

# Mental health in farming: Key points for Defra to consider



Slide pack designed by the Engaging for Change group at Harper Adams University.

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We would be happy to speak with Defra further on this matter.



# What can Defra do to help?



Embed a joined-up approach to farming policy which considers mental health



Rural-proof professional mental healthcare.



Track mental health over time and its effect on businesses.

This slide deck will give details on the importance of these three areas and how they could be approached.

# 1 Embed a joined-up approach to farming policy which considers mental health

## Good mental health underpins everything

- e.g. tech adoption, regulatory compliance, adaptation, diversification etc.
- If farmers are not in good physical or mental health, planning for the future becomes difficult.

## Learning lessons from other initiatives



**NY FarmNet supports farming businesses** in NY State. When established in 1986, only financial consultants were sent to support farmers. Often, these consultants could not get a farmer in a position to do a business plan because there were problems they were not equipped to deal with –e.g. family breakdown or conflict. Since 1987, **a social worker usually accompanies the financial consultant. One supports the family, one supports the business.** Both underpin each other.



**DEFRA'S RESILIENCE FUND DID NOT DO THIS - MONEY WAS ONLY PROVIDED FOR BUSINESS CONSULTANTS.**

# Mental health can be poor due to a combination of pressures farmers face (e.g.)

- **Business**

- Animal/crop disease, Finances, Succession, Weather/climate change.

- **Social**

- Bereavement, Family conflict, Illness, Loneliness, Rural crime, Struggles with sexuality or other EDI issues.

- **Policy and public**

- Bureaucracy, Constantly changing or uncertain policy, Criticism from politicians or the public or media, Pressure from inspections or penalties for admin errors, Specific policies perceived as damaging (e.g. IHT, trade deals).

Research Article

## The Impact of COVID-19 on Farmers' Mental Health: A Case Study of the UK

David Christian Rose , Faye Shortland, Jilly Hall, Paul Hurley , Ruth Little , Caroline Nye  & ...show all

[Link to research article](#)



## The mental wellbeing of young farmers in Ireland and the UK: driving factors, help-seeking, and support

David Christian Rose , Fergal Bradley, Deirdre O'Connor, Jilly Hall, Rosie Morrison , Martin Mul Kerrins



[Link to research article](#)

# Stressors differ depending on personal characteristics

- Gender
- Age
- Race
- Sexuality
- Neurodiversity/disability

**Agriculture, COVID-19 and mental health: Does gender matter?**

Hannah Budge  Sally Shortall

**The mental wellbeing of young farmers in Ireland and the UK: driving factors, help-seeking, and support**

David Christian Rose , Fergal Bradley, Deirdre O'Connor, Jilly Hall, Rosie Morrison , Martin Mulherrins, ...show all

[Link to research](#)



**Navigating Farm Stress: Traumatic and Resilient Dimensions of the Black Agrarian Frame**

Andrew R. Smolski   & Michael D. Schulman 

**Mental Health Among LGBTQ+ Farmers in the United States**

Courtney Cuthbertson, Dane Rivas-Koehl, Anisa Codamon, Alyssa Billington & Matthew Rivas-Koehl

A comprehensive guide to

**Neurodiversity and mental health in farming**

*Advice on establishing support networks for everyone in your team*

**FARMERS WEEKLY**

**LEVEL THE FIELD**

Working for a more equitable farming industry

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# Embed a joined-up approach to farming policy which considers mental health



## Align policies across departments

Policies across government must be joined up. It is no good supporting farmers with one hand, then causing stress with the other. Language and action across government matters. Trust is easily broken.



## Work closely with cross-governmental departments and local communities to strengthen rural resilience

Ensure rural healthcare and community is strengthened by working closely with Departments for Health, HSE, Local Communities, Education, etc.



## Invite mental health professionals and charities to strengthen existing policy delivery

Recognise that mental (and physical) health underpins good farm decision-making so mental health professionals and charities can support policy design and delivery e.g. tech adoption and business funding.

Opinion: Is there political will to invest in rural services?

