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BUILDING MENTAL WELLNESS IN THE RURAL SECTOR

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
INTRODUCTION	5
AIM.....	6
METHODOLOGY	6
1. AUTHORS JOURNEY.....	7
2. DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY	9
2.1 The emotional differences between depression and anxiety.....	9
2.2 The physical differences between depression and anxiety	10
2.3 Differences between male and female depression	10
2.4 Living in valleys and peaks	11
3. SUICIDE	12
3.1 When lives are changed forever	13
3.2 Support and resources available.....	15
3.2.1 Rural Support Trust.....	15
3.2.2 Farmstrong.....	16
3.2.3 Support is just a phone call away.....	16
4. UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR BRAIN	17
4.1 Neuroplasticity and how the brain reacts.....	17
4.2 Red brain vs Green brain.....	17
4.2.1 Top tips for growing your Green brain	18
4.3 Impact of nutrition on your mental health	19
4.4 Neurotransmitters and their role.....	19
4.4.1 Neurotransmitter deficiencies and their effect.....	20
5. TREATMENTS.....	21
5.1 Antidepressant medication	21
5.2 Alternative therapy	21
5.3 Learning how to “celebrate the little wins”	22
6. A RURAL WOMENS PERSPECTIVE.....	24
6.1 Rural people looking after rural people	25
CONCLUSIONS	27
RECOMMENDATIONS	28
If you only have 5 minutes a day	28
If you only have 10 minutes a day	28
If you have 30 minutes today.....	28
Incorporate these into your daily/monthly/yearly plan	29
REFERENCES	30

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The topic of mental wellness has become more mainstream in New Zealand due to suicide rates continuing to climb and as more and more people suffer from stress, depression and anxiety in an ever evolving busy society. Unfortunately the rural sector is not immune. In fact the rural sector has a higher suicide rate per capita than the urban sector.

This report explores depression, anxiety and suicide to further understand how to recognize the signs and what to do when the signs appear in your life or others around you. How do we ensure that as a society we can live in a calm, relaxed state of mind even with the reality of a fast world filled with social media and a “keeping up with the Jones” attitude.

In New Zealand one in ten adults are on antidepressants, this is an eight-fold increase in total prescription numbers since 1998. 14.3% of New Zealand adults have been diagnosed with depression at some time in their lives and 6.1% with anxiety disorders. There are many reasons for these figures. What are we as New Zealanders doing to ensure these statistics do not continue to rise? Ask yourself: Are my daily routines sustainable and do I live in a way that will keep myself and others around me mentally well?

This report involved a literature review, thematic analysis and interviews. My focus was to find trends around what triggered mental wellness issues as well as what daily, weekly and monthly techniques people use to make their mind and body feel better.

The research uncovered the main influencing factors in our rural industry causing mental wellness issues. Main factors included isolation, long hours, not enough time off farm, lack of exercise, poor eating habits and lack of sleep.

As New Zealand’s suicide rate increases, now is the perfect time for us to be talking through these issues with an opportunity to make a real difference within our communities. Implementing simple daily mindfulness activities will help you to look after yourself and then others around you.

The research has been pulled mainly from New Zealand to provide a real sense of what is going on within rural New Zealand. This work will not only be vital for the Primary sector but also our urban neighbours as depression does not stop at the farm gate, it can easily find its way into your life at any age or stage.

There are four personal stories throughout this report. The aim here is to give the reader a chance to reflect on their own circumstances while reading about challenges others have been through. We all have a story, tell someone yours, it just might make all the difference to your mental wellbeing and possibly theirs.

INTRODUCTION

It is easy to get overwhelmed by the challenges that confront us. This report will give you an insight into other rural people's lives and how they deal with the pressures of daily life.

I decided to do this project as part of my own wellbeing process. Having experience with both anxiety and depression, it was a chance for me to be honest with not only myself, but also my peers. Let's get all people talking about mental wellness openly and honestly as if we were talking about the weather (a topic close to all farmers' hearts). The reality is, mental illness is just that, an illness not a weakness. We need to get away from the stigma of someone being "Mentally Ill" and treat our brains as if it were any other muscle in the body. If it doesn't feel right talk to someone about it.

Whether you are reading this on the farm or sitting in a busy suburban café, it really makes no difference. The steps to wellness are all the same: Prioritize looking after yourself and then the others around you.

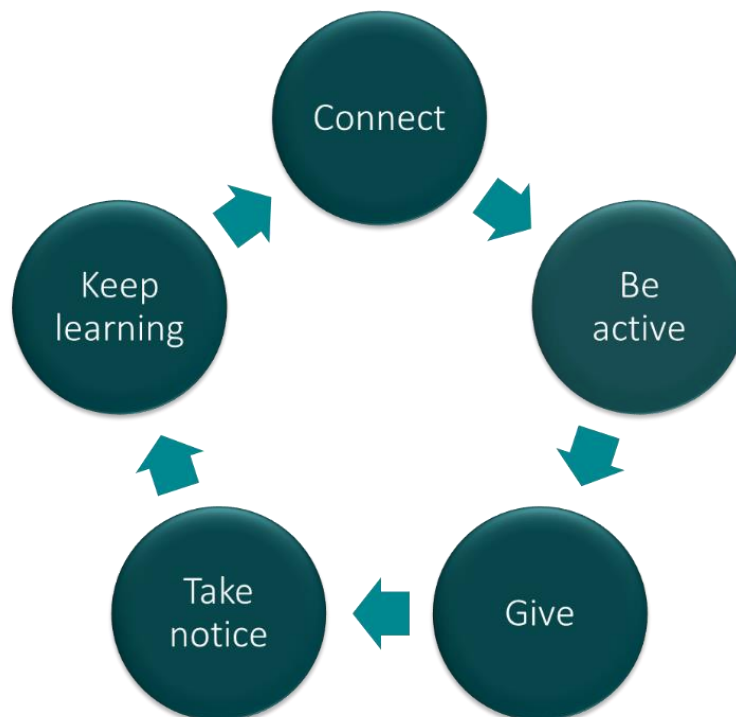


Figure 1: 5 ways to mental wellbeing.
Source: Mental Health Foundation New Zealand

