



South Eastern Health
and Social Care Trust



Public Health
Agency

Survive & Thrive on the farm



Farming is an occupation, but it is also a way of life. Unfortunately the demands of the farm can put you and your family under a great deal of pressure.



Even the most successful farms and hardworking families will experience pressure and stress.

Stress can cause serious health problems for many farmers and their families. Admitting you are worried about yourself, your family or farm isn't a sign of weakness. This is the first step to managing and dealing with stress.

The greatest asset to any farm is the farming family. We hope that this booklet will provide you with the information necessary to raise awareness of the issues that may be affecting your health and wellbeing, and the resources that help you to deal with them.

What is stress?



The term stress originates from the world of engineering, where it relates to the capacity of a physical structure to withstand strain. However, structures exposed to stresses and strains over a period of time can begin to experience damage.

This is also true of people, although stress among individuals is more complex. It is recognised that the farming community face a number of particular stressors and that an accumulation of stress can take its toll on the physical and emotional health of individuals and their families.

What are the causes of farm stress?



Stress can:

- Occur suddenly – without warning. For example heavy rain might destroy your winter crop or there could be identification of a reactor in your herd
- Build up in a single day – as one thing after another goes wrong. For example, that vital piece of farm equipment breaks down or calving complications end with your being unable to save the calf and then there's the additional cost of vet fees
- Snowball over a long period of time – due to poor cash flow, high debts, or where fodder is decreasing as weather conditions worsen
- Arise as a result of life events - such as bereavement, poor physical health or relationship difficulties within families and extended families
- Occur within ourselves - how we react to stress depends on how we view the situation. In other words our stress depends on the inner beliefs and values which we use to deal with events in our lives.

How does stress affect your health and wellbeing?

Poor health can be brought on for a number of reasons:

- Physical conditions develop eg. arthritis, raised blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease
- Emotional wellbeing eg. worry and stress about your way of life.

However, if poor health is recognised and addressed, then often the burden can be reduced and your future outlook will improve.

The first step in managing stress is to recognise the signs that are particular to you.

It is important that when you recognise you are under stress that you talk to someone, for example a family member or close friend. This may need to be followed up with a visit to your family doctor.

Take a look at these signs and symptoms of stress, and see if you can identify with any of these:

Physical Health

- Headaches
- Exhaustion
- Face looks pale and drawn
- Neck ache, back ache and general aches and pains
- Breathlessness
- Palpitations
- Chest pains
- Raised blood pressure
- Skin problems
- Recurring infections
- Digestive problems and ulcers
- Heart disease.

Emotional Health

- Increasingly worried
- Loss of self confidence
- Constant feelings of guilt and hopelessness
- Tired but can't relax
- Negative attitudes
- Irritability
- Tearful
- Feeling that you are letting your family down
- Loss of the ability to make decisions and become forgetful
- Experience poor concentration and confusion.



Life

- All work and no time for self, family or friends
- Loss of sense of humour
- Increase in alcohol consumption
- Decline in personal appearance
- Changes in routine – stop attending your place of worship, community groups or special events
- Avoid contact with outside services such as bank manager, tax man, farm suppliers
- Seeking isolation
- Becoming angry and lashing out often towards anyone that may try to help.

Work

- Increased risk of accidents
- Decline in farm or home appearance
- Decrease in care for livestock and pets
- Poor working relations with family members and farm employees
- Complaints from farm suppliers
- Low productivity.

What can you do to tackle stress?



Recognise – **YOU** are the most valuable resource on the farm, so you need to be in good working order and look after your health.

Shun the ‘super person’ urge – some people expect too much of themselves and get into a constant state of worry because they think they are not achieving what they should.

Take one thing at a time – when you are under pressure, an ordinary day’s work can seem unbearable. Tell yourself this is temporary and you can work your way out of it.

Work through your anger – having an outburst may give you a sense of righteousness or even power, but it generally leaves you feeling foolish and sorry in the end. The energy resulting from anger is better used to handle a distasteful chore such as cleaning out the cow shed.

Give in occasionally – if you find you are getting into frequent quarrels with family or neighbours, it is easier on the system to give in once in a while even if you feel you are right. If you yield, you usually find that others will too.

Take time with family – use that Sunday lunch or evening meal to relax with the family and catch up on the good things that are happening.

Talk it out – admitting you are worried about the farm isn't a sign of weakness. Talk your problems out with a trusted friend. Get professional help if you are experiencing severe distress (see back page for useful contact numbers). Remember professionals are trained to offer support in confidence.



Take care of your body – get adequate rest, nutrition and exercise. Well nourished, rested people can withstand stress better. Farmers may feel they get enough exercise. However, in addition to work, leisure activities such as walking or running to raise the pulse rate and bring fresh oxygen to the muscles can help improve both physical and emotional health.

Turn your crises into challenges – shift from worrying about problems to problem solving.

Recognise things you can change – learn to accept those situations that are outside your control. Knowing the difference in these is key to survival.

Laugh – try to see the humour in everyday life!

Asking for help is not a sign of weakness!



Support for you and your family:

Aware Defeat Depression

Information, self help and support for individuals suffering from depression.

Services in Bangor, Downpatrick & Lisburn

0845 120 2961 (Helpline) or (028) 9035 7820 (Office)

Citizens Advice Bureau

(028) 4461 4110 (Down District)

(028) 9266 2251 (Lisburn)

(028) 9181 9257 (Newtownards)

(028) 9145 7000 (North Down, Bangor)

(028) 9042 8288 (North Down, Holywood)

Cruse Bereavement Care

A confidential counselling service to help individuals and families cope following the death of a loved one.

(028) 9127 2444 (North Down & Ards area)

(028) 9023 2695 (Belfast office covering Lisburn & Down areas)

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)

(028) 9037 8418 (Headquarters)

Health Development Department (South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust)

Equip yourself with skills - there are a range of courses available on stress management which will provide you with skills to support individuals who are distressed.

(028) 9250 1373

Lifeline

0808 808 8000



Rural Support

A confidential listening ear and signposting service for farmers and rural communities.

0845 606 7607 www.ruralsupport.org.uk

The Samaritans

24 hour confidential telephone listening and befriending service for people who are lonely, suicidal, depressed.

0845 790 9090

Ulster Farmers Union

(028) 9751 0196 (Ballynahinch)

(028) 4461 2782 (Downpatrick)

(028) 9266 2850 (Lisburn)

(028) 9181 4218 (Newtownards)

(028) 9751 0196 (North Down)