Prof David Rose

09 October 2024

[Link to article](#)



# Rural-proof professional mental healthcare

Current NHS provision of mental healthcare is not good enough for people in rural areas, including farmers.

**Landscapes of support for farming mental health: Adaptability in the face of crisis**

Faye Shortland PhD, Jilly Hall PhD, Paul Hurley PhD, Ruth Little PhD, Caroline Nye PhD, Matt Lobley PhD, David Christian Rose PhD ✉

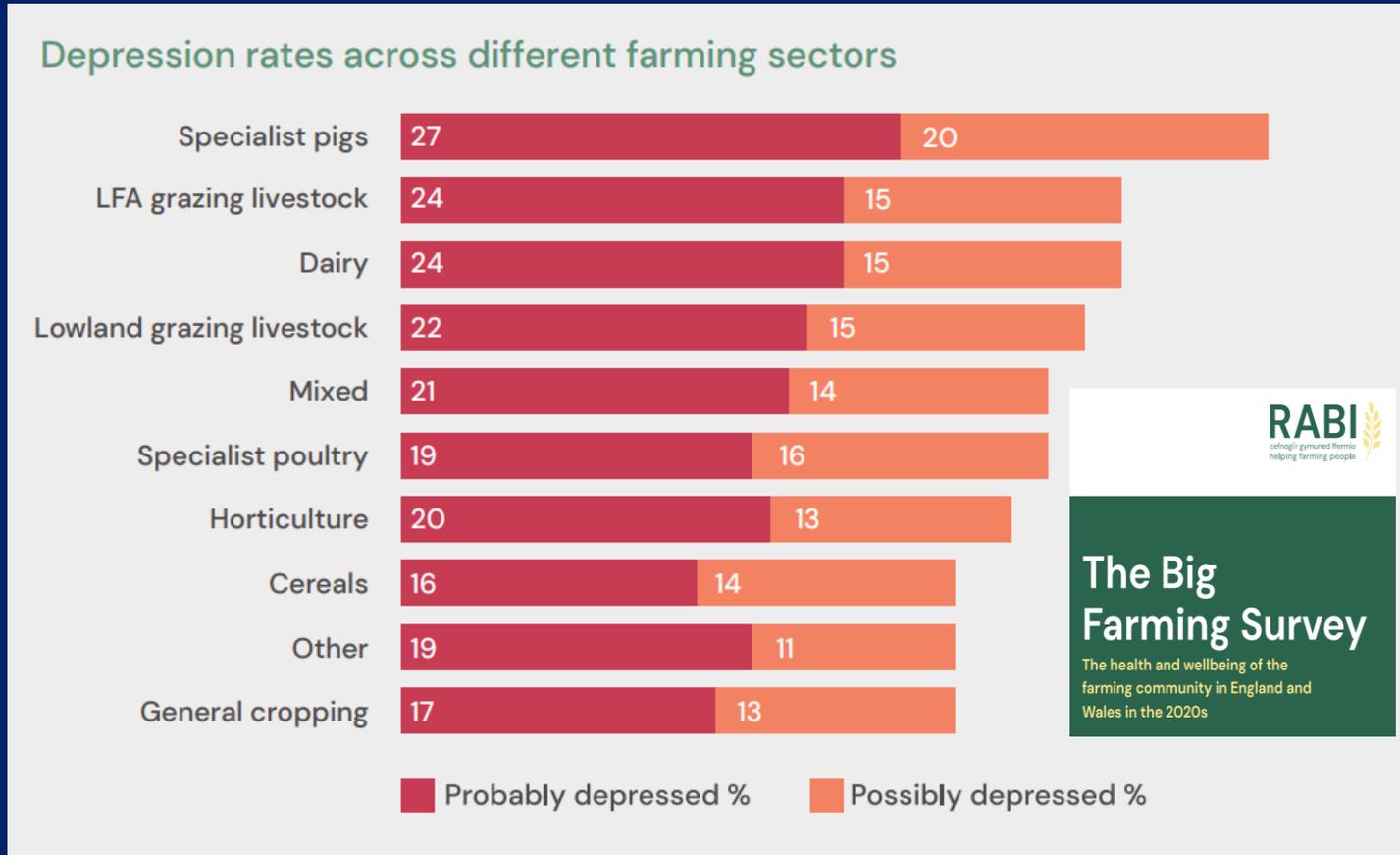


[Link to research](#)

*"If they had a bit more farming knowledge and the farming community felt more able to reach out to them, I do think people could be helped better than some of the rural support out there at the moment."*

One GP told a farmer to 'stop farming', not understanding that a generational link with the land didn't make that so easy.