“Rural people in particular are used to being self-sufficient. They can lead isolated lives, and find it hard to ask for help” (Avery, 2017, p. 78)

AIM

I want to encourage this conversation so people can openly and honestly talk about what is going on inside them. This research will look to build a picture of depression and anxiety within the rural sector and how we can use a tool box daily to help ourselves and others outside the rural industry.

For people living with depression and anxiety, this is a resource to draw strength from. For people who have not experienced depression or anxiety, it is an opportunity to learn the facts of how it feels to live with these conditions and how you can best support those who do.

No matter what your situation is, daily mindfulness activities within this report will help you on your wellbeing journey.

METHODOLOGY

The research used for this report involved a literature review, thematic analysis and interviews. Through the literature review and interviews my focus was thematic analysis to find trends in what triggered mental wellness issues and how people get themselves through using simple daily techniques to make their mind and body feel better.

“The day I accepted my depression was the day I started feeling better”

(Kirwan, 2010, p.79)

1. AUTHORS JOURNEY

Matte Kirk

Mid 30's, Rural Professional

A 'C' student at best, school was hard for me. At 16 I decided to leave school to become a Dairy Farmer. I wasn't born and bred in a rural community but having close friends who were, I knew that Dairy Farming was a career that interested me. After five years farming and a few trade jobs, I decided it was time to follow my heart and go traveling. Five years and 23 countries later I came home with a life partner, settled back into New Zealand life and chose Dairy Farming as my pathway. I moved from a Farm Assistant to Contract Milking to managing a multi-million dollar farming operation in the short course of four years. During my farming career, I always set goals and aimed to move into 50/50 share-milking by my mid 30's. I attended discussion groups, entered and achieved places and merits in the Dairy Industry Awards and completed my Agriculture Diploma to secure further career progression. There was a time when I simply was in love with Dairy Farming.

Like most I had other passions including surfing, triathlons, rugby and loved socializing with friends and family. But overtime, despite all of my endeavors to maintain a healthy work life balance, things were not rosy. The things I enjoyed doing were no longer existent. I was tired, frustrated and unmotivated. I spoke with my wife about key influences bringing me down including isolation, staffing issues, lack of sleep, being tied to the farm seven days a week while juggling the needs of a young family. But above all, the constant feeling of anxiety around the never ending decisions, list of jobs, financial pressure and the compounding issue of never being able to get away from it all, were ultimately what spiraled me into bouts of depression. This was a very lonely time for me as I actually didn't realize it was happening. I'll never forget the day I got some blood tests done and they came back "normal". Man was I disappointed. Why hadn't they shown up something that I was lacking, something that could easily explain why I was feeling the way I was feeling. This was the moment I knew I had depression, this was the moment I knew I had to change my mind set.

I needed balance back in my life to be able to enjoy the things I once couldn't live without. My body wasn't designed to work 70+ hours per week, month after month. Truth is, I don't remember my daughters first 6 months of life.

Three years ago I walked away from a very promising farming career. Although this time was stressful, my wife and I both recognized it was an essential step in our journey to wellbeing. Did I feel better straight away? Absolutely not. But my down days started to get less and less and further and further apart.

I began to focus on the things that keep my mind in a positive state. Talking with family when I start to feel down. making time daily for exercise and having plenty of quality family time. I incorporated weekly sports like surfing and mountain biking back into my life. I'm a massive big picture thinker so I set goals and celebrated when I achieved them. I started enjoying socializing with friends and family again.

These days do I feel down from time to time? Yes absolutely. The difference now is I bring those thoughts in, acknowledge them and then let them go. I avoid stewing on negative thoughts as negativity breeds negativity. For me, being honest with myself was the best thing I have ever done. It has allowed me to control the controllable and not stress about outside influences and the uncontrollable.

“Right now is the most important moment - do it, enjoy it and then move on to the next moment” (Kirwan, 2010, p. 89)

2. DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Mental health is complicated. While experts have created specific diagnoses for depression and anxiety, the truth is that they do have a great deal of overlap. This can make it fairly difficult to differentiate between the two separate problems. While the two share a lot in common, they are separate conditions, and the disorder plays a very important role in the treatment.

2.1 The emotional differences between depression and anxiety

Depression:

- Feelings of sadness about the future, as though it is hopeless.
- Listlessness, and a lack of belief that positive things will occur.
- Little worry, but instead a certainty of future negative emotions.
- Possible suicidal thoughts.

Anxiety:

- Apprehension over what's about to happen and what could happen in the future.
- Worried thoughts, or a belief that something could go wrong.
- Feeling like you need to run away or avoid things that could cause further anxiety.

