics, who belongs to a family with long experience in agriculture, who owns an average Olive and Cereal farm. While working in Madrid in a multinational company, his elderly father falls ill, a situation that makes it difficult for him to continue farming. For this reason, our case study person decides to leave his job to take over the family business.

From the beginning, our promoter found himself alone, with only the help of his foreman. The process of adaptation was complicated, being used to planning and working in very professional teams, he finds himself in a field where conditions are uncertain and where he has to adapt to new situations all the time.

From the beginning, he shows a total lack of technical knowledge, he does not know when the tasks have to be carried out, he does not know the characteristics of the farm, the importance of irrigation and how to plan them, the nutritional and phytosanitary products, as well as the processes of commercialisation and negotiation with suppliers.

In these early stages he is lost, frustrated, and has to delegate many of the decisions to the farm workers, who help him on the basis of how things have always been done. Our person tries to learn, but the need to adapt means that he does not fully understand the routines and processes. He perceives that every year is different, that suppliers provide him with contradictory information, and he ends up not understanding what criteria he must apply in his decision-making processes. All this ends up frustrating him, causing stress and permanent confusion.

One day, talking to another young farmer, he tells him that he attended the Marmolejo School of Vocational Training for two years, obtaining certification as a Higher Agricultural Technician. He sees this new colleague as a well-prepared person with clear ideas, and since then he has not stopped thinking about whether the training could help him to resolve his confusion. He thinks that dedicating two years and combining work and training is going to be complex. However, he prefers to take on this extra work rather than continue with the situation he is in. So, he decides to enrol in Marmolejo the following year and start a training process that should give him the knowledge, skills and abilities to manage the farm according to his own criteria.

Handling the situation

He enrolled in the two-year vocational training course in which he has to study and take exams in various technical and administrative agricultural subjects. These include knowledge about crops, irrigation, pest management, nutrition, livestock, farm administration, labour management, machinery, mechanics, plant multiplication, phytotechnics, botany,

He talks to the teachers to inform them of his situation, and the very understanding teaching staff allows him to miss some classes, but on the condition that he takes his exams like the rest of his classmates. For two years, he makes the most of his time, as he can apply all the learning he acquires in the modules in his day-to-day life, so he attends as many classes as possible and studies with great enthusiasm and motivation, as he finds everything he is studying very practical.

After two years he feels fully trained, he feels that the great effort he has made has been worthwhile, he now has clear criteria on agronomy and agricultural business management and he feels confident and motivated to take up the reins of his professional life, with sound and solid knowledge for decision making.

Training is a fundamental tool for young farmers, who are a group more likely to suffer the difficulties of agriculture, as they have less experience and do not have sufficient tools to face the uncertainties and management of a farm, if they do not have sufficient support and tutoring.

The possibility of attending this education and training course also allowed him to meet other colleagues, exchange opinions, and interact with well-prepared teachers who supported him during the two years. This experience was highly motivational and has helped him to maintain a positive attitude towards the work he has to do, to the extent that he continues to run the family farm but has also started running his own farm.

Conclusion and tips

The desire for self-improvement and to feel in control of his decisions led him to train professionally in an activity with which he was unfamiliar. The desire to overcome frustrations and overcome stress and confusion led him to an exercise in self-improvement that required a great deal of effort and commitment. Necessity often pushes us to look for solutions; if we believe in them, we will always find rewards and experience validation.

Tips to other farmers

"We young farmers need to build our knowledge in a solid way, and to do this, in addition to obtaining information from our environment, it is always good to have a solid education that allows us to contrast the suitability of what is proposed to us, as well as allowing us to feel confident in the decisions we make".

The FARMRes Summary Report(SR) highlights the need to improve the farmer's decision-making processes and how management and planning are essential to adapt to the circumstances and uncertainties of the activity.

As we have seen in the SR, in addition to specific training for the prevention, identification and resolution of problems related to emotional health, training in professional farm management can be considered as a protective factor for mental health. Integrated farm management is considered to consist of three different areas: Self-management, work management and network management.

Therefore, professional training can become a very important solution to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills that enhance decision-making, farm management from a technical perspective that allows for better planning. This gives the farmer more confidence and self-confidence to face the difficulties that may arise.

Providing business management and personnel management training, so that farm leaders can professionalise their management and facilitate their decision making, can be very important factors from the point of view of promoting positive mental health and preventing the impact and consequences of farmers and other members of the agricultural sector experiencing mental health challenges.

Considering that the most vulnerable profiles were young farmers, women, and small farms, it is essential to bring technical training as a core tool and an opportunity for the prevention of situations affecting mental health. With more tools we have, there is better opportunities to respond to the complicated situations that may arise from time to time. This can reduce the consequences of these complications, avoiding falling into situations of stress, and reduce the risks of anxiety or depression.

FARMRes seeks to define and create prevention and self-help tools for farmers, and although the development of technical and management training is beyond the scope of the project, it is necessary to make it clear that this type of training can complement any preventive training approach related to the management of emotions and mental health. It may be interesting to provide access to platforms or vocational training courses that can ensure that this area of training is covered.

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Diana's path of resilience and self-assurance in the Vineyard

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Diana's path of resilience and self-assurance in the Vineyard

Diana is a young farmer from Tuscany who has been running her family's winery since 2008. Since she took over the farm, she began to experience anxiety due to the high levels of responsibility she was under, and a loneliness generated by leaving her friendships to move to the countryside. After several years of experiencing these feelings, in 2018 it all spiraled into depression as her children (twins) joined her life and, with them, more pressure and anxiety. It was at this point that she decided to seek professional help and, today, she is able to manage these problems more rationally.



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Name of the interviewed	Diana Lenzi
Type of farming activity	Family vineyard in Tuscany (Italy) where they produce traditional red wine known as Chianti Classico, as well as other crops such as olives for EVO and ancient grains for flour and pasta.
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Anxiety and depression, caused by strong sense of responsibility and loneliness.

What is your story?

Diana struggled at many points with anxiety and mental health issues. Her story begins when she took over the reins of her family farm in 2008. At that time, she didn't feel she was at all equipped in terms of knowledge, skills or how to run a farm. But the fact that it was a family farm, something her parents had put so much effort into for so many years, it was important for her to take over and help them, so she felt all that pressure. At the same time, her parents ran the farm in a way that was not business-oriented; it was mostly a family property, where they didn't need her to survive (her parents had their own professions).

So, first of all, she felt two great burdens: on the one hand, that she had to take care of the farm and felt a great responsibility towards her parents; on the other hand, the pressure to make this farm financially stable and viable as she was leaving her job to take care of it, so she had to make it her livelihood.

Secondly, another big problem she went through in those years was that, at the age of 23, she was living in Rome, and so were all her friends and all her social life; and in those circumstances, she left Rome to move to the countryside, where she found herself alone and isolated. And while she was going through all that, Diana felt that her friends in the capital could not understand what she was

going through. She felt misunderstood, she was living in totally different situations than her friends in the city. It was in this loneliness that the farming community came to her "rescue", with a large community of people in her area and throughout Italy, where other young people were doing the same as Diana and going through the same situations as her, creating a sense of accompaniment.

At this time, she felt as if she was in a "jar" and someone was pouring water into it, and more and more and more and more, to a point where it was not possible to breathe, a feeling of being lost, and of not being able to find a solution to any of this, that all she could do was move faster and look for the surface, a feeling of oppression and loneliness.

Handling the situation

For many years she didn't even realise she needed outside help, she just kept going and pushing herself, even though she had been surrounded all her life by many people who understood a lot about mental health: her father was Psychiatrist, her sister a Psychoanalyst and her other sister a Family Therapist. However, when she really understood that she needed professional help (for her the one that really helps you to overcome these problems) was when her twins were born, because this added a whole list of anxiety, pressure, feeling lonely, not knowing how to manage the farm and being a mother at the same time. For Diana it all ended up in a very bad depression.

When she went from crying once every few months to crying every day, she realised that something was going wrong, and she understood that she had to get help. From then on it took her 3 years to recover, because once you start with this help, you put everything into perspective: all the pressure, all the anxiety that she was feeling for the last 10 years. Having someone for those three years who helped her to understand her way of life and to understand that pressure and responsibility that she felt, made her not fall, and understanding that, in order to do things well, you have to be well too.

Conclusion and tips

Today she feels more rational, she allows herself to be sad or afraid, and at the same time she understands that being sad or afraid is only a part of it and she looks for the part of her that is happy and hopeful. Moreover, she tries to understand better what it is that makes her sad or afraid (if it is related to finances, to a coworker, to nature,), and establishes what it is she needs to do to resolve the situation..

For example, remembering some summers where it never rains, and because of that, there are no grapes, which causes financial losses for the whole year. Such circumstances naturally create anxiety which Diana experiences every night. However when it is an anxiety created by circumstances beyond personal control, it is important not to let the situation or anxiety control the person.

Tips to other farmers

First, start by seeking help from people who share your work, in the same way that her friends in Rome would never fully understand what she was going through, but her farmer friends would. Talk to people who work in the same field, because they are probably also going through the same problems, will understand, so lean on them to create a first level of support.

Secondly, there is no shame in seeking professional help. These professionals are people who have been trained and studied, and who dedicate their lives to helping these people who are struggling, and they are there for us, but we also have to allow them to help us. Seeking their help does not mean that you are going to be sick all your life. Recovery is possible with the right support. It does not even mean that you are sick, it means that you are going through a difficult period, which is sometimes shorter and sometimes longer. It is important to be decisive and to look for a person who will help you in those moments of worry and anxiety to alleviate the stress of it all, or stress.

As can be read in Diana's story, the main factors she mentions that affect her mental health coincide with those observed in the FARMRes Summary Report (SR) such as financial uncertainties and loneliness. However, there are also additional factors noted in the SR such as family responsibilities, climate change and an increase in psychological symptoms such as those experienced in recent years by Diana like anxiety and depression.

Going back to our SR, we understand how comprehensive farm business management is, therefore an important factor in preventing financial uncertainties. Such circumstances can lead to situations that can affect farmers' mental health. Also in relation to this report, we see how Diana is among several of the most vulnerable groups when she started to experience these mental health problems: young, female, inexperienced,

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Breaking the Silence: Agrisinet Network for Farmers well-being.

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Breaking the Silence: Agrisentinel Network for Farmers well-being.

The Agri-Sentinelles Network is a multi-partner network that aims to raise awareness, train and equip volunteer women and men who work in contact with farmers to get involved in suicide prevention, in order to: better identify farmers who are experiencing serious difficulties or who are in psychological distress; orient farmers to facilitate their access to an existing support system; develop attitudes adapted to farmers in fragile situations, without playing the role of social worker or psychologist.



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The Agri-Sentinelles Network is a multi-partner network that aims to raise awareness, train and equip volunteer women and men who work in contact with farmers to get involved in suicide prevention, in order to: better identify farmers who are experiencing serious difficulties or who are in psychological distress; orient farmers to facilitate their access to an existing support system; develop attitudes adapted to farmers in fragile situations, without playing the role of social worker or psychologist.

Name of the interviewed	Réseau Agrisentinelles - Stéphane Devillers from Elliance and Quentin Pauchard from La Coopération Agricole (coordinators of the project)
Type of farming activity	Le Réseau Agrisentinelles is an initiative that was launched by organisations working with farmers (advisor, researchers, chambers of agriculture, cooperatives, farmers representatives, Agri sector social insurance, etc.) in France.
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Suicide prevention initiative.

What is your story?

The Agrisentinelles network initiative was a response to the increasing prevalence of suicide among farmers, a problem that emerged only in the last 5 to 10 years. Previously, mental health issues within the farming community were often disregarded or attributed to occupational hazards and psycho-social risks. The approach to addressing suicide among farmers was primarily focused on periodic reporting, similar to accounting practices, with reports being generated every 7 years or so. While some small-scale initiatives were starting to emerge to support farmers once identified, the crucial aspect of early detection was missing.

Recognizing the need for a proactive approach to mental health in the farming community, the idea of the Agrisentinelles network was born. Several organizations came together to address this pressing issue. The Ministry of Agriculture in France played a significant role by providing funding to establish the project. At that time, the conversation around animal welfare had gained momentum in France, but the well-being of farmers had not received the same level of attention.

The Agrisentinelles network aims to fill the gap by deploying "sentinels" on the ground who can detect early signs of distress or mental health challenges among farmers. These sentinels act as a support system, providing farmers with the necessary assistance and guidance when they need it most. By actively monitoring the well-being of farmers and fostering a culture of openness and support, the network seeks to prevent tragic incidents and provide timely intervention.