# Mental (+ physical) health of some farmers is poor



**healthwatch**  
North Yorkshire

## Ploughing through barriers:

Understanding the challenges and promoting help-seeking in farming communities

- 74% had experienced back, joint, knee, shoulder or muscle pain.
- 42% had experienced stress & anxiety.
- 31% had experienced sleep problems.

This slide pack focuses on mental health, but physical health should not be forgotten (can go hand-in-hand)

# Barriers to farmers seeking help

- **Stigma**

- stoicism/hegemonic masculinity.

- **Accessibility**

- lack of time to attend appointments, geographic isolation.

- **Availability**

- lack of GPs who understand farming, lack of mental healthcare provision in rural areas.

- **Loss of rural community**

- loss of spaces of rural community (churches, post offices, pubs) limits peer/friend support.

“A farmer from Mid Wales who was initially hospitalised locally for his mental health...has been moved to Brighton, not just over the border, to the other side of the country...that type of distance isn't a one-off unfortunately.” (Quote in paper below)

“...fundamentally from our point of view, there just isn't the provision. We're talking about people just understanding the rural setting, the rural context.” (Quote in paper below)

## Landscapes of support for farming mental health: Adaptability in the face of crisis

Faye Shortland PhD, Jilly Hall PhD, Paul Hurley PhD, Ruth Little PhD, Caroline Nye PhD, Matt Lobley PhD, David Christian Rose PhD ✉



[Link to research](#)



Harper Adams  
University

# Landscapes of support for farmer mental health – focus on England

- English landscape less connected than e.g. NI (Rural Support).
- Mix of formal/informal providers.
- Rural charities often dealing with problems caused by poor or inaccessible state provision of care.

State or private professional healthcare

Mental health charities

Faith groups e.g. chaplains

Peers, family, friends

Rural communities

Agricultural organisations

“Accidental counsellors” e.g. farm advisors

Digital world/AI

Animals

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[Link to research](#)

# Those who help farmers in allied professions also suffer stress

- The many allied professions supporting or interacting with farmers – e.g. accountants, agronomists, contractors, land agents, RPA staff, veterinarians – can suffer stress from encountering farmers in distress. Do not forget to support the supporters.

***“what support may be available to managing agents if a tenant informs us of something of concern? Or if we have had a difficult interaction with a tenant that may affect our mental health?” (quote from managing agent in study below)***

Palczynski et al. (in review): AKIS actors as ‘accidental counsellors’ in the landscape of support for farmer mental health: a novel critical framework.

# 2 Rural-proof professional mental healthcare



## Reach 'harder-to-reach' farmers

Ensure new mental health workers understand and are accessible to farming populations. See report – bottom right)



## Support existing professionals and charities

Bolster ongoing efforts already embedded within rural and farming communities.



## Support the supporters and boost rural community

Improve informal landscapes of support alongside formal and state provision of care.



## Engaging 'harder to reach' farmers: the roles and needs of skilled intermediaries

### Research summary

Veronica White, Paul Hurley, Jilly Hall, Jessica Lyon, Judith Tsouvalis, David Christian Rose & Ruth Little



[Link to report](#)

# 3

## Track mental health over time

### Why this matters

- Monitoring the effects of mental and physical health can provide evidence:
  - Of the impact of health on business productivity and adaptation.
  - To evaluate the success of interventions.

### How this could be approached

- Embed long-term measurement of farmer mental (and physical) health into data collection (e.g. Farm Business Survey, Opinion Tracker).
  - Validated options include:
    - Warwick-Edinburgh mental health scale (used by RABI for the Big Farming Survey),
    - Health-Related Quality of Life
    - Farmer stress assessment tool