Depression can occur after someone experiences anxiety, because someone that deals with severe anxiety may end up feeling drained and hopeless once their anxiety or anxiety attack is over. That's why the two conditions can be difficult to tell apart. Similarly, those with depression can still fear certain things getting worse, despite already being of the belief that the future is less positive.

Depression tends to have fewer physical symptoms, but the mental symptoms can be dangerous (especially the potential for suicidal thoughts) and the lack of energy so pronounced that many people with depression deal with intense struggles daily that certainly rival the symptoms of anxiety.

“When someone is depressed, they don’t have any confidence in their own ability to shape the world; they don’t have any confidence in the ability of the people around them”. (Abraham, 2017)

Physical symptoms can be very different as well. Though again, there are similarities. Both anxiety and depression can leave you feeling drained and fatigued. But in the case of anxiety, it tends to occur after intense anxiety, while with depression it tends to be more constant, without necessarily any triggers.

2.2 The physical differences between depression and anxiety

Depression:

- Severe lack of energy or drive
- Flat affect (complete lack of emotion) along with slowed thinking and behavior.
- Severe appetite changes, headaches, and sleep problems.

Anxiety:

- Fight or flight response symptoms, such as shaking, sweating, feeling the need to run or move.
- Physical symptoms that resemble health disorders, especially if accompanied with health worries.
- Fast heart rate, bowel issues, hyperventilation, and other "energy" causing symptoms.

(Abraham, 2017)

Simply put, anxious people worry about the future, depressed people don't see a future. The good news for us all is that depression is treatable, and the more you understand about the particular implication of depression, the more equipped you will be to tackle the condition head-on. Remember depression is an illness not a weakness.

2.3 Differences between male and female depression

The below table shows the difference in physical and emotional feelings that you are likely to experience as a male or female. If you can relate to any of the below, be honest with yourself and go talk with your doctor.

WOMEN TEND TO:	MEN TEND TO:
Blame themselves	Blame others
Feel sad, apathetic and worthless	Feel angry, irritable and ego-inflated
Feel anxious and scared	Feel suspicious and guarded
Avoid conflicts at all costs	Create conflicts
Feel slowed - down and nervous	Feel restless and agitated
Have trouble setting boundaries	Need to feel in control at all costs
Find it easy to talk about self-doubt and despair	Find it "weak" to admit self-doubt or despair
Use food, friends and "love" to self-medicate	Use alcohol , tv, sports and sex to self-medicate

Figure 2: The difference in how men and woman react when they are depressed.

Source: Diamond, 2017

2.4 Living in valleys and peaks

Valleys with peaks is an easy concept for people to understand as we all have ups and downs. The important thing to remember is, living on peaks is both unrealistic and unsustainable. The valleys are where we will spend up to 90% of our time. Enjoy your time here while you plan for your next adventure up the peak.

These graphs show the difference between a healthy and a depressed mind. If you know someone who is depressed, keep these graphs in mind when you are talking to or spending time with them, it will give you a better understanding of why they are acting the way they are. Living with depression below the line day in day out is both mentally and physically exhausting. The peaks do not feel as high as someone without depression due to the negative mindset towards the future.

