

## How is your mental health?

Yes, this is still the George newsletter, please stay with us.

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

Shockingly, on average 1 farmer dies by suicide every week in the UK. Farmers and those working in the agricultural industry are identified as professions very much at risk for poor mental health. Long hours, solitary work, financial stress and historically, an unwillingness to talk about difficulties can all contribute to feeling down and desperate. Among other vulnerable occupations are vets, also near to the top of the list. Vets are 3.5 times more likely to die by suicide than members of the general population. Sadly, almost all vets will know a close personal friend with suicidal tendencies.

We hope, 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 and we want to engage with you without sounding patronising.

### What does the term Mental Health mean?

Before we begin it is important to know:

#### **Mental health is not the same as mental illness**

All of us have mental health, which is like (and linked with) our physical health. Just like physical health, if we devote time and energy to it we can improve our mental health and mental resilience. It can change over time as our lives and circumstances change around us.

Poor mental health (feeling hopeless, depressed or anxious for example) is not something to be ashamed of, just as you wouldn't be ashamed about catching an illness or having an accident. With help, and if necessary treatment, it can be overcome.

### The Stress Bucket

The 'stress bucket' is a common analogy used to illustrate coping skills and resilience. Everyone has a metaphorical internal 'bucket' which represents your capacity to handle stress. The size of one's bucket is dependent on personality type and life experience, meaning that some people have a greater capacity for stress than others. Regardless of how big your bucket is, 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, or making more time for yourself in the day. 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 totally normal to feel all of these things, SOME of the time. We all go through stressful or difficult periods. However, if you have these feelings over long periods, or even feel like it's all of the time, then it's probably time to make some changes.

### Building Resilience

Recognising triggers of stress and learning to cope with them is a skill just like any other, one which requires patience and practice in order to build and improve your mental resilience.

Devoting time and thought to looking after yourself doesn't mean you will become less focussed on the rest of life. In fact, being healthy and taking care of your wellbeing means you are likely to be more effective and have more energy through the day. It's important we look after ourselves and look out for others, particularly in our industry.

### Physical health

*Physical and mental health are interlinked, and they both have a massive impact on each other.*

- **Eat properly:** plenty of energy and plenty of greenery. Make mum proud.
- **Stay hydrated:** water is best, but tea will do in a pinch.
- **Regular exercise:** this shouldn't be a problem for most of you.
- **Sleep:** try and get as much as you need each day. Everybody is different; some people need more than others.

### Talk to someone

*I imagine for many or most of you, the thought of talking about your feelings is unusual at best and anxiety inducing at worst, but a problem shared is more than 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 and vet or industry meetings all count.
- In a team or family farm situation, open and honest communication is the way forward - especially when dealing with succession, the future of the farm or other delicate topics.

### Schedule time away from work

*We all know how all-consuming farming can be, and how difficult it often is to get away, but any time not spent thinking about crop rotation or mastitis can help improve our mental health.*

- It doesn't have to be a week's holiday in the sun; simply an afternoon off or having a meal out to break the cycle of 'work, sleep, eat' can help.
- Hobbies – You can talk to Chris W. about the benefits of head-to-toe lycra and holding up traffic on a bike; he loves it! But hobbies can be less physical: Walking, painting, collections or games are just some examples.

### Work out what makes you (and others) happy

- For some, being at work all the time **IS** what makes you happy - and that's OK.
- If that's not you, try and work out what brings you satisfaction in life and strive towards that.
- Employers – are you concerned about high staff turnover rate? Finding satisfaction for yourself and your staff can make a huge difference.



If you are worried about a member of your family, friends or staff, the **most helpful thing you can do is listen**. Telling people to 'buck up' or 'just get on with it' (although tempting) is not constructive. Patience, empathy and above all listening in earnest is essential. It may not solve the underlying issue but relieving stress by talking to someone is often the first step.

### Professional Help

If you feel you may need help, with finances, feelings or personal issues, there are a range of professionals willing to talk to you:

**Farming Community Network:**  
**03000 111999**

- to talk to a sympathetic person who understands farmers and rural life.
- Calls will be answered in person from 7am-11pm every day of the year.

**YANA Help:**  
**0300 3230400**

- Help for those involved in farming and other rural businesses affected by stress and depression.
- When calling, please leave a message and they will respond as quickly as they can.
- Their website is also full of information, financial aid and ways to help others with their mental health: [yanahelp.org](http://yanahelp.org)

**RABI:**  
**0808 281 9490**

- The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution.
- Provides financial support during times of crisis.
- Confidential Helpline (7am–11pm.)
- They also have an online mental wellbeing service on their website: [rabi.org.uk](http://rabi.org.uk)

**Samaritans:**  
**116 123**

- The goal of the Samaritans is to "make sure there's always someone there for anyone who needs someone."
- They are always available and can be reached on any phone, at any time.

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 with us.**

**Let's help each other to build mental resilience, improve our mental health and support our community where we can. The best place to start is by helping yourself.**

Ben J



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### **Booking TB visits over winter**

With the start of 6 monthly testing, this winter will be busier than usual for all of us.

If possible, please book your TB visit with us as soon as you receive your notification.

This will help us to organise visits and ensure we can book the best time and date for you.