The initiative represents a shift from reactive approaches to mental health in the farming community towards proactive measures that prioritize early detection and prevention. By recognizing the unique challenges faced by farmers and addressing their mental health needs, the Agrisentinelles network strives to create a supportive environment that promotes the overall well-being of farmers. With the Ministry of Agriculture's support and the collective efforts of various organizations, this initiative aims to make a positive and lasting impact on the mental health of farmers in France.

Handling the situation

The Agrisentinel Network is a comprehensive initiative aimed at addressing the critical issue of suicide prevention within the agricultural sector. With a focus on France, this network brings together various stakeholders, including agricultural professionals, healthcare providers, and support organizations, to collaborate and implement strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, and support.

The Agrisentinel Network operates based on three key pillars: surveillance, training, and support. These pillars work in conjunction to create a robust system that identifies at-risk individuals, equips individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to intervene effectively, and provides ongoing support to those in need. Let's delve deeper into each of these pillars:

Surveillance: Surveillance forms the foundation of the Agrisentinel Network's proactive approach to suicide prevention. It involves the establishment of a sentinel system comprising trained individuals who act as observers within the agricultural sector. These sentinels, often fellow agricultural professionals or trusted members of the community, are trained to recognize signs of distress and potential suicidal behavior in their peers or colleagues.

The sentinels are provided with comprehensive training to identify warning signs, initiate contact with individuals in crisis, and connect them with appropriate support services. By acting as frontline observers, the sentinels play a vital role in early detection and intervention.

To ensure privacy and data protection, the sentinels are bound by professional secrecy and confidentiality obligations. They sign an "act of commitment" that outlines their responsibilities, rights, and the importance of maintaining strict confidentiality.

Training: Training is a fundamental aspect of the Agrisentinel Network. It aims to equip individuals within the agricultural sector with the necessary knowledge and skills to identify, respond to, and support individuals at risk of suicide.

The training provided to the sentinels consists of several modules tailored to different roles and responsibilities. Module 1 focuses on general sentinel training, enabling participants to identify warning signs, contact relevant individuals, and offer appropriate advice. Module 2 is aimed at clinicians, health professionals, and social workers, providing them with specialized training in assessing suicidal potential and offering guidance. Module 3 caters to specialist clinicians, focusing on crisis intervention techniques and advanced support strategies.

Additionally, Mental Health First Aid evidenced based training is available to all citizens, providing them with essential knowledge about mental disorders, recognizing signs of distress, and offering appropriate guidance and support.

The training is designed to empower individuals within the agricultural sector to play an active role in suicide prevention and intervention, fostering a network of informed and compassionate individuals capable of making a difference in their communities.

Support: Support forms a vital component of the Agrisentinel Network, ensuring that individuals in crisis receive timely assistance and ongoing care. The network facilitates access to a range of support services, including mental health professionals, helplines, and counseling services.

Sentinels play a crucial role in connecting individuals in distress with the appropriate support services. They are trained to initiate contact with those in crisis, provide a listening ear, and guide them towards the help they need. The network works in collaboration with existing support organizations and helplines to ensure a seamless referral process.

Ongoing support and follow-up are emphasized to ensure that individuals at risk receive continued care. This includes regular monitoring, personalized care plans, and access to resources that promote mental well-being and resilience within the agricultural sector.

To ensure efficient coordination and information sharing, a departmental file is established under the aegis of the Agrisentinel Network. This file consolidates information about the sentinels, their commitments, and the overall functioning of the network. It is declared to the relevant data protection authority, ensuring compliance with privacy regulations.

In summary, the Agrisentinel Network is a comprehensive and collaborative initiative aimed at suicide prevention within the agricultural sector. Through surveillance, training, and support, the network empowers individuals within the sector to play an active role in identifying and intervening in potential crises. By fostering a network of trained sentinels, the Agrisentinel Network strives to create a culture of support, understanding, and well-being in the agricultural community, ultimately reducing the incidence of suicide and promoting mental health.

The Agrisentinel Network provides training through a collaborative effort involving a pair of individuals, including at least one clinician such as a doctor, nurse, or psychologist. This multidisciplinary approach ensures that the training incorporates both mental health expertise and practical agricultural knowledge. To date, the network has successfully trained and activated over 3000 sentinels who are actively engaged in their roles. These sentinels, equipped with specialized knowledge and skills, serve as a vigilant support system within the agricultural sector, contributing to the prevention of suicide and the promotion of mental well-being.

[Example of success stories \(in French with autogenerated english subtitle\)](#)

Conclusion and tips

Tips to other farmers

"Mental Health issues and suicide cannot remain taboo in Agriculture. It is important that everyone in the sector cooperates to stop this harmful situation."

Le Réseau Agrisentinelles, or Agrisentinel Network, serves as a powerful demonstration of how cooperation across the agricultural sector can effectively address mental health challenges. This collaboration is crucial in developing prevention mechanisms to tackle the mental health problems faced by farmers, which are primarily caused by financial uncertainty, societal pressures, and feelings of loneliness. The network has recognized that these factors can be adequately mitigated by various stakeholders who have a direct influence on farmers' well-being, such as professionals who visit farms and engage in invoicing practices.

Through the Agrisentinel Network, valuable lessons have been learned regarding the importance of collective action and shared responsibility. The network has emphasized the significance of bringing together clinicians, agricultural experts, and other relevant professionals to provide comprehensive training to the sentinels. By combining their expertise, these diverse professionals can equip sentinels with a broader understanding of the specific challenges faced by farmers and enable them to effectively identify warning signs of mental distress.

One crucial lesson learned is that the active involvement of clinicians within the training process is instrumental. Their presence ensures that sentinels receive a solid foundation in mental health assessment and crisis intervention techniques. By including clinicians in the training program, the Agrisentinel Network ensures that sentinels are equipped with the necessary skills to identify and respond to mental health issues appropriately.

Moreover, the network's success in training and activating over 3000 sentinels highlights the potential for widespread engagement within the agricultural sector. This achievement demonstrates that individuals and organizations within the sector are receptive to the importance of mental health and are willing to invest time and resources in preventive measures. The Agrisentinel Network serves as a model for other industries to establish similar initiatives that prioritize the mental well-being of their respective communities.

The network's collaborative approach has also shed light on the significant role played by various actors who directly influence farmers' lives. Professionals who visit farms, such as agricultural advisors or consultants, have a unique opportunity to assess the well-being of farmers and provide valuable support. Additionally, invoicing practices and other business interactions can be structured in a way that eases financial burdens and reduces stress for farmers. The Agrisentinel Network recognizes the potential of these actors to contribute to mental health prevention efforts and emphasizes their involvement in training and support systems.

In conclusion, the Réseau Agrisentinelles exemplifies the potential for effective cooperation across the agricultural sector in addressing mental health challenges. Lessons learned from this network emphasize the importance of collective action, shared responsibility, and the inclusion of clinicians in training programs. The network's achievements in training and activating thousands of sentinels underscore the willingness of stakeholders to prioritize mental well-being within the agricultural community. Furthermore, the recognition of the influence of various actors within the agricultural sector highlights the potential for targeted interventions to mitigate factors contributing to mental health issues. The Agrisentinel Network serves as a valuable model for fostering mental health support systems which could be upscaled and replicated at European level.

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Vojtech's support network

SUCCESS STORIES

Vojtěch's support network

Vojtěch Pýcha is a Czech young farmer that co-owns a 150-hectare arable farm operating as a limited liability company. He manages the day-to-day operations, cultivating crops like cereals, sugar beets, and soybeans. Working alongside his father, they hire seasonal workers during the harvest. However, Vojtěch faces mental health challenges due to a heavy workload, balancing farm responsibilities, studying and external representation of farmers' roles. Recently, the company suffered a €50,000 loss due to declining wheat prices, causing stress and uncertainty. Additionally he has found it difficult to share his struggles as others cannot relate to his unique circumstances.



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Name of the interviewed	Vojtěch Pýcha
Type of farming activity	Arable farm on 150 hectares
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Anxiety due to immense workload and price uncertainty.

What is your story?

Vojtěch Pýcha helped establish his family 150-hectare arable farm into a limited liability company during his studies in 2021. He has since then been responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations on the farm. The core focus of his farming activities revolves around cultivating cereals (wheat, barley sugar beets, peas and soybeans).

Working in collaboration with his father, Vojtěch actively oversees the operation of the farm. During the harvest period, they hire seasonal workers to assist with the increased workload. Vojtěch places great value on providing a positive working environment for his father. It is also important for him and to work together as a team. He explains that it is not possible to delegate a lot of the work on the farm.

Recently, Vojtěch has experienced high levels of anxiety, as there have been multiple challenges on his farm and in his life. This has had a major impact on his mental health. The substantial workload on his shoulders, managing his responsibilities as an external representation of young farmers in the Czech Republic, overseeing day-to-day operations on the farm, and simultaneously pursuing his studies, has placed a significant strain on him. The constant pressure to excel in multiple areas and the recent uncertainty of the markets has contributed to him experiencing high levels of anxiety. Recently, the company has faced a significant financial setback due to declining wheat prices, resulting in a loss of €50,000. This unexpected financial blow has caused additional stress and concerns. Facing this extensive loss overnight that could have been invested on the farm has been haunting him.

Vojtěch finds it difficult to share his struggles with others due to the uniqueness of his working situation. The demands and pressures he faces as a farmer managing day-to-day operations while also studying create a sense of isolation. The absence of shared experiences makes it challenging for Vojtěch to find understanding and support from those around him. His mental health issues persist for Vojtěch and the issue of the situation seemed to get worse with the extension of his Master Degree. This unexpected extension contributes to an already difficult situation while Vojtěch tries to find coping mechanisms.

Handling the situation

In handling the challenging situation, Vojtěch Pýcha has adopted several coping mechanisms that helped him navigate his mental health struggles. One such outlet for him is playing basketball. As a former semi-professional basketball player, engaging in this sport allows him to find solace and release stress. The physical activity and camaraderie with his teammates provide a much-needed respite from the pressures he faces. While Vojtěch has chosen not to seek professional help at this point, he remains open to the idea if his situation were to worsen.

Regarding the delegation of tasks, Vojtěch considers the option of involving his father more on the farm. However, he prefers not to overburden his father, recognizing the importance of maintaining a balanced division of responsibilities. Considering administrative tasks and legal representation, Vojtěch could delegate part of his task to a Legal solutions provider, which decreased the amount of weight on his shoulders considerably.

When asked about the flexibility of his studies, Vojtěch explains the unfortunate reality that his university does not consider individual cases or personal situations. This lack of flexibility poses a challenge for him, particularly with the course for which he had to extend his studies. The strict approach of the University's course policies limit his ability to adapt his academic pursuits to his personal circumstances.

Conclusion and tips

Through his challenging experience, Vojtěch Pýcha has derived meaningful conclusions that shape his outlook and will guide his actions in the future:

Personal Strength and Resilience: Vojtěch has come to realize the importance of relying on his own inner strength and resilience when faced with adversity. His engagement in basketball and the support he receives from his teammates have shown him the power of personal coping mechanisms. He understands that he possesses the capability to overcome obstacles and manage his mental well-being. He also explains that he would be mindful of not putting himself under so much strain in the future and not overload himself with too many commitments.

Recognizing the need for Support: Although he has not sought professional help for his situation yet, Vojtěch has learned that there may come a point when external assistance may become necessary. He understands the value of acknowledging when his mental health may worsen and being open to seeking appropriate support.

Navigating Institutional Constraints: Vojtěch has learned firsthand the limitations imposed by his University's inflexible policies. He has experienced the disappointment of personal situations being disregarded and his individual needs not being considered. Vojtěch would welcome a more individual oriented approach toward students in his situation.

Tips to other farmers

To fellow farmers, Vojtěch's advice is simple yet crucial: avoid overwhelming yourself by trying to juggle too many things at once. It's all too easy to get caught up in the never-ending demands of farm life and neglect your own well-being. Remember that your life and mental health are just as important as the work you do. If you find yourself struggling and things start to take a toll, don't hesitate to seek professional help. There's no shame in reaching out to experts who can provide guidance and support. Prioritize self-care, set realistic goals, and remember that taking care of yourself ultimately enhances your ability to manage your farm effectively. By focusing on your well-being and seeking help when needed, you can cultivate a healthier and more sustainable farming journey.