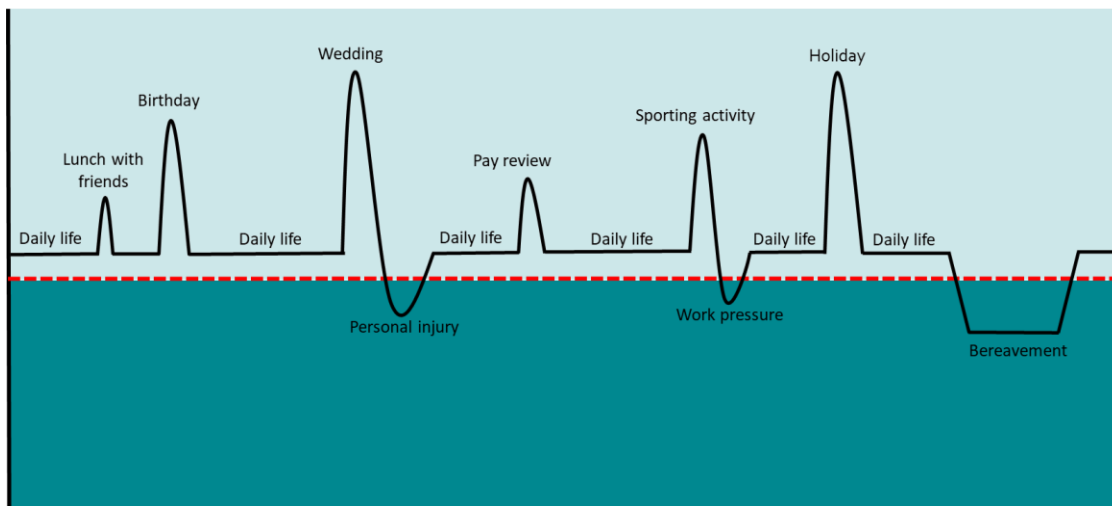


Figure 3: People living without depression

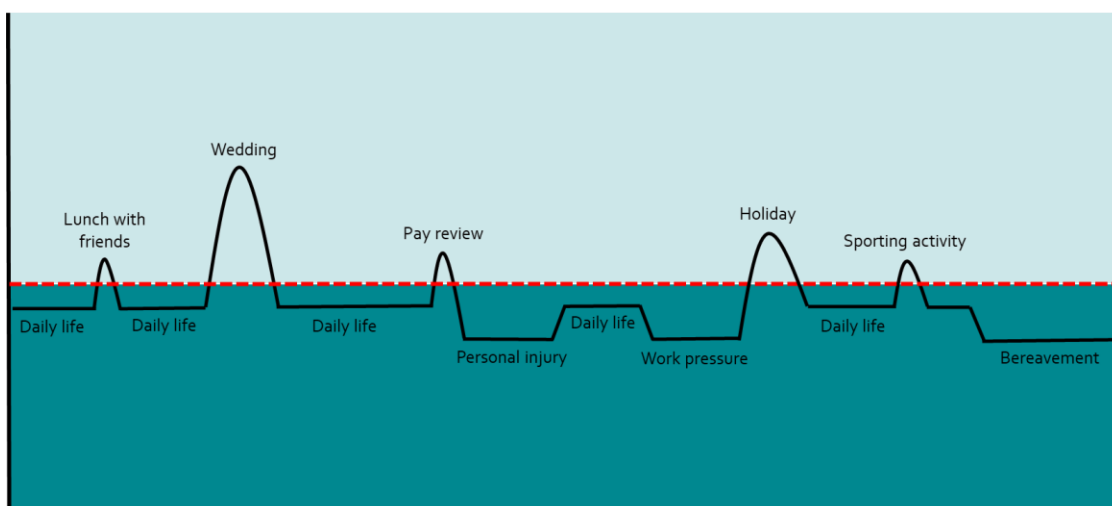


Figure 4: People living with depression

3. SUICIDE

Compared with other countries in the OECD, New Zealand's suicide rates are towards the middle of the range. However within that OECD range, New Zealand's male youth suicide rate was the third highest and female youth suicide rate was the highest.

The below graph shows that for every 100,000 rural residents from 2012 – 2017 an average of 16 will take their lives each year. A total of 107 rural lives have been lost to suicide since 2012. This is 30% higher than those living in urban areas and I believe 100% too many.

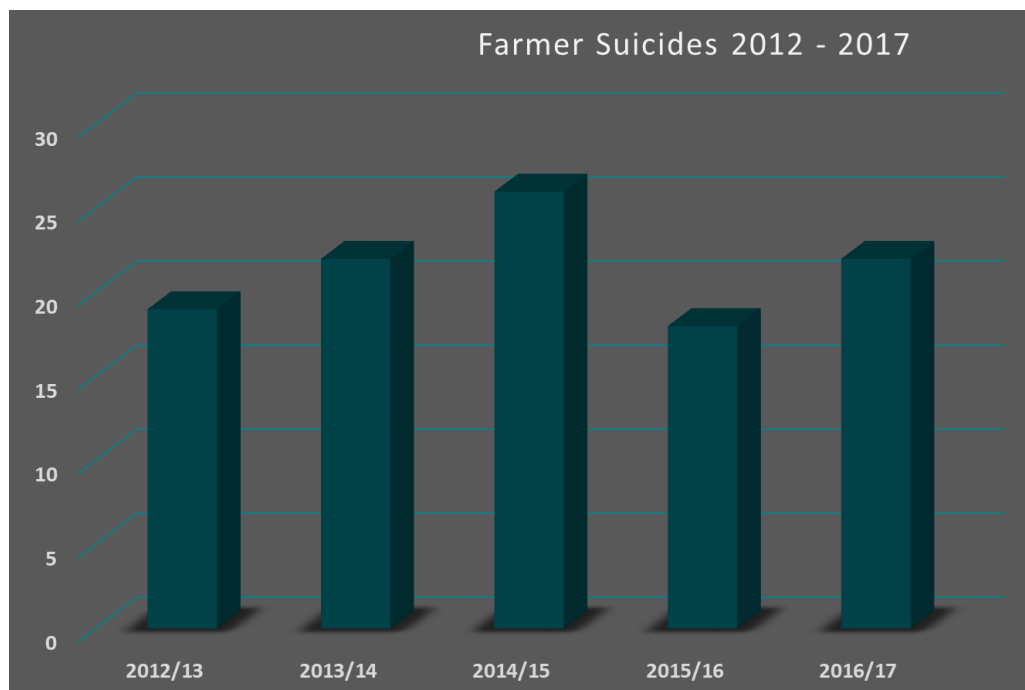


Figure 5: Farmer suicides 2012-2017.
Source: Stuff.co.nz - Statistics NZ

It has long been thought that the group most at risk were farm and business owners due to the economic and financial pressures. However recent figures show young people under 25, predominantly farm labourers and dairy hands have a higher rate of suicide.

Young Farmers chief executive Terry Copeland said "while young people, who figured large in the statistics, did not have the financial pressures of farm owners, they faced different pressures. It's all relative to the age and stage of a person, and there may be a shared pressure which rubs off from a farmer to a younger farmer."

It may not be the social and environmental factors, or mental illnesses that are responsible for rising suicide in New Zealand. To eradicate suicide we must depoliticize suicide and set to work building strong and caring communities. There needs to be a change, and we need to work on change together.

Being suicidal can isolate you, so instead of putting the onus on people in crisis, we should put it on those who aren't. Take the time each day to look out for your colleagues, neighbours, family and friends. If things don't seem right with someone, don't just turn a blind eye, be brave and say to them "I am worried about you, is everything ok?"

