

Farmer Health and Safety



The Five Ways to Wellbeing are evidence-based steps that everyone can take to maintain and or improve mental health and wellbeing. Undoubtedly, it is most important to maintain safe farming practices to reduce the risk of injury and untimely loss of life. Equally it is most important to maintain wellbeing practices to reduce the risk of mental health challenges or mental illness. When our mental health is compromised by stress and anxiety there is a greater risk of making mistakes and accidents may occur. The two go hand in hand and for once it is probable ok to disagree with the adage that “ a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” We, think we are all better off if we keep farm safety and or mental health and wellbeing in the one hand.

Finola Colgan Development Officer Mental Health Ireland and Niamh Nolan Project Manager Farmers4Safety Managing Risk Together -EIP Agri Project

Connect

Social interaction and feeling valued by other people are fundamental human needs. Combined they contribute to wellbeing and indeed can be cushions against isolation. Research shows that people with strong social connections are happier, healthier, and live longer. Because of the nature of farming, long hours, demanding situations, and unexpected life events both on and off the farm, it can be difficult to form regular social connections, so it may be necessary to claim time to get out to socialise that best suit your needs. A couple of suggestions include arranging to go for a cup of tea, a walk and a chat with a neighbour, perhaps consider volunteering in your local community which is an excellent way of networking.

There are also benefits to giving support to and getting support from other people with similar experiences.

Be Active

Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety. It promotes both physical and mental health and well-being. It may appear ironic to make such a suggestion to farmers given the physical demands level associated with farming practices. One useful way in terms of farming might be to consider abandoning the quad occasionally and get in a swift walk. It is well established that that planned exercise releases endorphins that can make a person feel more alert, more energised, and able to cope with challenges. Clearly this increased energy is very important, your awareness is increased which is beneficial in terms of reducing farm accidents that may occur due to lack of concentration.

Another suggestion is to create off farm activity , such as joining a cycle club, join a football team, seek out indoor activities that are organised by your Local Sports Partnerships

Undertake an activity that you enjoy and doing at your own pace to reap the benefits. The message really is, to make physical activity a regular habit, as it can be a game changer in lifting your mood from a low spot to a better place.

Take Notice

Take notice of how you are feeling both physically and mentally. It is understood that farming is a very busy way of life irrespective of the farming focus – cattle, sheep , horses , dairying tillage and so on. When a farmer is busy there is a risk of physical and mental overload creating a risk of physical exhaustion and burnout . The most practical thing to do to reduce such clutter, is to stop, pause, collect your thoughts by being aware of the generous nature around you, the sound of animals grazing , birds, the beauty of the trees that line your land – giving yourself these few random moments of self-care can help you feel calm and in control. Making such moments for yourself and focussing on the task in hand rather than what has to be done yet or something that did not go according to plan can also reduce the risk of incurring an accident. Unfortunately, and sadly farm accidents regularly occur because of being stress and in a hurry to get something done. Is it worth the risk?

Keep Learning

Being interested about all sorts of matters on and off the farm is good for the mind. Learning about new ways of farming keeps the mind active and motivated. There is no evidence to show that *“you cannot teach an old dog new tricks”* quite the opposite! The more we keep our brains stimulated the more we thrive no matter the age! It is important for self esteem to embrace new opportunities and experiences. Check out your local Education Training Board and see what they have on offer. Joining in with adult also provides the opportunity to develop new friends and to socialise. Local libraries are also a wealth of information and offer community talks on all kinds of matters.

Give

Give and giving while important are beneficial and can make you feel better with the acknowledgment and sharing of gratitude. It very commendable when your time, words and deeds benefit others. It is like an emotional endorphin that creates positive feelings and energises you. It can be connecting with a neighbour that is struggling, listening, and offering the hand of friendship.

However, once again take a moment out, pause to think about your own needs and give to yourself, some personal quality time. It is not a selfish thing to do.

The Five Ways to Wellbeing

Embracing these five ways can make a massive difference to your quality of life and most importantly contribute to safe farming practices. They are five keys that can you unlock every day in small meaningful ways that will benefit you and the people in your life. As mentioned at the outset they are evidenced based, people who integrate them as a daily habit thrive. Why? Because you can feel connected with others by making the effort, paying attention to being active, taking notice and learning about of opportunities around you to feel calm and relaxed , give regularly to others and yourself. In this regard these Five Ways in your hand are worth two in the bush

International research found that people who thrive have five things in common. They feel connected with others, take notice of the simple things, give regularly, keep learning and are physically active.

Further Information

'Your health is your wealth' is true in farming

The Health and Safety Authority's (HSA's) Farm Safety Partnership Advisory Committee (FSPAC) working group has developed **Farmers' Health and Wellbeing** – A guide to staying healthy while farming. They also commissioned a video for their Survivor. Survivor Stories Real Farmers Real Accidents.

The guide offers advice on the various health issues that pertain to farmers and their work. The video highlights the story of George Graham Award Winning Sheep Sheerer who struggled with his mental health and how he reached out and took the first step to seek the support he needed. Finola Colgan Mental Health Ireland commented "Farming brings its own unique stresses basically because of the nature of farming, and the demands made of it and the lifestyle that goes with it"

In publishing the guidance and mental health awareness video Pat Griffin, Senior Inspector at the HSA, commented: "The work of a farmer is often unpredictable, demanding and can be hazardous. We are urging farmers to take time to assess their well-being and put plans in place on how they will address their health concerns.

"Taking the time to review your mental and physical health is important and in some cases a health issue that arises could significantly increase your risk of a serious farming injury or worse, a fatal accident," he advised.

Farmers4Safety – Managing Risk Together EIP AGRI Project Manager Niamh Nolan highlighted the value of Peer-to-Peer mentoring. It provides farmers and their mentors with the opportunity to talk about their "on the ground" experiences. This approach is also reducing social isolation and providing an excellent opportunity for farmers to connect and support each other .

Further Information

Survivor Stories Real Farmers Real Accidents: <http://hsa.agtel.ie/>

Farmers Health and Wellbeing: <https://bit.ly/3yTaFTK>

Mental Health Ireland – Farming Resilience <https://bit.ly/3PC176b>

Farmers4Safety Managing Risk Together -EIP Agri Project <https://bit.ly/3cpL7pH>