Vojtěch's experience offers valuable lessons for us to learn. Firstly, it emphasizes the importance of prioritizing mental health, even in demanding circumstances like in farming. His message to other farmers is clear and sharing his situation offers a stepstone for other to be open about the struggles they face in their daily work. Secondly, seeking support from others can provide understanding and encouragement during challenging times. While Vojtěch did not have many people to share his situation with, meeting with friends to play basketball helped him get out of his anxiety and shows the importance to not isolate when facing issues. Thirdly, finding a balance in responsibilities is crucial for sustaining well-being. Vojtech was mindful about sharing responsibilities and delegating the tasks when he can. While the situation causing his anxiety continued, he is consistently putting in place coping mechanisms.

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Respite Aid Scheme: giving the farmers a break to keep the farms running.

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Respite Aid Scheme: giving the farmers a break to keep the farms running.

The respite aid scheme was launched in 2017 on a French scale by the French agricultural social security fund MSA in collaboration with the Agricultural Replacement Service. The scheme enables farmers in a situation of professional exhaustion to be relieved by the intervention of a replacement agent on their farm to ensure the continuation of the farm.



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Name of the interviewed	Respite Aid scheme coordinated by MSA (French Agriculture Social Security) and Service de Remplacement (Farmers replacement service), name of the Interviewee: Karim CHEURFA-MOLINIER from Service de Remplacement France.
Type of farming activity	The respite aid scheme to replace farmers when they need a break.
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Professional exhaustion, mental health issues.

What is your story?

The Respite Aid Scheme for Farmers is an initiative that was established as a replacement service to support the continuation of farm activities and provide relief for farmers facing professional exhaustion and burnout. The scheme was initially tested by the French Ministry of Agriculture in 2017, with an initial budget of 4 million euros for the first year. The funds were allocated to the MSA (French Agriculture sector Social Security), which played a key role in administering the aid.

The primary objective of the Respite Aid Scheme was to alleviate the pressure on farmers, particularly animal breeders who needed to work on their farms on a daily basis. Under the scheme, a social assistant will visit the farm and provide a week of respite aid to the farmer in need. In 2018 and 2019, the aid was reduced, and the responsibility for financing the scheme was transferred to the MSA and their local social funds. The local MSA funds were given autonomy in determining the eligibility criteria, duration of aid, and the remaining cost to be paid by the farmer.

The Respite Aid Scheme represents 1% of the replacement motives of the Service de Remplacement, which amounts to 50,000 hours of work or 6,250 days. In 2022, approximately 1,800 farmers participated in the scheme. However, the initiative faces certain limitations, mainly due to the budget constraints of local MSA funds and their social programs. This can lead to restrictive conditions or a high amount of money remaining to be paid by the farmers, discouraging them from applying for this aid.

Moreover, there are additional barriers such as strained relationships between farmers and the MSA, for example, due to unpaid cotisations, as well as the tendency for farmers to keep their mental health struggles private.

The MSA and Service de Remplacement aim to utilize the Respite Aid Scheme as a last resort and instead invest in structural vacations and breaks for farmers to achieve a better work-life balance and a more sustainable profession. Indeed work-life balance is well-applied across the agri-food sector, except for the farmers themselves. The Respite Aid Scheme is considered a complementary measure that should be accompanied by additional support from social assistants and psychologists. It is noteworthy that 90% of the demands received, even from non-members of the replacement service, are met. The Service the Remplacement gives priority to these demands alongside other emergencies such as illnesses or accidents, with the aim of maintaining the farms while their owners are in distress.

The agents who are sent on Respite Schemes are experienced individuals who are prepared to handle difficult situations on the farms they are assigned to. The objective is to engage voluntary agents for these farm visits. However, the Replacement Service faces challenges in finding suitable candidates due to the lack of interest in agricultural vocations, which impact on hiring opportunities.

The financing of the Respite Aid Scheme is dependent on the MSA, and is primarily financed by farmers themselves. Although some actors in the agri-food chain have financially supported local initiatives for annual leave for farmers, they have not yet extended their support to the Respite Aid Scheme. As of now, there has not been any discussions regarding the establishment of tools like an endowment fund by actors in the agriculture sector, other than farmers, to support the scheme.

Handling the situation

The Respite Aid Scheme for Farmers aims to address the struggles faced by farmers in several ways. Firstly, it recognizes the professional exhaustion and the burnout experienced by farmers and provides them with a much-needed break by giving access to a number of days of respite aid. This temporary relief allows farmers to recharge and alleviate the immense pressure they face on a daily basis, particularly animal breeders who require constant attention to their farm activities.

Moreover, the scheme acknowledges the importance of mental health for farmers, who often face unique challenges in this regard. The Respite Aid Scheme addresses the practical aspect of farm management. By sending experienced replacement agents to intervene on farms during the respite period, the initiative ensures that the productivity and functionality of the farm are maintained. This not only allows the farmer to take a much-needed break but also ensures the smooth continuation of farm activities in their absence.

Furthermore, the scheme endeavors to create a more balanced work-life balance for farmers. While the Respite Aid Scheme is intended to be used as a last resort, the overarching goal of its leading organizations is to invest in structural vacations and breaks for farmers. By promoting a better work-life balance, these organizations acknowledge the importance of overall well-being for the social sustainability of the agricultural profession.

However, it is worth noting that the initiative does face certain limitations and challenges. The financial constraints of local MSA funds and the potential burden of costs on farmers can create obstacles for those seeking respite aid. Additionally, strained relationships between farmers and the MSA, along with the reluctance of some farmers to openly discuss their mental health struggles, can further impede the effectiveness of the initiative.

In conclusion, while the Respite Aid Scheme for Farmers may have its limitations, it represents a recognition of the struggles faced by farmers and aims to provide tangible support. By offering respite aid, access to professionals, and advocating for a better work-life balance, the initiative strives to address the multifaceted challenges encountered by farmers in their profession.

Conclusion and tips

Tips to other farmers

“When you’re feeling weary, with your head in the sand,
Pressing on the brake is no sin, it’s time to take a stand!
Don’t hesitate to reach out for helping hands,
In the face of exhaustion, let support expand!
Your well-being matters, embrace assistance, together we’ll withstand it!”

In conclusion, the Respite Aid Scheme for Farmers is a commendable initiative that takes a comprehensive approach to addressing the realities of farming activity and the struggles faced by farmers. It recognizes the immense pressure and professional exhaustion experienced by farmers, offering them a much-needed respite through temporary aid. Additionally, the scheme’s leaders focus on promoting a better work-life balance aside of the respite demonstrates a commitment to the overall well-being and sustainability of the profession.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of the funding scheme associated with the initiative. The reliance on local MSA funds and their social programs poses challenges in terms of restrictive conditions and potential financial burdens for farmers. This can prevent some individuals from accessing the aid they require. Strained relationships between farmers and the MSA, along with the hesitance to openly address mental health struggles, further complicate the implementation of the scheme.

To ensure the long-term success and accessibility of the Respite Aid Scheme, it is vital to address the funding issue as a major priority. Exploring alternative funding mechanisms, such as involvement from actors in the agri-food chain or the establishment of an endowment fund, could alleviate the financial constraints and provide more sustainable support. By overcoming these limitations, the initiative can reach a broader range of farmers and effectively alleviate the burdens they face.

Overall, the Respite Aid Scheme for Farmers deserves recognition for its comprehensive approach and understanding of the challenges inherent in farming. It serves as an important step toward supporting farmers’ well-being and acknowledging the demanding nature of their profession. By addressing the funding limitations and ensuring accessibility, the initiative can truly make a lasting impact on the lives of farmers and contribute to a healthier and more sustainable agricultural sector as a first aid tool.

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SUCCESS STORIES

Do not stay too long in the sadness. “Even if it seems difficult, you always have to find one bright side”

Leena operated Leena's home farm together with her husband. There had been chickens on the farm until 1996, after that the farm continued as a crop farm. In addition, Leena was employed outside of the farm and her husband, Timo, had a forest machinery company. In the fall of 2005, the bank manager, upon seeing the couple, asked if the matters regarding final wills were in order. During the week of Christmas, a situation emerged when a mutual will was made. In January 2006, Timo died in an accident. Leena told us her story about how she had to manage to move forward in such a situation. Although Leena has had moments where she could have been bitter, she has considered it important that there must be some solace.



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Name of the interviewed	Leena
Type of farming activity	Crop farm
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Grief for loss

What is your story?

It was January 2006. She called Timo in the afternoon about shopping needs. After the call, Leena could no longer reach her husband by phone. Timo had a habit of not answering the phone while working, but this time Leena felt something was different. She decided to do one necessary work task right away, thinking that it would be done. As the afternoon and evening progressed, Leena called her husband without an answer. She went to sleep, but woke up at two in the morning to find that Timo still hadn't come home. Leena called Timo's subcontractor, who went to the forest to see what the situation was. After a while, she received a phone call: the worst possible thing had happened, Timo had died in an accident in the forest alone while repairing the forestry machine.

Leena took the car to the work site. The rescue service and the fire department were already on location. Since the site was not far from home, the first responders were local. At first, the responders tried to prevent Leena from going to see what had happened. However, Leena was convinced that if she did not see what had happened, she would never find peace. Another bystander let her in to see what had happened. Timo had been repairing the same part that he and Leena had also repaired the night before. The helpers instructed Leena to call a support person as soon as she got home. She called her friend, who got there. It was early morning.

Leena was widowed at the age of 44. Leena's parents lived in the same home as Leena, Leena's two sons were already adults at the time of the incident and lived away from home. Leena received support from her close circle. The home seemed to have turned into a cafe, run by Leena's good friends. People brought their condolences. Leena could not eat, she sat at the end of the table and followed the activities around her. In addition to grief, she had to take care of her own health, as a diabetic, loss of appetite is dangerous. Leena received instructions from her diabetes doctor and nurse on maintaining the sugar balance, as well as support on discussing the loss of a spouse. The support given around one's illness also supported the mental coping. Crisis support was offered and Leena went to talk to the nurse once. However, Leena found the support from her close friends and family to be more meaningful than crisis support.

Handling the situation

Before Timo's death, Leena had to face various losses. The fact that she had supported others in the moment of loss gave her strength to deal with the loss of her own spouse. The support network was also strong, the roles of the supported and the supporters alternated, now Leena received support and help.

Leena is grateful that her own family, her parents, her husband's siblings and parents, and friends were close to her. One of the husbands sisters slept in the same room with Leena during the time after the incident, the boys were at home and all were together. Facing the mourner was difficult for some, others avoided Leena and sometimes Leena supported the person who was grieving.

The severe frosts started after a week of Timo's death. A water tank in the barn started to leak. The neighboring farmer came to help fix it. The following week, the toilet shower broke. The dishwasher broke. In the moment, everything seemed a lot of extra and things to be taken care of piled up. All this made Leena think that she is still needed in this world. One just needs to get going, repair and get a new faucet and a new dishwasher. In addition to the grief, these things seemed really big in the moment. Furthermore, Leena's mother's memory began to deteriorate to the extent that she could no longer manage at home. Leena's father also moved to an apartment building closer to the place where Leena's mother was being treated. In July-August 2006, Leena was alone at home for the first time in her life. In the autumn of the same year, her father-in-law passed away. Leena had to give up many of her loved ones in a short time span.

Leena thought the best solution was to give up her new associational mission, which had started in the beginning of January. She also informed the other associations in which she was active that she would no longer manage the affairs for the associations. The associations convinced Leena to stay and lighten the workload. So Leena continued to work with the associations. The tasks remained, but she received more help.

Then spring came and the sowing had to be done. The most difficult moments were the first times when a machine was put into use. After that, the other times were already easier. The first summer was terrible.

The waste oats seemed to be everywhere. Leena went to tear them sometimes with the children, sometimes with the neighbor's. The burden felt unreasonable and at times it was annoying that why did this have to happen, why did Timo have to die. However, the will to live kept she going.

In the fall, Leena was just leaving for a trip abroad with her friend, when the inspector called her. An inspection time was arranged for a time after the trip. The inspection went well, but at that point she felt that it couldn't be true.

The biggest grief related to the matter are the thoughts that, for example, the grandchildren have not known their grandfather, that is a painful thing.