Mike King from keytolife.org.nz says that when he was suicidal the last thing he wanted was to call someone or talk to his doctor.

"I wanted a friend to walk into my room and tell me they love me ... that I mean something in their life." (King, 2017)

Don't try to run away from your problems. When you pack a bag you will no doubt be packing the problems too. Our suicide rates are climbing because we as a society are making it too hard for people to open up. A resilient mind set is needed not a resistant one.

3.1 When lives are changed forever

Josh's story

Late 20's, Dairy Farmer

I have so much admiration for Josh Crawford. At just 28 he owns his own cows, leases a farm, and has an amazing wife and three awesome young kids. His energy is infectious. He laughs a lot and his outlook on life is really positive. Josh grew up in a very loving, supportive family just north of Hamilton. Having 3 younger brothers and a sister, growing up his days were filled with the typical 1990's way of life on the family dairy farm.

Unfortunately for Josh and his whole family, on 18th September 2015 their lives changed forever. Their beloved son and brother Sam committed suicide on the family farm. Sam was just 19 years old. Josh says "Our whole world just turned sideways. Nobody saw it coming".

Sam or Sammy as he is known managed one of the family farms, a farm that has been in the family for 55 years. He was a very good motor cross rider and an exceptional young farmer. In just his 2nd year he won the prestigious vet award for the highest 6 week in calf rate in the district, a feat many lifetime farmers will never achieve. He had the world at his feet.

Sam's depression was not picked up at the time. In Josh's words, "We have thought back and have now realized that his behavior had changed a bit. He was more withdrawn and wasn't really keen to get off the farm as much as he normally would. He wasn't that keen to have a beer with the boys, but we all just assumed he was tired and run down, just like we all get sometimes, he seemed happy though". Sam was going through a relationship break up at the time and again looking back the family felt they were not aware how much it was taking a toll on him.

For Josh it has been really hard staying on the family farm. At times he and his wife Emma thought about moving to Australia to start a new life, but leaving his Mum and Dad just didn't seem right. I ask how it has been for his parents, tears appear in Josh's eyes "It has had a huge impact on Mum and Dad, words cannot even describe it. Our whole family would have stepped in to help Sammy if we knew what he was going to do, we would give up everything we own to have him back. The family had a succession plan for Sam and I to take over the farms, but that's no more. Our grief will be here forever".

After Sam's passing Josh really struggled, "I kept asking myself why, why, why? I got really bitter and twisted, it was cooking me. I would bottle things up till I exploded. I kept thinking how good things could have been". Josh then went to see a counselor and started taking medication to help him sleep and level his emotions. "I cope better now. I recognize depressive signs within myself and when I see them, I take notice. I will stand back and appreciate the little things, I don't sweat the small stuff as much as I used to. I am keen to help people, to get my voice out there. Unfortunately now all I can do is talk about it, but if our story can help one family then it is all worth it".

Josh and Emma are a tight family unit. They spend an enormous amount of time together, both on and off the farm. They see time off the farm as super important for their mental wellbeing even if it is just a few hours. "A drive off the farm always helps to get a perspective on where we are at" says Josh, "it's a good reminder that if our farm is super wet or dry, oh yeah so is everybody else!!"

Josh's ways to stay stoked:

- Take a more relaxed approach to life.
- Kids are such a positive influence.
- Don't compare yourself to what other people have.
- Looking at the positives in every day, even in the shit days there is something to be thankful for.
- Time off the farm. I used to go months on end without any time off, I now know that is not sustainable.
- We milk Once a Day from Christmas onwards. This allows us heaps of family time over summer.

- Riding my dirt bike, it's my outlet. 5 minutes on a bike is all I need to forget about the world and just enjoy the moment.

My time spent with Josh was both heart-breaking and inspiring. Here is a young guy who has been through so much and yet is powering on under the toughest of circumstances, using a positive mind set motivated by watching his kids grow up in a loving, rural environment.

I now see the pain and suffering that an event like this would have on your mental wellbeing. You are not only coping with grief and anger of losing a family member, but you also have a tremendous amount of sadness for the silent pain your loved one must have been going through. For me I see this as the scariest thing about Depression, it can be a silent killer.

People who are depressed generally don't talk about it, some feel isolated and do not want to be painted with the stigma brush of "being depressed".

The reality is though, it can happen to anyone at any time in your life. Rich, poor, black, white, male or female, the black dog does not discriminate. We as a community need to say enough with the old school "harden up" attitude.

"A broken mind can't diagnose a broken mind" (Avery 2017, pg78)

3.2 Support and resources available

Our rural sector is fortunate to have a multitude of organisations all working with a combined goal of supporting our rural communities in health and wellbeing. Each and every one is offering our rural people the opportunity to reach out and take support from other people who are passionate about helping.

3.2.1 Rural Support Trust

The Rural Support Trust are available 24/7 for support and guidance. They can talk over the phone or come to you for a free and confidential chat. However if more than a cup of tea and a yarn is needed, they will connect farmers with professionals who can provide further support, including farming or business advice, financial information, health, mental health and counselling services. The trusts cover all aspects of rural agribusiness; dry stock, dairy, cropping, horticulture, forestry, poultry, and rural contracting.

"We support all rural people - owners, managers, staff, and contractors".

