

Talking about
the elephant
in the room:

FARMER MENTAL HEALTH

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We asked 76 Scottish farmers for their thoughts on mental health via an online survey. Read on to find out more about the signs of mental health issues, farming factors that might lead to problems, spotting the signs of mental ill-health and breaking down barriers to accessing support.

An introduction from the Farm Safety Foundation

Mental health in agriculture is the elephant in the room. No one really wants to talk about loneliness, anxiety or suicide. But it's there, and many are increasingly worried that it's getting worse...

We are not alone. A survey in August from the Office for National Statistics found that almost one in five adults were likely to be experiencing some form of depression, compared with one in ten before the pandemic.

So why are we still not talking about it more? Why is there still a stigma connected to poor mental health in farming? Four years ago, we launched Mind Your Head, a week-long campaign to raise awareness of the issues facing farmers today and highlight the wealth of support available across the UK and this year, Mind Your Head will shine a light on the collective efforts of those living and working in the industry to tackle the issue and encourage farmers to take notice, open up and talk to each other.

It is so important to encourage a culture within agriculture that explicitly recognises how the job can, and does, impact on the wellbeing of everyone living and working in it and how poor mental health can have a direct and deadly impact on the job. Given the year we have just experienced, making sure we are all looking after our physical and mental wellbeing has never been more relevant.

Stephanie Berkeley

Manager, Farm Safety Foundation



Farming and mental health

We asked farmers to discuss factors linked to a farming lifestyle that they thought might have an adverse impact on mental health – here is what they told us.



Spotting the signs of mental health issues

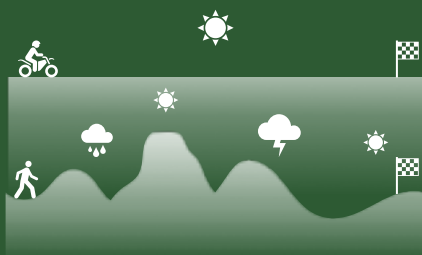
At least 1 in 4 of us will likely experience mental health issues at some point in our lives. All of us have mental health – so it is important we can spot the signs of difficulties and know how to look after ourselves and support others. It is completely normal to feel stressed at times and even to experience some symptoms of anxiety and low mood/ depression at times too. Farmers know better than most that life brings sunshine and rain – ups and downs.

Mental health difficulties

Mental wellbeing



ALL OF US move up and down on this continuum ALL OF THE TIME



Usually we cope quite well with this and things work out over time, but a pandemic brings exceptional circumstances – with a lot of extra pressure for many people at the moment.

If you notice you feel “stuck” and are finding it difficult to get away from upsetting thoughts, feelings or physical discomfort – it is important to seek more information and support (see page 4).

Our Scottish farming participants suggest you should look out for the following warning signs of stress and mental health issues in yourself and others:

- ▶ **Neglecting usual activities:** Lack of self-care, ignoring responsibilities and general apathy.
- ▶ **Social withdrawal:** Withdrawal from social interactions of any kind, less communicative, unusually quiet.
- ▶ **Cognitive changes:** Increase in irrational and negative thoughts along with lapses in concentration.
- ▶ **Temperament changes:** Sudden uncharacteristic mood swings, increased irritability. May also be more emotional and prone to obvious low mood.
- ▶ **Substances:** An increase in alcohol and / or drug use.
- ▶ **Energy levels:** Change in energy levels, either becoming more lethargic and tired, or more restless and unable to sleep.

Getting help and support

Farmers in our study shared a variety of ways to get help and support for mental health issues, so if you feel in need of support take a look at the list below and go for the option that is most comfortable for you!

Farmer specific support (charities and organisations that are designed to support farmers)

RSABI

<https://rsabi.org.uk/Home-Page>

National Farmers Union of Scotland (NFUS)

<https://www.nfus.org.uk/>

Farm Advisory Service

<https://www.fas.scot/>

Are Ewe Ok? (SAYFC)

<https://www.sayfc.org/members/member-support/are-ewe-ok/>

You Are Not Alone (YANA)

<https://www.yanahelp.org/>

FarmWell

<https://farmwell.org.uk/>

Yellow wellies:

<https://www.yellowwellies.org/the-little-book-of-minding-your-head-download-your-copy-here/>

Healthcare professionals (trained professionals accessible via the NHS)

Local GP

Mental Health Professional

Clinical Psychologist

Mental health organisations (accessible by phone, email or face-to-face)

The Samaritans

<https://www.samaritans.org/?nation=scotland>

Mind

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH)

<https://www.samh.org.uk/>

Papyrus UK

<https://www.papyrus-uk.org/>

Social support

(reach out to your family, friends and fellow farmers)

Talk to your partner

Talk to your family

Talk to your friends

Supportive online farming forums e.g. The Farming Forum:

<https://thefarmingforum.co.uk/index.php>



Breaking down barriers

Our farming participants also told us about some of the barriers that might be faced when trying to get help and support. It's important to be aware of these barriers, along with suggestions for overcoming them.

Barriers	Breaking down barriers
<p>No time to access support: Farming is a 24/7 occupation where there are never enough hours in the day for critical tasks, never mind time to visit the doctor</p>	<p>Time to save a life: It might be yours, it might be your neighbours, or your friends – it's important to prioritise mental health in the same way you look after your physical health.</p> <p>Access support anywhere, anytime: Most of the charities and organisations listed in the support section offer 24/7 phone lines and online resources, making it easier to fit mental health into your hectic schedule (and removing travel time!)</p>
<p>Don't know how to start the conversation: Farmers reported they weren't sure what to say about mental health concerns, and they were worried about negative reactions.</p>	<p>Find out more: There are several online resources that provide details about mental health, and suggestions for starting a conversation – such as 'The Little Book of Minding Your Head' by Yellow Wellies.</p> <p>One step at a time: Getting in touch with your GP, or a charity such as RSABI can be an easy first step – they will guide you through discussing your concerns.</p>
<p>A culture of self-reliance: Farmers felt that they were expected to deal with their issues independently, and were reluctant to ask for help unless they were in crisis.</p>	<p>Self-help: There are multiple sources of self-help for anyone who doesn't feel quite ready to discuss mental health with others: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/self-help-therapies/ these range from books, to apps, to online courses and can all help to improve your mental health.</p>
<p>Lack of anonymity: Being part of a small rural village can feed into the perception that everyone knows everything about everyone else – and farmers wanted mental health concerns to remain private.</p>	<p>Moving online: The majority of mental health charities and organisations offer the capacity for anonymous phone calls and / or online chat with volunteers and professionals. The NHS self-help resources also offer a way to find help whilst remaining totally anonymous.</p>
<p>Don't know where to get support: A proportion of our participants were still unsure how, or where, to get support.</p>	<p>More information: We have listed some forms of support in this leaflet to give you a starting point. Whether you prefer to talk to a mental health charity, or an organisation developed specifically to help farmers, there is bound to be a resource that can help you.</p>



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NTSag & APHF websites

research.abdn.ac.uk/nts-farming
abdn.ac.uk/aphf

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