Leena has had many problems with her own health. She describes her character as positive. She has her loved ones and staying active as a coping mechanism. The farm's fields have been rented to another farmer since 2015. Leena had dancing as a hobby together with her husband. Leena kept that hobby even after Timo's death. Dancing also gave meaning to live. At the moment, the hobby of dancing continues with a close person, with whom Leena has been together for several years. Nature and water are important to Leena. The sound of the bubbling rapids next to the home gives her strength. Water as an element gives peace of mind.

Conclusion and tips

Leena had always thought that you should do the things you want in life, and not wait for the retirement. This idea became stronger after Timo's death. You can't wait in life if you want to do something. Leena plans ahead and considers it important. Plans and dreams became more realistic and concrete. The plans must also take into account one's own resources. You can do it in parts and you don't have to go to the extremes.

Tips to other farmers

“Even if it seems difficult, you always have to find one bright side”

Losing a spouse is a difficult situation. The spouse is never forgotten. One shouldn't worry about the situation for too long. One has to let go of the pain, the sadness and the longing, even though that person is always there in your memories. Leena thinks it's important that Timo is addressed by the name that everyone has addressed him by, be it Timo, father, daddy... The later you leave the naming, the harder it becomes to say it. In addition, you just have to find the bright side of things, no matter how difficult it is.

When planning and thinking about the future, it's natural that thoughts don't easily stop at what if the other one of us doesn't exist. Leena brings out how she speaks in favor of getting final wills and powers of attorney in order. It helps in the moment of loss. Talk about your wishes and how you will act if there is no one else. It is not necessary to talk about this often and all the time, but it is good to have a discussion about this topic as well.

We are tested in different ways during our lives. A tree that has never been in the wind will fall after growing too tall. A tree that has experienced the wind strengthens its roots and stays upright even in storms. The resilience of our mind and its development function in the same way. Leena's story shows the strength of resilience. Difficult experiences give us the capabilities and operating models for how we can survive and cope.

For some of us, there are moments in life when we are tested beyond measure. It is important to ask for help and let people close, even when it is difficult. And keep hope and plans alive. Plans don't always have to be big. A good plan can also be, for example, a small walk planned for the evening or a call to a friend. Make goals, big or small. Remember to break big goals into parts and consider your own resources. Seek support, from professionals or close people. Grief, but also let go of grief. We always have the memories.

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SUCCESS STORIES

Learn to listen to yourself “There has to be more to life than construction while investing”

Sirkku ja Mika operate two robot milking barns in Finland. When they started on the farm in 1997, they had 20 cows, currently there are 150 cows on the farm. They have made continuous investments. The latest expansion was started in 2020 and the barn with two robots is now operational. We often hear about the end result. Sirkku ja Mika talked about their journey. Everyday was filled with work, construction, and childcare and home care. Along the way, the workload started to become too much and Sirkku became depressed. Sirkku and Mika want to remind us that there is more to life than just construction and work, also during the investment periods.



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Name of the interviewed	Sirkku and Mika Nieminen
Type of farming activity	Barn for two robots. 150 cows and a field of 120 ha with a rental reputation
Mental health issue and affecting factors	The size of the farm has been increased a lot over the years. A large amount of work and family life at the same time, 4 children.

What is your story?

Sirkku and Mika took over as the successors of Mika's parents in 1997. At first they built the house where they currently live.. The barn built by Mika's father had room for 20 dairy cows. The old barn was initially expanded so that there was a maximum of 25 cows. The youngest of the couple's children was born in 2006. In 2007, the construction of a new barn commenced on a different plot of land. In 2008, the new barn was ready, with a milking station and 80 cows. When moving to a new barn in 2008, the amount of work did not decrease rather it increased. A few years later, covered slab silos were built. There is a lot of work involved in increasing production and it takes quite a long time. Sirkku says that at that time she was working all her waking hours. During the barn-working time, the grandparents were taking care of the children. After coming back from farm work, Sirkku continued with childcare and home care. She lost all other contacts and only had enough time for errands. Mika was responsible for field work and construction work, which has been going on continuously on the farm. In 2011, Sirkku fell ill with depression and was on sick leave. At the beginning, a substitute was hired to help in the barn, so that Sirkku's workload could be reduced. Before Sirkku got sick, they had no paid labor on the farm; the grandparents were somewhat helpful.

In the years before Sirkku's illness, a lot of investments had been made on the farm, which is why the economical burden from the loan was also high. When thinking about hiring an employee, there was the pressure that they have to manage by themselves. The investments had been made in a financially sustainable way, because a lot of personal work input was used in the construction. On the other hand, the large share of personal work burden caused its own pressure. In the end, it went well in terms of getting an employee. A person from the village came to ask for a job when his previous job duties with another employer were about to end. Now he has been working on the farm for 12 years.

Over the years, the children also grew up and participated in the farm work. In 2020, the barn was expanded and there are currently two milking robots. Sirkku and Mika have their own areas of responsibility. Sirkku has planned the functional design of the barn - how to make the old barn and the extension part into a functional unit. Sirkku is primarily responsible for animal fertility, breeding and maintaining records, Mika is responsible for the economic aspects, machines and field duties. The children contribute a lot in the field work. Breeding was done using their own animals rather than buying animals. Increasing production has thus been slower, but the animal lineage is in better control. A cottage in the nearby area offers Mika and Sirkku a place for relaxation.

Handling the situation

Sirkku received therapy for depression. The decrease in the workload also had a large impact in the recovery. At first, a substitute worker was used for the farm work. The therapist understood the situation and indicated that the recovery will take time. The understanding encounter gave Sirkku permission to be sick and she immediately received a longer sick leave and a return to work was not attempted too hastily. When an employee was hired to replace her, it was a relief. Having an employee provided hope that it's not necessary to return to the same high workload. Mika's support and understanding was important in the recovery.

Mika was taking part in various non-profit organizations and he did not give them up during the construction years either. Seeing life outside of work was important. Mika feels that in the early stages of Sirkku's illness, it was difficult for him to understand the issue. It was hard to understand how and why the other person experiences things so differently.

A common goal is important. When something comes up, they are discussed and agreed upon. Work is done towards common goals usually successfully, but sometimes there are failures. You have to learn from failures, improve something or create something else.

Recovery from depression takes time. Sirkku feels that tolerance for stress is currently at a lower level than before the depression, but nowadays the ability to read oneself is better. When the stress level starts to rise, you have to pay attention to it and defuse the situation. There should be nice and pleasant things in everyday life.

Conclusion and tips

Mika describes that he thinks about issues quite differently. Much broader than before the investments. When you see life and the world, you begin to understand that we are quite small here. Understanding how much you have to learn, study and listen all the time. Everything is done for ourselves and for the next generation. At the same time, you can be yourself. You don't have to be different because of others.

Tips to other farmers

“When starting investments, you have to have enough enthusiasm with you. There has to be more to life than construction while investing.” Mika

The amount of work during construction projects is large, because during construction you also have to take care of other work on the farm and the production must remain at a good level. You have to give enough time to plan the investment and also visit different farms. Finding the right construction partners also takes time. It is important that when investing you keep in mind what you are aiming for and what you hope for. Do your own thing. One should be careful and precise with the content of the agreements and contracts. Contracts are a big entity and come with their own difficulties.

Mika says that they were instructed during the investment planning that the dimensioning of the workforce should be set to the level of future production at the very beginning. However, when planning an investment, consideration for the human resources is easily overlooked and even with proper planning unfortunate surprises can happen.

Resourcing employees is demanding. It does not make sense to keep additional employees due to cost reasons. The calculation must take into account the resources needed to start and maintain production, also in terms of working time. Another thing that is easily overlooked in resourcing are the resources needed for completing the construction projects. All the little things that remain to be done at the same time when production is already being started in the new building.

When more animals are purchased for the farm, the risks must be known. Even if the cows are really good, it is not a guarantee that, for example, the udder structure of the animals is robot-operable. In the costs related to the purchase of animals, it is good to note that there is a risk that the animal will not adapt. However, once the investment is completed, production must be started as soon as possible.

Competence is highlighted during changes. Entrepreneurs need to train and study more. Both Sirkku and Mika have updated their skills over the years. Even in a large farm, each animal needs its own special care. Investing in animal health is important. Sirkku and Mika have noticed that prediction and prevention are a great “investment”, both in terms of entrepreneur and animal health.

Often, when planning investments, the economic aspects and production are taken into account. Human resources are brought up in the discussion, but it is difficult to estimate how much work there is during construction projects and to manage both the construction and the existing production. Acquire the necessary amount of employees for the increase in production after the investment is completed.

Since it is not always easy to find an employee, only a minimal effort is made to acquire an employee. You have to focus properly in recruiting and in finding an employee; the effort is a long term investment and adds significant value. If you are investing in the production, I hope that when making the calculations related to the investment, you realistically consider the amount of work and

the need for employees. An entrepreneur must have time to sleep. Sirkku's and Mika's tip, that there is more to life than just work and construction during investment periods, is a valuable one.

If you feel that you're working all of your waking hours or you don't have time to recover from work, stop! Asking for help is brave. It takes courage to go to the doctor and discuss your own coping skills. It is courage to notice that there is too much work. It is courage to hire an employee. If your financial situation is such that hiring an employee does not seem possible, ask for help planning your finances. The time to ask for help is always good and right.

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Help is available for financial stress. “Doing things starts to go better when you remember that there are alternatives”

Farmers' financial stress is often a comprehensive issue that can be a widespread issue. Financial stress also affects the personal life of the agricultural entrepreneur, the personal or/and family's livelihood. Economic challenges cause thoughts that are also related to farm continuity and transgenerational values. There has been financial stress on farms for a long time. Living in constant uncertainty and the fact that farms have to somehow plan ahead at the same time. The investments are big and they are made with an eye to the future, but it is not possible to plan the economy further than maybe a few years at the most at the moment.



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Name of the interviewed	Maija Pispä
Type of farming activity	Work Ability Coordinator, Project worker, Support the Farmer- project
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Financial stress

What is your story?

In financial stress, a certain type of avoidance behavior is typical. The behavior becomes short-tempered and stressed, sleep difficulties and other symptoms begin. In avoidance behavior, for example, you stop opening invoices because you feel that you cannot pay the invoices when there is no money in the account. There is a tendency to ignore and avoid talking about and to have it pushed out of the mind. The issue can be taken out of proportion. is quite typical. The thought that what does it matter even if this costs several hundreds, when the account is missing 50,000 all the time.

Short-sighted repair attempts are also quite common. The changes may be big, for example, the farmer changes the direction of production and hopes that the situation will improve without stopping to think about the economy: what actions should be taken to correct the financial situation. He does not create a plan. There is typically the fear of losing the farm and the family home, loss of the family inheritance, and feelings related to shame. This feeling of shame is one of the most significant factors that prevents facing financial difficulties and taking the necessary preventive actions.

Handling the situation

Help is available. There are advisory organisations from which various calculations for the financial situation are available to resolve the situation. The decisions to be made to fix the financial situations are often quite big and making them alone without professional support is difficult. It is not very likely that farmers will end up with reasonable solutions alone in financial stress. Stress causes farmers thoughts to be limited and it can be difficult to see different options. Alone, farmers probably will not even notice all the possible solutions and alternatives that exist. In the Support the Farmer -project, for example, they can help at the beginning by breaking down all the core aspects of the farm enterprise and looking at all the things that impact on. Often there is more to it than just economics. They map out whether there are issues related to health or farm production in the background, whether training, health care or what is needed. Sometimes financial difficulties can also be caused by an excessive amount of work, in which case production cannot be used to its potential. Things are thought about on a case-by-case basis, there are many options for different situations. When the farmer is tired, the Support the Farmer -project is an important factor in order to get started with what is needed. Training sessions are organized by several organizations, there are many advisers, accounting firms and accountants that can be of help. It is important to find out what causes the financial problems. After this, the situation can start to improve and the farmer can progress. There is a lot of different and varied support available.

Conclusion and tips

The important thing in moving forward is finding the courage to face the economic situation. With financial stress, one easily becomes critical of oneself, as the economy is something that just happens. It is important to be encouraged to address the issue. Shame often includes the thought of one's own inferiority and a sense of failure. Instead of thinking that I am unsuccessful, farmers should rather see the matter as an issue that needs to be addressed. Farmers should think they fail at doing this, but I'm still good. After getting rid of the feelings of shame things will become easier. When farmer let go of the shame, they realize that financial problems or the fact that they have to sell their family farm, for example, are caused by surrounding circumstances, the condition the farm was in when it was transferred to him, an investment at the wrong time, related to something that is completely not within your own control. When farmers can differentiate these and leave the shame to one side. the farmer often becomes more active, for example, in making decisions to get their finances in order. in order.