3.2.2 Farmstrong

Farmstrong is a nationwide wellbeing program for the rural community. Their aim is to help “farmers live well to farm well”. Their website <https://farmstrong.co.nz/> is full of awesome resources which give ideas of how to incorporate daily activities to keep you mentally and physically healthy. They also run events such as comedy and quiz nights with the aim to get farmers off the farm and into a relaxed social setting.

"Keeping in shape mentally and physically helps you put the best into the farm, so the farm can give the best back to you."

Sam Whitelock, Farmstrong Ambassador

3.2.3 Support is just a phone call away

Suicide Crisis Helpline (open 24/7) - 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO).

Lifeline (open 24/7) - 0800 543 354, www.lifeline.co.nz

Depression Helpline (open 24/7) - 0800 111 757, www.depression.org.nz

Rural Support Trust (open 24/7) - 0800 787 254

Healthline (open 24/7) - 0800 611 116

Samaritans (open 24/7) - 0800 726 666

Youthline (open 24/7) - 0800 376 633. You can also text 234 for free between 8am and midnight, or email talk@youthline.co.nz

Rural Women New Zealand – 0800 256 467

Farmstrong – www.farmstrong.co.nz

Resilient Farmer – www.resilientfarmer.co.nz

Like Minds, Like Mine – 0800 102 107, www.likeminds.org.nz

4. UNDERSTANDING WHAT IS HAPPENING TO OUR BRAIN

Generally speaking most of us don't take notice of how the most complex muscle in our body is changing, and how this relates to our mental wellbeing. By understanding the basics of brain development we can build a picture of why, as we get older we are more likely to encounter feelings of anxiety.

4.1 Neuroplasticity and how the brain reacts

Would you believe our brains are constantly being shaped by experience. Most of us have very different behaviours and thoughts today than we did when we were younger. This shift is called neuroplasticity.

Neuroplasticity is the 'muscle building' part of the brain. The things we do often we become stronger at, and what we don't use fades away (think about tying your shoe laces vs remembering how to do 7th form algebra). That is the physical basis of why making a thought or action over and over again increases its power. Over time, it becomes automatic, a part of us. We literally become what we think and do.

Neuroplasticity is at work every day throughout our life. Connections within the brain are constantly becoming stronger or weaker, depending on what is being used. Young people (like my kids) change easily, their brains are very adaptable. As we age, change doesn't come as easily (this explains why sometimes it is harder for an "old dog to learn new tricks"). The brain actually loses some of its plasticity and we become more fixed in how we think, learn, and perceive. A state of good mental wellness is often associated with behaviours that are functional, productive, positive, and beneficial to the individual.

Source: Brainwork's

4.2 Red brain vs Green brain

The brain has two sides (I know what a revelation right) but seriously this is actually fascinating stuff. Do you every wonder why you can feel amazing one minute then scared or worried the next? This is your Green and Red brain having a war.

"The brain is a muscle. If we have a leg injury we go to the physio to get treatment. If we have a brain injury we should do the same"

Example: You have just received a phone call from the lawyer letting you know you have officially purchased your first house. Your green brain says "Happy Days", you feel energized, emotional and proud of yourself all at the same time. You open a bottle of Champagne with a friend to celebrate. This is living in the Green brain.

After your friend leaves and the Champagne starts to wear off, you all of a sudden feel anxious. What happens if you lose your job and can't pay the mortgage? How about the interest rate going up or the roof starts to leak?

All of these thoughts are natural, it is your Red brain kicking into gear, just reminding you of the dangers you need to be aware of. But, too much time in the Red brain can cause anxiety attacks which could lead onto depression.



Figure 6: Difference between the Red and Green brain.

Source: Jackson, psychcentral.com (ND)

For all of us, our aim should be to constantly work on growing our Green brain. This allows our brain optimum opportunity to minimize anxious thoughts and negative energy when faced with tough decisions or challenging times.

4.2.1 Top tips for growing your Green brain

Bring your attention to something pleasant.	Breathe in the experience and allow it to intensify.
Spend time in your green brain.	Savour it, as you would your favourite food.
Choose to do something small that makes you feel good. Play a song you like, stretch your body, step outside and feel the sun. Whatever you choose, be fully present with it.	Replay a memory of something that made you feel good.
Reflect on something good that happened today.	Look at a photo of a loved one and see what happens.

Figure 7: Tip for growing your green brain

“In green brain mode we feel safe, satisfied and connected. Kindness comes more naturally. By holding this space it makes it easier for those around us to settle into it as well”. (Jackson) <http://psychcentral.com/blog/red-brain-green-brain>

4.3 Impact of nutrition on your mental health

“The brain takes 20% of the energy you eat, and needs a constant supply of nutrients” (Kirwan, 2010, p. 107)

Nearly two thirds of those who do not report daily mental health problems eat fresh fruit or fruit juice every day, compared with less than half of those who do report daily mental health problems (www.mentalhealth.org.uk).

A balanced mood and feelings of wellbeing can be protected by ensuring that our diet provides adequate amounts of complex carbohydrates, essential fats, amino acids, vitamins and minerals and water.

Sugary foods are absorbed quickly into the bloodstream. These cause an initial ‘high’ or surge of energy that soon wears off as the body increases its insulin production, leaving you feeling tired and low. Don’t worry though, one or two days a week it is fine to smash through some chocolate, wine or whatever your sugary poison is to celebrate the good things in the week. The thing to remember here is all in moderation.

