

Mental Health Awareness and the ‘Stress Bucket’

How is your mental health?

I hope I haven't lost you already- please stay with me!

It is impossible to ignore the subject of mental health at the moment. The media in general and increasingly the farming media report the ever-heightening incidence of anxiety, depression and suicide.

Shockingly, more than 1 farmer dies by suicide every week in the UK. Farmers, and those working in the agricultural industry, are very much at risk of mental health disorders. Long hours, solitary work, financial stress and historically, an unwillingness to talk about hard times can all contribute to feeling down and desperate. Among other vulnerable occupations, vets are near the top of the list. Vets are 3.5 times more likely to die by suicide than members of the general population. I myself know members of my university year group that have died as a result of suicide.

I would like, within the scope of this newsletter, to talk openly about how to recognize signs of poor mental health and discuss how we can possibly help each other and how you can help yourself. We are all in this together. This is an important topic that would benefit from more open discussion, hopefully most of you know me well enough to recognise that this comes from a place of good will and not patronisation!

What does the term Mental Health mean?

MENTAL HEALTH	
IS	IS NOT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Something we ALL have • Just as Important as (and linked to) our physical health • Something we need to give time towards • Something that changes over time as our life & circumstances change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always something negative • A sign of weakness • Something to be ashamed of • The same as 'mental illness' • About feeling good all the time

Importantly:

Mental health is not the same as mental illness!

The Stress Bucket

The ‘stress bucket’ is a common analogy used to demonstrate coping skills and resilience.

Everyone has an internal ‘bucket’ which

denotes your

stress capacity. The size of bucket is dependent on personality type and life experience, meaning that some people have more capacity for stress than others. People with good coping mechanisms can counteract the stressful aspects of their life and stop their bucket overflowing. A good coping mechanism can be as simple as having a hobby. A stressful life with no outlets for relaxation or relief can lead to low mood.



Signs of low mood

You may feel:

- sad
- worried, anxious or panicked
- tired
- a lack of self-confidence
- frustrated or irritated
- angry
- not interested in things

Or you might notice you start:

- withdrawing from your usual activities, particularly ones you used to enjoy or value
- spending less time with those you care about
- having trouble sleeping

It is very normal to feel all of these things, SOME of the time. I probably feel all of them every morning before 8am, and that's just trying to get the kids to put their shoes on. If you are feeling like this all of the

time then making some changes is likely to improve things.

Building Resilience

Recognising triggers of stress and learning to cope with them is a skill and doing so builds resilience.

Devoting thought and focus to looking after yourself doesn't mean you will become less focussed on your business. In fact, being healthy and taking care of your wellbeing means you are likely to be more effective with your time and energy. It's important we look after ourselves, and look out for others, particularly in these challenging and uncertain times.

- **The Basics**

- Eat properly
- None of you are drinking enough water - tea doesn't count
- Regular exercise
- Sleep - try and get some

- **Talk** - I imagine for many or most of you the thought of talking about your feelings is akin to a living nightmare, but a problem shared really is a problem halved:

- Talking could be anything from professional counselling, talking to a friend in the pub or to your other half
- Socialising of any form is beneficial - market day/vet or industry meetings all count.

- **Schedule time away from work**

- We all know how all-consuming farming is and how difficult it can be to get away.
- It doesn't have to be a weeks holiday but an afternoon off or evening meal out to break the cycle of 'work, sleep, eat repeat' can help
- Hobbies - talk to Chris about the benefits of cycling and head-to-toe lycra; he loves it

- **Work out what makes you happy**

- For some of you, being at work all the time **IS** what makes you happy - and that's fine
- However, everyone is different and are driven by different things. In a team or family farm situation open and honest communication is the way forward - especially when dealing with succession and the future of the farm.
- Employers - do you have a high staff turnover rate? Why do you think that is? Everyone needs job satisfaction.

If you are worried about a member of your family or staff, the **most helpful thing you can do is listen** to them. Telling people to 'buck up' (although tempting) is often not constructive. Patience, empathy but above all just simply listening is essential when trying to engage with someone who is struggling.

Professional Help

- **Farming Community Network:** To talk to a sympathetic person who understands farmers and rural life, call: **03000 111999** Calls will be answered in person from 7am-11pm every day of the year.
- **RABI** (The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution) provides financial support during times of crisis. **Confidential Helpline: 0808 281 9490 (7am-11pm)**

Heading into winter with the housing period stretched out ahead of you is often a fairly bleak time of year. If you want to moan about the weather, you will always find a sympathetic ear here.

We are lucky to be part of a community and I personally am always grateful for a job in a beautiful area visiting farmers who are (mostly) cheery and have a sense of humour. Life is short - we may as well try to enjoy ourselves. When summer rolls around again we will, hopefully, remember how fortunate we are to be farmers and farm vets.



Bea.