Tips to other farmers

Let go of shame and then get the idea that you have to do something about your situation.. These thoughts prevent us from seeing different possibilities. Face your financial situation. Budget and plan. The fact that you know what your financial situation will reduce your financial stress.

“The ability to act is very helpful and when you let go of the idea of avoidance.. Doing things will be a good first step to making things better and to remember that there are many available alternatives supports”

Sometimes, for example, by changing production methods, the situation may be corrected. If the situation demands that the farm be sold, there are several options and things you can still do. Ask a professional financial adviser to look at the financial situation with you. Making decisions is easier

when the matter has been discussed and the effects of the decision have been evaluated. Even after big changes, you will notice that this was also a way forward.

Recognizing financial stress is important. It may be easier to seek help from a doctor for sleep problems, than to stop and think about its root causes. Of course, treating insomnia is important, but at the same time attention should also be paid to the root causes. If the experienced symptom is due to financial stress, the fact that we only pay attention to the symptom will ultimately not make the situation easier in the long run.

Maija brings out avoidance behavior. When you feel that there are no opportunities to change the financial situation, it is possible that you do not even try to fix it. This type of thinking is a sign that you are avoiding the reality of your situation. Remember that there are always options. Even if you need to make difficult decisions due to the financial situation, it is typical that after difficult decisions you feel relieved in the end and you find new hope and new dreams in life. In the case of financial stress, the best help comes from cooperation. Financial and production counseling, support for finding root causes and various treatments to reduce symptoms, for example psychotherapy.

Let go of shame. Ask for help as early as possible and remember that it's never too late.

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Generations and Partners

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Generations and Partners

After the takeover is completed, the young farmer plans to build a new barn. An accident causes his mother to be fatally injured. The situation triggered helplessness and speechlessness.

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After the takeover is completed, the young farmer plans to build a new barn. An accident causes his mother to be fatally injured. The situation triggered helplessness and speechlessness.

Type of farming activity	Dairy farm
Mental health issue and affecting factors	It is the transitions that lead to mental and physical problems and health limitations. Generationally inherited personality structures.

What is your story?

After the unmarried farmer wants to continue running the farm and the takeover is completed, he plans to build a new barn. When the planning phase and approval have taken place, an accident during milking causes his mother to be knocked over by a cow and fatally injured.

The situation triggered helplessness and speechlessness.

Such far-reaching incidents like this in a family business creates uncertainty about how best to proceed. For the immediate future all planning was stopped. For the father, who has lost his wife and partner, and the son (young farmer), who has lost his mother, labourer, advisor and the farm family person who held the balance between the older and younger generation i.e father and son. the heart of the family was broken.

Handling the situation

Outside help or advice is still seen as a form of paternalism at this stage. At that point of time, the so should have taken over as successor to the farm and fill the role of his deceased mother. However, it was not fulfilled and lead to further conflicts.

After more than two years, communication about the future of the farm became possible through relatives who are active in chicken farming.

However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain a social environment in agriculture because there are fewer and fewer farmers in the villages.

Due to the fact that the young farmer became a board member of the local sports club and a new club house was planned there, a young woman was commissioned by the local architecture office with the planning. This woman became the young farmer's girlfriend during the construction period.

However, the conflict between the generations remained. The father now also has a partner. The problem is that the two women do not get along. The two couples live in the same farmhouse, but in two separate flats. There are always disagreements and conflicts on the farm.

There comes a point when decisions have to be made.

Fears between the son and father of losing the current partner due to the conflict

The young farmer is still at his personal limit during the labour-intensive days.

Farms with livestock can hardly afford any time off.

Conclusion and tips

The awareness about mental health on the farm grew, and they started to improve their communications with each other.. Of course, if there are big differences between generations and their thoughts and opinions, ethics and values it is challenging for both parties to get along. However, good communication and structure helped a lot in this case.

Without help from outside it would have been much more difficult or even impossible.

Tips to other farmers

Take the opportunity to have timely discussions with the help of a mediator – who understands and can relate to the views of the farmers and people who live and work on the farm.

Getting outside help earlier is important and “low-threshold” services would be very helpful in lots of cases comparable to this one.

If possible, all parties involved should seek a value-free discussion and “negotiate” a compromise that allows the people on the farm to work and live well together – even if they do not always have the same opinion.

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After the construction of the dairy barn, which was already a challenging time, the first child was born. The housing situation became cramped

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After the construction of the dairy barn, which was already a challenging time, the first child was born.

The housing situation became cramped:

- Parents in the basement
- Successor on the upper floor, where two rooms were provisionally prepared

The farm always got the absolute priority.

So the father is not present at the birth of the son: he was in the stable. From then on, his wife was available to work on the farm and his parents had to deal with health issues.

These changing circumstances led to increased alienation.

Type of farming activity	Dairy farm (140 dairy cows with own breeding)
Mental health issue and affecting factors	The addiction to an ongoing growth, getting bigger and bigger led to alienation from wife and child.

What is your story?

In this family farming business, the generations work together. They work hard, and at some point they lost their sense of direction..

The barn construction is undertaken amicably between all family members in order to create steps forward in the interest of the farm business. to get better and bigger:

- First for dairy cows
- then a building for the breeding
- then the farmers house and apartment building is converted.

After the construction of the dairy barn, which was already a challenging time,the young farmer's first child was born.

The housing situation became even more close and cramped:

- Parents in the basement
- successor on the upper floor, where two rooms were provisionally prepared

The farm always got the absolute priority.

So the father is not present at the birth of the son: he was in the stable. From then on, the wife was available to work on the farm and his parents of the farmers had to deal with health issues.

The grandfather is diagnosed with advanced MS.

The grandmother is diagnosed with joint arthrosis all over her body.

Alienation accelerated.

The wife is totally overwhelmed with the child and the situation.

They live in two chaotic rooms, without contact (Covid) to other families or mothers, and her own parents are about 50 km away. At the baptismal interview (child is one year old), the wife is diagnosed with massive depression. During the conversation it turns out that she had a short love affair with her brother-in-law in order to feel good about herself again.

So in a short time the whole situation became very difficult and challenging for the spouses, their little family, and as well the older family.

All those involved were overwhelmed. Situation seemed hopeless. Separation was on the cards. The question arose: "for whom do we do all this?"

At the same time, there are economic and financial constraints after the construction investment. This made a separation financial settlement with his spouse almost an impossibility and very difficult..

Handling the situation

The family doctor wanted to offer psychological help. None of the participants knew anything like this before. It was only after a conversation with a Deacon and his accompaniment that they realized that outside help was indispensable.

In this case, it was a stroke of luck that psychological help for the two spouses could start immediately. This led to positive and good discussions and a good opportunity to reflect on past activities and behaviours.

Farmers with livestock can hardly afford any time off.

If new considerable investments are made on debt capital, the situation can become very inflexible for all members involved.

The stroke of luck was that a relative of the wife, who had taken early retirement, helped out in the family business without hesitation when asked. This gave great physical relief, allowed the married couple to have more time together and be more supportive to each other. It was also good for their family life. Trust could be restored and built up again. It also provided the time and opportunity for both partners to experience love again, and to participate in life. This also relieved the burden on the grandparents) at the farm.

Conclusion and tips

The situations are changing.

Finding self-esteem in the mode of constant growth and "more and more" does not have to be. Farmers are also allowed to live privately.

This seems very logical to everyone including every farmer.

But at the same time if a family business is overwhelming for whatever reason there is a tendency that in many cases it can cause relationship problems which can end up being stressful and often difficult to resolve.It can also put pressure on the farm owner to work longer and longer hours. and miss out on family life,.

It is very important for the farm entrepreneur to work as a family in order to reduce the risk of relationship problems and to have a better quality of work life balance and good mental health and wellbeing.make The family and business need to be looked after together. This is fruitful.

Tips to other farmers

"Only cows and constant growth is not a real way. You need a broader view and an open mind!"

What is important in life?

It is good to pick up a book that is not agricultural literature. Recommended reading:

Michael Ende: Peppo the Street Sweeper

Heinrich Böll: the fisherman

In this family farming business, the generations work together.

Hard and steady work is a source for stability and being grounded, especially in farming in the work with nature, soil, plants and animals.

Hard work is good and fine, even during extreme seasonal peaks.

But at some point you need to be careful to keep a focus to stay on track, and not to revert to poor habits.

If your child is being born or any other important family occasion and you are not there to enjoy the event because you are not able to finish your work, then it is important to plan for such occasions so that you can have the time to be present Therefore it is important to rethink and prioritize how you are managing you time and how you do things.

Getting outside help can be very helpful, sooner rather thins later to resolve a difficult situation, comparable to this one.

In this case, after reaching a very difficult challenging situation, there was a stroke of luck that the young farmer's family was supported by a relative in dealing with the huge amount of work.

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Coping with loss: lifelong learning

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Coping with loss: lifelong learning

Due to this tragic accident and the death of his father, the son became the designated successor. He was only 12 years old, at the time of his father's death. a situation full of pressure that arose in the family farm.

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Due to this tragic accident and the death of his father, the son became the designated successor. He was only 12 years old, at the time of his father's death. a situation full of pressure that arose in the family farm.

Due to the payments to the two siblings after taking over, the situation within the family became increasingly tense.

Type of farming activity	Dairy farm (9 dairy cows with own breeding)
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Due to a tragic accident 18 years ago, the father died in the barn when a bull pushed him to the ground. The farmer's son was 12 years old at the time of the tragic incident. He had to watch everything from a close range because he was in the stable with his father at the time.

What is your story?

Being the eldest of the three children, the farmer was stuck in his role as farm successor by the tragic event of his father's death in the barn. In the last 18 years since then, the daily burden and responsibility became more and more stressful and pressurized.

Until a few years ago, the farmer's mother was still fully involved as a workforce. However, she was less and less able to help due to physical limitations and illness.

The consequence with the farmer was - "only I always have to do everything - alone, on my own".

The situation on the farm became increasingly worse. It also turned out that the farmer beat his younger brother although he helped him on the farm.

When the farmer was 28 years old, a cooperation was founded with his mother. Until then, the farm had belonged solely to the mother. The siblings were paid off and everything was legalized.

Due to the payments to the two siblings over 2 years, the situation within the family also became increasingly tense.

Helplessness, loneliness arose more and more.

Communication between the siblings was getting bigger and bigger, and the cooperation with the mother was not the best idea.

It was not a full transfer over. It was linked to the financial needs of the older generation as well.

Due to the constant burden of daily work and the fact that his mother is physically weak and his siblings are building their own lives, the farmer feels left alone not only within the farm work, but personally, and socially.

Handling the situation

When the announcements came from the farmer to his family - "you'll see" - and they were uttered more and more often by him, the sister became very worried.

She sought advice from the Agricultural Family Counselling Service. Due to the many verbal and physical injuries, a conversation could only be held with the mother and the sister.

The sister sought additional help from a communication coach with an agricultural background.

Due to the sudden and unexpected death of the mother and the emotional circumstance, the participants were able to have an intensive conversation with the coach.

It was recognized as a way to deal with the new situation of the family - the three siblings and the farm. It became possible to look at the possibilities to change the farm.

At the moment, awareness of the situation on the farm for all family members involved directly or indirectly is there.

At the same time solution is not clear at all.

Everything is still open, as the situation threatens to escalate again due to the death of the mother. However, it is now possible to accept help from outside and this was expressly desired by all involved.

Conclusion and tips

Often, access through women in agriculture for advice and assistance seems easier than to farmers.

In this case the sister became aware of what was going on, and she raised her voice and looked for help.

For the farmer himself it probably would have been impossible to overlook the situation.

Tips to other farmers

It is important to stay in touch with each other.

Of course, there are sometimes different opinions, even arguments fights between siblings.

At the same time these siblings and close family members usually know the person, the farmer quite well, and they could see if there are developments personally or socially which could possibly require help and support.

It is a need, not only to look for farm workers to help out on the farm but also to strive for a good living together, a culture of support.

Pre-designated situations bring a lot of pressure to the persons involved.

To be a foreseen successor and not able to find other opportunities in education or employment just to see more of the world - is sometimes a big burden.

In this case the burden was too much for the farmer, but awareness of the situation is given, a good basis to work on now - though not free of conflict, but at least goal oriented.