Foods that nourish the brain: Wholegrain cereals, nuts, beans, fruit and vegetables. The sugar in these foods is absorbed more slowly therefore they don’t cause mood swings. These foods are more nutritious as they contain thiamine (B1), a vitamin that has been associated with control of mood, and folate and zinc (supplements of these nutrients have been shown to improve the mood of people with depression in a small number of studies). Chicken, Fish and Red Meat should also be included in the diet.

“I believe nutrition and mind-set are so closely related. You have to eat well to think well.” (Farming Women in Their Wellbeing Research Summary 2018)

4.4 Neurotransmitters and their role

Neurotransmitters, in basic terms, are chemical messengers that carry, boost and balance signals between neurons (nerve cells) and other cells in the body. A sufficient balance of neurotransmitters is essential for good mental health as they can affect a wide variety of both physical and psychological functions including heart rate, sleep, appetite, mood, memory and cognitive function.

There are four neurotransmitters that are particularly important when it comes to our thoughts and general mood: acetylcholine, serotonin, dopamine/adrenaline/noradrenaline and GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid).

4.4.1 Neurotransmitter deficiencies and their effect

A simple blood test from your doctor can test for common micronutrient deficiencies such as Zinc, Iron, Vitamin D and B12.

Neurotransmitter	Effects of deficiency	Foods to avoid	Foods to consume
Acetylcholine	Deterioration of memory and imagination	Sugar Deep fried foods Refined and processed foods Cigarettes Alcohol	Organic/free-range eggs Organic or wild fish especially salmon, mackerel, sardines and fresh tuna
Serotonin	Low mood Difficulty sleeping Feeling disconnected Lacking joy	Alcohol	Fish fruit Eggs Avocado Wheat germ Low-fat cheese Lean organic poultry
Dopamine	Lacking drive, motivation and/or enthusiasm Crave stimulants	Tea & coffee Caffeinated drinks & pills	Regular, balanced meals Fruits and vegetables high in Vitamin C Wheat germ Yeast spread
GABA	Hard to relax Can't switch off Anxious about things Irritable Self-critical	Sugar Alcohol Tea & coffee Caffeinated drinks	Dark green vegetables Seeds & nuts Potatoes Bananas Eggs

Figure 8: Summarizes the effects of deficiency in each of these neurotransmitters, the foods that will make the deficiency worse and those that will improve it.

Source: www.mentalhealth.org.nz

“Zinc, vitamin D, Omega 3 Fish oil and many more have been used in open label trials for anxiety, sleep issues, bipolar disorder and ADHD”.

(Warren, 2017)

5. TREATMENTS

As discussed previously there are many techniques which can help us in our daily lives to stay well and away from depression and anxiety.

If needed there is medication called antidepressants which can be prescribed by a doctor to help the way chemicals in our brain are reacting to certain events in our lives. Complementary or alternatively to antidepressant medication there are multiple other therapies available designed to relax the mind and body, relieving anxiety and enhancing the overall sense of wellbeing.

“One in ten New Zealanders are on antidepressants, an eight-fold increase in total prescription numbers from 1998. Also there was a four-fold increase in claimed disability financial support due to psychiatric disorders in New Zealand from 1991 to 2016”. (Warren, 2017)

5.1 Antidepressant medication

Antidepressant medication is a very good way of balancing out an individual's neurotransmitters. Some people will respond to one antidepressant better than another, so in consultation with a doctor, adjustments may be needed. Not all people suffering depression and anxiety will need to be on medication.

The chemicals most involved in depression are serotonin and noradrenaline. Having low levels of these in the brain will increase the chances of feelings such as anxiety, depressed mood, aggression, insomnia, low energy, and low self-esteem. Prescribed antidepressant medication controls the serotonin and noradrenaline levels in your brain to lift your mood.

“Antidepressants aim to take away bad, negative feelings and bring you back to your normal self. They don't make you happy as such, but work on your brain chemistry, changing it slightly in ways which make you feel more like your old self” (Muir, 2013, p.116)

5.2 Alternative therapy

There are many alternative therapies that can be explored which are helpful to try initially or to complement antidepressant medication. Some therapies that have been considered as most beneficial to calm the body and mind include massage, reflexology, acupuncture, acupressure, yoga and meditation. These simple relaxation techniques are widely available, reasonably costed and in some cases can be done from home.

5.3 Learning how to “celebrate the little wins”

Sue’s story

Mid 50’s, Farm Owner

Sue lives on the outskirts of Morrinsville, in the heart of Waikato Dairy farm country on a very well presented, mortgage free dairy grazing and maize silage cropping block.

Sue was 49 when depression first came into her life. It was 2012 when her mum suddenly passed away. Shortly after Sue was told she needed to have a Hysterectomy. After returning to work and learning that she had been demoted by her employer, Sue’s mental wellbeing took a turn for the worse. “My friends told me your eyes don’t look right, they are just not there”. Sue went to see the doctor who prescribed her anti-depressants. At the same time Sue decide to join a gym “The gym was a huge help”. Day by day Sue began to feel stronger, she was gaining control of her life again and by the end of 2013 her friend said “yes you’re back”.