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Positive steps for dealing with unexpected loss

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Positive steps for dealing with unexpected loss

After many death events in quick succession, huge pressure emerged and brought about extraordinary positive joint action. The women from the village and the region stepped forward, to respond and to take meaningful action.

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After many death events in quick succession, huge pressure emerged and brought about extraordinary positive joint action. The women from the village and the region stepped forward, to respond and to take meaningful action.

Type of farming activity	region dominated by dairy cattle
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Tragic deaths in a short period of time caused great and worrying concern amongst farming families of the village for the men, the families and the farms.

What is your story?

In the last 3 years, many farmers (9 men aged 50-65) died very suddenly. Most of them due heart attacks. One person had a pre-existing illness, one had cancer, another had a farm accident with the hay crane. In three cases the children were very young (between 8 and 15 years). A serious and worrying fear and concern for the men developed. Therefore, the idea for a joint petition for health, strength and confidence for the farm families was born.

The initial joint event organized was to open mind, heart and soul for the future.

It was a very unusual response..

Possibly due to this unusual approach and handling of the situation the power of the event was even bigger.

After the events in quick succession, at first on the one hand, helplessness and fear arose. On the other hand, this stressful situation made the extraordinary joint action possible and definite..

However, the sense of helplessness and fear did not disappear, completely of course, but there was great empowerment and windows of optimism and confidence in looking forward.

Handling the situation

When all the tragic events happened, a group of extremely concerned and worried wives and young families decided to respond to the situation and to create change.

They were in fear that these incredible series of deaths could continue, and they wanted to act and to do something, about it.

A Deacon got involved in the issues and concerns, in response together with the concerned group a prayer walk was planned and undertaken..

This petition prayer walk had three stations:

Health, Strength and Confidence.

Health, so that everyone stays healthy or becomes healthy again

Strength, especially for the women and their children, so that they can cope with the difficult time and of course also manage the work (farming continues for all families).

Confidence, for everyone to realize that things are getting better again and can move on.

Small guardian angels were provided and blessed.

Everyone who was present at the petition was given a small guardian angel.

In the petition accompanied by music, among other things, the story of the magic bank was shared:

Each of us has a "magic bank". We just don't see it, because the bank is TIME!

Every morning when we wake up, we are given 86400 seconds of life for the day, and when we go to sleep in the evening, the rest of the time is not credited to us. What we did not experience that day is lost, lost forever. Yesterday is gone.

In the supplication process and subsequently, among other things, the awareness of time was sharpened: for the past, for the present, for the future.

This was about what has happened unchangeably and what is in our hands to shape.

The reference was made to agriculture, where in many cases hamster wheels have been created, which initially cause stress in the farm and family, in the partnership, in the marriage and between generations, and in the end can lead to psychological problems.

Quality of life was addressed. Not in the sense of today's "work-life balance", which entails considerable aberrations, but in the sense of awareness in daily life and work on the farms and in social interaction with each other.

The prayer walk took place in November 2022 and had direct positive effects in the area of awareness and perception. Time is still too short for long-term statements.

It was a great, unusual and strengthening community experience.

Conclusion and tips

It is important, despite all the drama and tragedy - perhaps even especially then - to realize the pressure, the worry, the fear and having to come to terms with it and to look forward to shaping it.

Tips to other farmers

Please be open minded and please speak about your worries, no matter how critical you consider them to be.

Talk to others about their feelings and to take a step forward together hand in hand

There is strength in cooperation. It can not alone be seen in joint action of daily farming work but also in joint action dealing with tremendous social challenges.

This joint action of women and the remaining families of the village and the region is untypical and at the same time and possibly because of its very special character it was the very powerful starting point to share feelings and overcome the situation.

◀ [READ PREVIOUS STORY](#)
Coping with loss: lifelong learning

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EmbraceFarm: supporting farm families coping with loss

SUCCESS STORIES

EmbraceFarm: supporting farm families coping with loss

Since 2014, EmbraceFARM has worked for farm families affected by sudden loss or trauma, suspected suicide through the compassionate provision of peer-to-peer support groups, an Annual Ecumenical Remembrance Services and residential bereavement weekends.

Read more ↓



Since 2014, EmbraceFARM has worked for farm families affected by sudden loss or trauma, suspected suicide through the compassionate provision of peer-to-peer support groups, an Annual Ecumenical Remembrance Services and residential bereavement weekends.

Vision: A caring supportive and non-judgmental community for all those affected by farm accidents and trauma.

Mission: to grow and sustain a support network for all those affected by farm accidents and traumas

In achieving their mission statement EmbraceFARM directly supports farm families including children, young people who have lost a loved one in a farm accident or trauma and individuals who have been seriously injured as a result of an accident

Name of the interviewed	Catherine Kenneally Embrace FARM Business Development Manager.
Type of farming activity	NGO Registered Charity Regulator number: 20149956 Registered Charity Revenue number: CHY 21837
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Bereavement and Grief

What is your story?

The impact a farm accident has on a family is immeasurable. It takes a serious toll on the survivor, the family financially, physically, and emotionally. These are all life dimensions that can have a big impact on the individual's mental health and indeed the family. The provision of supports to farmer and their families in such circumstances is important to ensure farm sustainability financially and in terms of the farm output.

Embrace FARM is committed to supporting the well-being of those affected by farm accidents in Ireland. Their valuable support and work with the community reveals that mental wellbeing is an important part of a person's journey towards recovery and for those who have been bereaved by the tragic loss of their loved one or are left coping with the enduring impact of a life changing farm injury.

Improving an understanding mental health in rural settings has to be constantly address. In a survey carried out by EmbraceFarm at their 2019 Conference in excess of 100 participants, 83% believed that there is a greater level of stigma associated with mental health than in urban towns and cities.. This is a red flag for FARMRes to address this particular awareness topic. and to reduce the stigma associated with mental illnesses.

The development of Farmer's resilience is crucial, as it is underpinned by factors such as climate change economic, social, and financial factors. It is necessary to develop appropriate programme resources that essentially are farmer proof. Farmer resilience can be strengthened when the farmer is adaptable and given the support.

EmbraceFARM -is very embedded within the farming community . They havecreated an environment in which the farmer and the farm family can know it is ok to talk. Their collaborative approach with the other agencies is ensuring a community support network and reducing loneliness and isolation at serious times of trauma. It is an invaluable and immeasurable support and have been successful in building a special community support.

The vision of Embrace FARM is to be a caring, supportive, and non-judgemental community for all affected by farm accidents & traumas. Their main actions are:

Supporting widows/widowers primarily with the loss of a partner due to sudden loss, suspected suicide, sudden medical events e.g., heart attack, cancer diagnosis and sudden injury

Supporting farmers with life changing injuries following farm accidents such as amputation, spinal and brain

Supporting fame families with the loss of a child or parent.

Handling the situation

This Programme aims to address the gap in rural services by providing a structured, single point of contact access to local professional and peer to peer supports for families and communities affected by sudden trauma on farms.

1. Peer to Peer Support
2. Facilitate Accredited Counselling
3. Encircle Programme – provision of one to one emotional and practical support for farm families after sudden loss and injury.

Key Messages include:

Hope: Our goal is to provide hope and understanding

One Step at a Time: "There is no rush, we are here to offer support as long as it is required."

Provision of evidenced based literature and website for ongoing support <https://embracefarm.com/resources/publications/ifj-supplement-2020/>

Conclusion and tips

The aforementioned profile of EmbraceFARM that has developed organically highlights the role it plays in supporting farm families. It is a unique Irish development and led Organization with multiple programmes that can be adapted to suit its development within the FARMRes partners

Tips to other farmers

We aim to remind affected farm families of the supports available, no matter where they are on their healing journey. We all have a part to play – mental health is everybody's business.

It needs to be recognised that the needs of people in agriculture. Farming and rural environments are by their very nature diverse and complex. FARMRes has the potential to improve the mental health and health and well beings of its people

A farm accident or unexpected death not only affect the person whose life has been lost or the person who has been injured but also their immediate family, home friends and their local community,

It supports by listening and being there for families to answer questions following the aftermath of a farm accident. Embrace FARM provides a space for people to come and remember their loved one in their annual ecumenical remembrance service.

EmbraceFARM host residential family weekends which are facilitated by an accredited counsellor each year where a spouse, child or sibling has been lost in a farm accident.

◀ READ PREVIOUS STORY
Positive steps for dealing with unexpected loss

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Farmers4Safety – Managing Risk Together

SUCCESS STORIES

Farmers4Safety – Managing Risk Together

Farmers4Safety Managing Risk Together EIP AGRI Pilot project adopted a 'peer-to-peer' mentoring and champion approach to engage farmers in an attitudinal and behavioural change towards farm safety by tackling and improving the social norms around farm safety and emotional wellbeing



Read more ↓

Farmers4Safety Managing Risk Together EIP AGRI Pilot project adopted a 'peer-to-peer' mentoring and champion approach to engage farmers in an attitudinal and behavioural change towards farm safety by tackling and improving the social norms around farm safety and emotional wellbeing

Name of the interviewed	Niamh Nolan – Project Manager
Type of farming activity	Organisation established in partnership with the Department of Agriculture Food and Martin and The Irish Rural Network. The project was delivered on the ground by a trained Farm Mentor network comprising seven personnel; the Project Manager / Co-ordinator and the six mentors (2 per county). The project was delivered with BRIDE (Biodiversity Regeneration in a Dairying Environment) project, the Duncannon Blue Flag Farming & Communities Scheme, the New Futures Farming Group, and the Health and Safety Authority are carrying out this project in their catchment areas.
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Farm Safety Health and Wellbeing

What is your story?

Farmers4Safety was an 18-month evaluated pilot project funded by the Irish Department of Agriculture Food and Marine and Food.

Lead partner, Irish Rural Link (IRL), established the peer-to-peer mentoring concept as a viable and successful precedent based on results from a previous Farm Safety Mentor Programme 'Farmers Inspiring Farmers', which took place in 2013 and focused on four midlands counties. This received positive acclaim and identified both challenges faced by farmers and possible solutions which could be adapted within other regions of the country.

Furthermore, peer-to-peer mentoring has been recognised within the Seanad which stated that "researchers have discovered that when there is a facilitated peer engagement of farmers talking to farmers in a practical way focusing on an issue on an ongoing basis, it tends to lead to greater adoption of the code of practice" (p. 169). [Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report on Farm Safety \(2015\)](#).

This farmer led approach has been highly valued by the participants in the previous programme and this project sought to expand upon it. Through successful delivery of this core principle, the project aims to achieve its objectives of raising awareness on farms regarding health, safety, and wellbeing. In addition, the project aimed to introduce the focus communities to practical ways of addressing the identified challenges and highlight the supports that are available.

The main aim is to signpost farmers and farm families to the relevant supports/services that they may require, to create a permanent farm safety, health, and wellbeing network by using appropriate discourse for farmers. Also to highlight the importance of creating a buddy system to tackle the issue of social isolation within the agriculture sector.

To achieve these aims and more a Team of Farmer Peer Mentors was established and trained into delivering the overall aims and objectives of the F4S Project.

An important aspect of their training was participation in a number of Mental Health Awareness workshop provided by Mental Health Ireland's Development Officer Finola Colgan with national lead for liaising with farm organisations and farmers

Handling the situation

The types of issues that the Peer Mentoring Team addressed included Farm Risk assessment – as required by the Department of Agriculture Food and Marine

A key initiative that developed in partnership with Mental Health Ireland was a Quality-of-Life Index – self assessment – that can be downloaded and completed by the farmer in his or her own time. It was set out as follows:

- 1. Workload** – This section provides the user with an opportunity to assess their workloads
- 2. Physical and Mental Health** – This section provides the user with an opportunity to assess their physical and mental health
- 3. Quality Time** – This section provides the user with an opportunity to assess how you use your free time and interact with others

There is a rating scale attached to the questionnaire that provides the user you with an opportunity to become more aware of how they are getting on with their farming and personal life. It helps identify what areas the user may address. Links are provided to source help and support

Peer to Peer Mentoring: During the pilot phase of the project the Farm Peer Mentoring Team met farmers on site, assisted them with their farm risk assessment safety plans. Created buddy systems between farmers and conducted farm safety health and wellbeing attitudinal surveys. This activity allowed farmers to have a one-to-one conversation with their peer and to discuss or seek advice on any mental health concerns.

The farmers and farm families were open to conversing with the peer mentors because they were fellow farmers, making it easier for them to connect, listen, communicate, and engage with each other, thus creating a collaborative learning environment.

Conclusion and tips

The Farmers4Safety – Managing Risk Together EIP-Agri Project Report April 2023 findings included in the post-evaluation and attitudinal survey showed that 94.8% of participants found the "Farmer4Safety" initiative beneficial in raising awareness of health & safety and mental wellbeing. Farmers4Safety – Managing Risk.

The team also discovered that 89.5% of farmers and their families would like to see more free mobile health check-ups, such as blood testing, eye test, heart monitoring, at their local marts or co-ops, highlighting the need for more accessible healthcare options.

Additional relevant numbers are:

35% of respondents knowingly take risks on the farm.

55% of participants find it difficult to spend quality time with their partner and their farm family when they are constantly working and thinking about the farm, while 45% do not.

Tips to other farmers

'It is important for farmers to look after their physical and mental health to ensure farm safety and safe practices. It is well recorded that most farm accidents are related to risk taking due to stress and time pressures.'

'Prioritize self-care – ensuring a good regular sleep pattern, eat well, make time for family and friends. Seek help and support rather than deny that there is a problem or problems.'

Have an annual medical check up to reassure your health status and if there are any potential underlying problems that can benefit from immediate attention. Use self-help lines.

It is a project that could be adapted to suit the aims and objectives of FARMRes Aim to highlight the essential role and value of the 'peer-to-peer' mentoring approach in tackling and improving the social standards around farm safety, health, and wellbeing.

← READ PREVIOUS STORY
EmbraceFarm: supporting farm families coping with loss

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The path to a happier life: overcoming alcoholism

SUCCESS STORIES

The path to a happier life: overcoming alcoholism

Oliver grew up in a large family in the early seventies on a small family farm. He emigrated to find work in that period of his life he became alcoholic. Oliver informed me that in his earlier years as a young adult when he was away from home he had an issue with drink that as he expressed unfortunately led him to becoming dependent on alcohol which eventually developed into him becoming alcoholic. His growing dependency on alcohol and its consumption led to regular bouts of depression and anxiety and states of poor physical health.



[Read more](#) ↓

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Name of the interviewed	Oliver H
Type of farming activity	Equine Breeding
Mental health issue and affecting factors	The impact of an alcoholic addiction on Oliver's mental health and wellbeing. Oliver recognised that his addiction was seriously impacting on his quality of life in terms of work, his relationships with family, and friends. It was also affecting his physical and mental health and on occasion he experienced thoughts of suicide

What is your story?

It evoked a lot of stress; anxiety worry and multiple concern. As Oliver stated "At the worst level it brought me close to suicidal thoughts and self-harm". He lost a lot of self-confidence, experienced low self-esteem, felt lonely and isolated. He found himself for a long time in a state of denial that he had a problem with alcohol.

Handling the situation

The main support Oliver received was Alcoholic Anonymous AA through the recommendation of someone who was watching out for his best interest and who understood the difficulties Oliver was experiencing with alcohol. When Oliver found out about the AA service at the outset he was reluctant to attend meetings. However, he decided to find out more and with the support of his friend he commenced attending regularly. He learned about the importance of adhere to the AA member's programme.

It was important for Oliver that he met with "good people" who cared. He slowly and gradually took their advice to seek out the support that he eventually secured and engaged with commitment and hope to the AA Programme

The first meeting he attended ; a member told Oliver "that he did not have to drink again that day." He was 27 years old; the person who said this to him was 57. He advised Oliver that he was saving him 30ty years that he himself wished he had before he found his support through AA. That said Oliver expressed his gratitude to that person and went onto say how he had died at 87 but died sober

Oliver is now a contented person, worked hard to raise the funds to buy his own farm and commenced breeding equine stock on his holding.

Conclusion and tips

Oliver unreservedly said Yes. He regained his physical health, as up to that point in time when he got the support he needed, he had a long-term ulcer problem caused by his alcoholism. That was cleared once he became sober , thereafter his general health improved and his eating habits. Ultimately he felt much healthier, more energetic, and hopeful about life and going forward. In terms of his mental health, his self confidence and self-esteem improved. He got the courage to believe he could work hard, earn, and save for the price of a farm so that he could return to his roots.

In addition, Oliver in recognising and experiencing the benefits of being a member of AA inspired him to voluntarily set up a rural AA meeting for people experiencing issues with alcoholism. He hosts an open AA weekly on a Friday evening.

"I am a confident and more content person and know that there are more positive ways of dealing with setbacks and disappointments"

Tips to other farmers

Oliver in addition to what he shared within his story wished to add how strongly he recommends the importance of a person to recognise and or to take notice of them drinking patterns. He especially highlighted that if it becomes apparent that drink is being used as an unhealthy coping mechanism to address issues such as loneliness relationship problems, stress anxiety and so on, the reality is that such an approach he said will only exacerbate the problems and undoubtedly create more as it did for his life until he got matters sorted.

'Seeking help and support is a crucial first step to recovery' He also emphasised that It is very important not to be in denial of the warning signs of alcoholism and to seek help and support as soon as possible through talking to someone that understands and can be trusted.

'Talking is very helpful when sober: Seek out alternative activities that do not involve drinking. Set goals to overcome alcoholism'

'Be mindful if family and friends START showing concern about drinking patterns, do not ignore their concerns'

Be aware that if alcoholism is a problem for you, you are not alone and or the only one dealing with the negative impact of alcoholism. Find out about support groups in your area that help their members to overcome alcoholism. Going to your GP/Family Doctor is an important first step for proper medical guidance and support.

It is important to raise alcohol awareness among farmers and to encourage open and honestly conversations about alcohol use and its triggers

Alcoholism is a worldwide epidemic and there is substantial evidence to suggest it was a significant cause of concern during the Covid-19 epidemic . Although facilities that served alcohol were closed people were able to buy in off licence facilities and home drinking became a major public health issue.

Moderation is a key factor. It can be noted that alcohol when taken in social company and in moderation can actually be beneficial as on such occasions it reduces loneliness and isolation.

From Oliver's story it is evident that excessive drinking is harmful and can lead to alcoholism Farmer's may use alcohol as an unhealthy way to cope with high levels of stress. As expressed by Oliver this can be due to a combination of reasons, such as loneliness relationship problems, isolation financial worries . However, it is also important to bear in mind that some may have a family or personal history of alcoholism or a mental health condition like depression.

Some additional information:

Binge Drinking

An issue not raised in Oliver's story concerns "binge drinking" which is invariable defined as consuming five or more drinks on an occasion for men or four or more drinks on an occasion for women. It has also been noted that persons who binge drink are not necessarily dependent on alcohol. Rather they are packing their drinking into one or two 'heavy sessions' in the week.

However, habits or practices of this nature can lead to alcoholism . Binge drinking and it is associated with particular risks to health and can have negative effects on a person's physical and mental health.

Weekly low-risk alcohol guidelines

"The Irish Health Service Executive (HSE)"

The recommended weekly low-risk alcohol guidelines are less than:

- 11 standard drinks for women
- 17 standard drinks for men

Drinks should be spread out over the week.

Have 2 to 3 alcohol-free days per week. Drink no more than 6 standard drinks on any 1 occasion.

The less you drink the lower your risk of developing alcohol-related health issues."

In Ireland a standard drink has about 10 grams of pure alcohol.

- a pub measure of spirits (35.5ml)
- a small glass of wine (12.5% volume)
- a half pint of normal beer
- an alcopop (275ml bottle)
- A bottle of 12.5% alcohol wine has about 7 standard drinks.

Questions worth considering that may help you consider if you have reason to be concerned with your drinking patterns,

Have you ever considered if you drink too much?

Do you think you need to cut back or take a break from drinking?

Do you think your drinking habits are impacting on the quality of your life?

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Farmers4Safety – Managing Risk Together

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Positive steps after marriage breakup

SUCCESS STORIES

Positive steps after marriage breakup

Fiona is a farmer's wife and the mother of four young adult children. Fiona gave up her off-farm employment to be at home full time and to assist with the running of the farm a couple of years after marrying. She was finding working away from home and having to help out morning and evening with farm work tiring and exhaustive. Fiona highlighted that giving up her employment left her financially dependent on her husband and other members of his family also involved in their farming enterprise. These new circumstance generated feelings isolation, low self-esteem and loss of identity



[Read more](#) ↓

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Name of the interviewed	Fiona Casey
Type of farming activity	Mixed farming including dairy enterprise
Mental health issue and affecting factors	High levels of stress anxiety and depression due to marriage relationship breakdown brought about by mental, emotional and at times physical abuse and coercive control

What is your story?

Fiona expressed finding herself in a difficult non loving relationship very difficult. She was also subjected to increasing physical mental and emotional abuse; she did not know who or where to go for help or who she could trust to be supportive, She also felt personally embarrassed to find herself in this situation and did not wish to burden her own close family members. Fiona expressed how the signs of her marriage beginning to break down impacted on her emotionally

As time went by the impact of losing her independence, having little or no communication with friends and people away from the farm impacted on her self-esteem and self-confidence. The marriage relationship became more and more difficult to endure. Fiona also began to see how the deterioration in her marriage was impacting on their children. There were many attempts by their father to influence them against her. She also began to realise that she was in a coercive relationship which was very unhealthy, extremely difficult and controlling. She became concerned about her own state of mental health and wellbeing and that of their children.

Fiona expressed that one of the biggest challenges she had to deal with was to make it appear when in public and during family occasions that all was normal. It was she said "an enormous pressure to appear to "be a contented person in the company of other people".

Handling the situation

Fiona spoke about how she did not seek help for her situation as she felt extremely embarrassed, did not know what her own family and relatives would react. However, she continued to function silently as best she could and said how she believed she was in denial of the reality of her situation.

Her opportunity to open up about her personal trauma occurred when she was attending counselling for support to deal with the loss of a very close family member due to death by suicide and with whom she had a very deep and special family relationship. It was during one of these counselling sessions that she disclosed about the personal trauma she was experiencing in her marriage, her concerns around the coercive control and the impact that these circumstances were having on her then young adolescent children

This was the first occasion that she spoke in confidence about her personal circumstances, and she claims it was a big relief. During those sessions, the Counsellor recognised the trauma and stress being experienced. As Fiona said "the Counsellor helped me peel away the layers of my stress. This was for me, the first opportunity I had to "get it all out from my throat". I had been trapped and did not know how to cope"

In line with these sessions and coming to the realisation that she needed to separate from her husband, she began to make arrangements to leave the family home with her children. This was very stressful and difficult, it was necessary to seek legal support, This action generated another barrier as her husband refused to cooperate. Nether would he agree to marriage or mediation counselling, Fiona had very limited personal funds but made the decision to move on and get out of the situation. Fiona had to resort to taking her husband to Court to establish her legal and financial supports for herself and their children. This was a very difficult stressful journey and very costly.

Fiona identified what helped her most was having the support of her own family once she had opened up to them with the support of the Counselling she had received. She also learned that she needed such caring support, and to realise that she did not have to remain in a difficult, abusive, and coercive relationship that was impacting on her mental and physical health and that of their children

Fiona expressed that although it was difficult and in some limited ways continues to be so, taking the legal action and going to Court was an important step to establish her rights as a separated person, the financial support for herself, to be able to rent a house and provide education for their children.

Also important for Fiona, now that she was living away from the farm home she could renew and restore a number of her lost friendships. This helped her gain confidence and belief in herself.

Fiona availed of opportunities to retrain and upskill giving her a new sense of confidence and self-esteem. Through these new achievements Fiona was successful in acquiring meaningful temporary employment that has since opened new opportunities.

Conclusion and tips

Fiona identified what helped her most was having the support of her own family once she had opened up to them with the support of the Counselling she had received. She also learned that she needed such caring support, and to realise that she did not have to remain in a difficult, abusive, and coercive relationship that was impacting on her mental and physical health and that of their children

Fiona expressed that although it was difficult and continues to be so although she is now living independently with her children, that taking the necessary legal action and going to Court was an important step. This action establishes her rights and legal entitlements as a separated person, being granted financial support for herself, to be able to rent a house and provide education for their children.

Also important for Fiona, now that she was living away from the farm home she could renew and restore a number of her lost friendships. This helped her gain confidence and belief in herself.

Fiona availed of opportunities to retrain and upskill giving her a new sense of confidence and self-esteem. Through these new achievements Fiona was successful in acquiring meaningful temporary employment that has since opened new opportunities.

This trauma that she experienced has helped her be empathetic to other people in similar situations, and in saying that she was mindful that a man can find himself the subject of a difficult relationship and not know where to turn to for help.

Regained self-belief in herself and knowing that she has much to offer others because of her lived experience.

Very important for Fiona as she expressed "I am t proud that I addressed the situation for myself and our family

Tips to other farmers

Fiona expressed the following to anyone who may find themselves in such situation. From her, we can learn that it is important to be proactive when in a vulnerable situation. Here you can find some tips:

- Build up self-confidence through attending support groups personal development course available locally or online
- Talking is very helpful. Open up to people that can be trusted as it is important to be careful who you talk to in this type of situation
- Seek out independent professional support i.e., not someone that knows both families as in a family doctor or legal person as they may be biased and takes sides if they have to provide court reports Therefore, avoid using the family doctor, find another GP to look after your health needs and any medical certs that maybe required.
- Fiona highlighted to be aware about the circumstances and situation she found herself in is in fact not unusual and that there is help and support available in term of counselling, medical and legal advice.
- Where there are younger family members involved, get appropriate support/counselling for them to help them understand and cope with the situation on hand.
- It can also be beneficial to learn about the warning signs of coercive control so that the emerging situation can be managed sooner rather than later.
- Use help lines that provide support services

Some 1.7 million marriages and an estimated 0.7 million divorces took place in the EU in 2021, according to the most recent data available for the EU Member

Undoubtedly marriage break up is very stressful and upsetting irrespective of the reasons. When it does happen, professional advice is crucial to achieve the best outcomes for the parties concurred and family members.

Farming is not just a job it's a way of life and for farming families, life on the farm and life at home are blended .It can be like living over the shop premises. Work is always at the doorstep. In most fam family situations, the spouse can also be the business partner silent or otherwise and responsible for a lot of the paperwork associated with regulations and compliance. Running a farm can put pressures on marriage and family relationships - long hours taken up by farming, important events missed, financial difficulties and so on. Any number of things can upset and lead to mental strain in a relationship.

Successful family farming requires a regular open honest dialogise between the parties. Such an approach can reduce the risk of the family farm business being put at risk perhaps ending up in a legal dispute, lead to mental and physical health problems and at worst suicide.

Victims of domestic violence often feel "fear, shame, stigma" about their situation and this, along with other factors, can hold them back from seeking the help and support they deserve and need".

"Coercive control is a persistent pattern of controlling, coercive and threatening behaviour including all or some forms of domestic abuse (emotional, physical, financial, sexual including threats) by a boyfriend, partner, husband, or ex. It traps women in a relationship and makes it impossible or dangerous to leave. Coercive control can damage a woman's physical and emotional well-being."

Successful family farming requires a regular open honest dialogise between the parties. Such an approach can reduce the risk of the family farm business being put at risk perhaps ending up in a legal dispute, lead to mental and physical health problems.

Check these resources from Ireland services:

[Women's Aid Ireland](#)

It is important to note that men can also be the subject of these issues relating to domestic abuse and coercive control

CEO of Men's Aid has stated said that when it comes to the farming community, it is "very conscious" of situations "behind front doors" where there are partners "that are controlling the farm, controlling the finances, controlling the family as well and indeed, part of that is [controlling] the dad, their husbands". [agriland.ie/farming-news/concerning-increase-in-farmers-seeking-help-for-domestic-violence/](https://www.agriland.ie/farming-news/concerning-increase-in-farmers-seeking-help-for-domestic-violence/)

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The path to a happier life: overcoming alcoholism

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Hope and Self Care after thoughts of suicide

SUCCESS STORIES

Hope and Self Care after thoughts of suicide

George experienced a number of life issues that accumulated and built up to a high level of stress anxiety and depression culminating in mental and physical strain. The biggest factor impacting on his situation as expressed by George situation was not having the ability to say 'no' to anything to be done and asked of him as he felt uncomfortable about saying no in case he would let someone down.



[Read more](#) ↓

Introduction This interview was conducted in person with George Graham on a farm setting. George's story relates to a number of life issues that at times led him to thoughts of suicide.

George experienced a number of life issues that accumulated and built up to a high level of stress anxiety and depression culminating in mental and physical strain. The biggest factor impacting on his situation as expressed by George situation was not having the ability to say 'no' to anything to be done and asked of him as he felt uncomfortable about saying no in case he would let someone down.

This left him feeling over awed and overwhelmed and left with feeling that he had no control of his life.

Name of the interviewed	George Graham
Type of farming activity	Mixed Farming and National and International Award-Winning Sheep Shearer:
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Suicide

What is your story?

At the core of George's story is his struggle with mental health challenges and how he learned to manage it and continues to do so. George stated that at the heart of his story is growing up on a family farm that the main emphasis was on work and getting work done. There was little or no time given to take a day off or to go away for a family holiday. He now believes that this being the situation for him growing up and working on the family farm was unhealthy and not being encouraged to think about self-care contributed to having poor mental health and self-esteem. He did not know what it was to take a day off and enjoy himself. There was no tradition of days off, time for self-care, in fact he said it was almost frowned upon.

George became a successful sheep farmer and learned the skill of sheep shearing. He progressed to becoming a champion sheep shearer at National and International Championships.

He is always in demand for sheep shearing around Ireland. This skill also brought home to work opportunities too Norway. However, George was constantly struggling with his mental health and regularly held thoughts of suicide. "My mind" as George said " was on overtime, just racing here, there, and everywhere. It was just an absolute nightmare, thinking of all these crazy things. I could not stop it, and I could not control it."

Matters came to ahead for him when he was on a Sheep Shearing Contract in Norway upon Before going there, George knew he was not well mentally, `my body was telling me not to go, but I felt I could not say no`, he says.

While he was Norway, he found he was not sleeping properly, eating properly, avoiding company and conversations or talk with people around him .At was at this time he experienced real thoughts of suicide. He was trying to run away from his problems at home in Ireland, - they had come with him, and he could not get them out of his head. He felt he was in a very dark unhealthy place and uncertain how-to manage it so far away from home.

However, he began to think, and he came to the personal understanding while in Norway that could admit to himself that he had a problem, was overworked, neglecting self-care. Deep down he realised that a personal relationship that had not worked out was the trigger or cornerstone of his negative feelings. This realisation brought other issues to the surface. It made him feel very vulnerable, alone, and extremely concerned.

Handling the situation

While in Norway, he met a Psychiatric Nurse who he befriended to translate for him Through this regular contact he found himself talking to her about his feelings and the issues that were troubling him. This was immensely helpful.

The conversations they had helped break the ice for him and to feel comfortable about opening up about his dark thoughts of suicide.. These conversations became as he said, "my fountain of hope," That lady said to him she would always be there for him. This helped him enormously

George realised it was important to hold on to HOPE, to get home to Ireland to get support and the necessary help

Instead of hiding and trying to run away from the problems and issues that were eating away at him, he realised that he needed to seek support and that this was something he had to do for himself.

At that point of time, he also believed and understood that he required medication. Something which he happily shared he no longer requires. His first point of contact when he got home was to talk to his GP/Family Doctor, who prescribed medication which he found helpful. Going to the Doctor turned things around for him and helped me change the way I was thinking

George explained that now rather than fight a troubling situation and end up sinking low he turned to a number of coping mechanisms which he has put in place for himself. So that when he is not having a good day or feels he is in a dark place he will strive to do something different to diffuse the situation. This could be doing something different such as taking a short car drive, stopping off somewhere to have a cup of tea and or coffee. Contact someone for a hat. Break the silence and the worrying thoughts through distraction

Accessing Mental Health Services helped George as he was being cared for by specially trained nurses, doctors who helped him through his situation. He expressed that it was a traumatic time for him when his that my farm gun was taken from him in his own safety and best interest. It has since been returned to him some time later..

A turning point in his medical professional relationship at a moment of crisis was the day when his Doctor turned to him and said, "Do you think you can get through this situation until Monday?" He provided George with a comfort letter of support in case he felt he could not cope and needed to contact emergency services

That Doctor also put his hand on his shoulder and said, "I know you for a long time, if anything happened to you, I would be broken hearted". These words and kindness and compassion were a heartfelt turning points for George . He felt understood.

Conclusion and tips

George had to learn about the consequences of having to take medication. Most importantly right now however, he is no longer on medication, but at that time in his life it was very important and got him from A to B

Tips to other farmers

"Having conversations about how you are feeling especially when you are in a dark place and having negative thoughts when you need support"

Seek help. Avoid letting the problem build up. Make an appointment to see you GP/Family Doctor as they are an important first point of contact for medical support let it be physical or mental.

Have an annual health check-up at least once a year. It is vital. It can be very reassuring and if there is need for some intervention either physical or mental health it means the problem is sorted sooner rather than later "a stitch in time saves nine"

Other recommendations include:

- take a walk-in nature away from your farm
- meet up with people that cheer you up and put you in a good mood
- reading - articles, books poetry that can inspire, reassure, and uplift your spirits
- listen to the music that you enjoy
- take time out for moments of spirituality - meditate, reflect through personal prayer
- go for a drive, stop off to have a cup of coffee , say Hello to someone, get a conversation going , even if it is only about the e-weather, it helps to break the silence, Who knows but the other person may welcome such an intervention
- finding a safe space to let go talk to someone you trust
- make time for family and friends,

The real message of hope George would like to share is to say that do not try to go it alone, look for help, talk to someone and share your concerns. People are understating and all too willing to help. At such moments you may feel alone, but as George said "I can assure you; you are not alone. put yourself first - it is not being selfish be self-compassionate"

Mental health problems can happen to anyone in any walk of life. Remember you are not the only one experiencing mental health issues, everyone, whether you are a sheep farmer, dairy beef or a sailor, everyone has mental health, and that mental health can be challenged at the most unexpected of times and you owe it to yourself, your quality of life to get the help and support you need,

The most important gift you have in life is Time, and if you are struggling make time for yourself to seek support.

Three especially important considerations pointed out by George :

1. Be safe
2. Peace of Mind
3. Your Health

Combined George believes these three things will help you cross most bridges in life.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Pn4XJoZk84>

<https://thatsfarming.com/farming-news/george-graham-suicide/>

Life and farm work are demanding both for the farmer and the family. The stress and struggles that emerge from this particular workplace setting are unique. It is also well documented that prolonged periods of stress, impact on mental and physical health such as anxiety depression, and heart disease respectively. Such a combination can inevitable lead to serious farm accidents /injuries self-harm and suicide.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), suicidal behaviour is associated with different outcomes and actions with varying degrees of lethality, such as suicidal ideation, attempted suicide, and completed suicide (World Health Organization . Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative. World Health Organization; Geneva, Switzerland: 2014 and Word Health Organization . World Report on Violence and Health. World Health Organization; Geneva, Switzerland: 2002.).

Suicide in farming within the EU is well documented with France having a high statistic, and in Ireland it has been recorded that almost a quarter (23.4%) of Irish farmers are at risk of taking their own life, according to "stark" research figures released to coincide with Agri Mental Health Week.

The study, funded by the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention, was conducted by University College Dublin's School of Agriculture and Food Science, and is based on a series of 10 one-to-one interviews with farmers, four focus groups, including one with industry professionals who deal directly with farmers, and a national survey carried out within the last four months. (<https://www.irishexaminer.com/farming/arid-40982102.html>)

Bereavement by suicide shares many of the characteristics with other bereavements However it is also different.

Additional resources:

HUGG - Healing Untold Grief Grouosht<https://www.hugg.ie/surviving-a-suicide/>

"Faced with a sudden, often unexpected, and sometimes violent death, the suicide bereaved experience a grief which typically includes strong feelings of guilt, self-reproach, and questioning - "why?". Discomfort, shame, and self-stigma associated with suicide can make it difficult to talk about. There may be further challenges to face which are not common to "normal" bereavements e.g., inquests, media coverage, trauma reactions and difficult family relationships". Women and Men may experience Grief differently, women are more likely to express their feelings early after loss, reach out for social support, express more sorrow, experience depression, guilt, and they are more willing to talk about the loss.

As noted by EmbraceFARM <https://embracefarm.com/supports/bereavement/>

"Whereas men on the other hand are more likely to take on a managerial role, intellectualise their emotions, indicate feelings of anger, fear and loss of control, they also may use denial or be more private about grief"

The Encircle Programme focus is on assisting the emotional wellbeing of farm families through their loss and in turn with the practical support and information they may require on this journey. <https://embracefarm.com/embrace-supports/encircle/>

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