Then in September 2015 her father passed away, followed 10 months later by her husband Ken who suffered a heart attack on their family farm. Sue was now the sole owner/manager of a farm that she had owned for 30 years but had never run the “hands on part”. “I was in charge of the books and Ken run the outside cropping/grazing side of things. 2015/16 was the lowest point in my life. I felt scared and lost, I lost the two guys that really had my back”. While Sue somehow managed to run the farm, the first year was a blur. Sue clearly remembers many times driving into town but not being able to get out of the car once she arrived, or sitting out the back of the farm bawling her eyes out. “I also couldn’t get out of the house and I kept saying no to friends who would invite me places, I was definitely isolating myself”. Once again Sue sought medical help. With anti-depressants and regular trips to counselling, Sue was able to gain control again and acknowledge her grief. “The counsellor gave me guidelines on how to work my day, simple things like, get up, get dressed and go outside do the farm work, come back inside, shut the door and say “right that’s the farm work done”. Focus on small jobs one thing at a time. Sue uses the motto “Must do, might do” when it comes to the job list. Sue is a realistic optimist who expects things will get better. “If I can only do one job today then that is ok”. She credits her family support for helping her get through, “my kids realize it is an illness not a weakness”.

Looking back now, Sue says she thinks Ken was depressed in the last 6 months of his life although they didn’t realize it at the time “He was a worrier” she says. But being the old school mentality meant not showing emotion or talking about his feelings.

Sue's tips for wellbeing:

- I get off the farm at least once a week. Have lunch with my friends and talk, talk, talk, socialising definitely helps.
- Travel to Perth once a year to visit family. Sitting on the beach over there miles away from the farm is very therapeutic and gives me time out from making daily decisions. I think about what both Ken and I achieved while he was here, this gives me a real sense of pride.
- Celebrate the little wins. I get more wins every day.
- Staying home and just hanging with my dog.
- Don't rush life. Do things when you can, they will happen when they happen,
- Worry is a wasted emotion, if you can't change it why worry about it.

"Relationships, relationships, relationships that's what get me through"

(Avery, 2017, p78)

6. A RURAL WOMENS PERSPECTIVE

In early 2018, Farmstrong commissioned research to better understand the wellbeing needs of Farming women and to identify the things they see would make the most difference to improving their wellbeing.

Sleep, fitness and getting off the farm are top of mind for many women when it comes to improving their wellbeing. One woman who was training for a marathon said it made her feel healthy and gave her a sense of accomplishment.

The results which consisted of an online survey completed by 786 women and 26 in-depth interviews with farming women from five different regions are shown in the graph below.

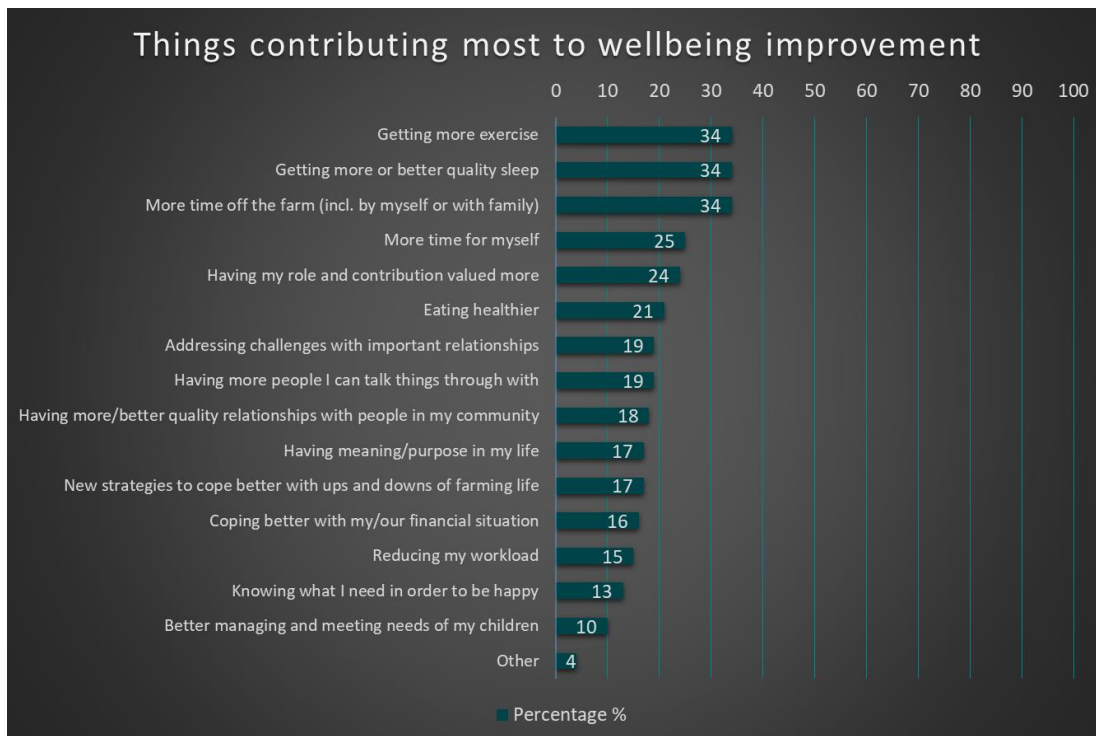


Figure 9: Things contributing most to wellbeing

Source: The wellbeing of farming women. Farmstrong Research summary 2018

“The biggest thing about farm life, that will improve your wellbeing, is getting off the farm.”

“Calving is hell if you're not fit for it.”

“We tend to think we are the only ones going through difficult times. Sharing our stories is helpful.”

6.1 Rural people looking after rural people

Robyn's story

Mid 40's, Contract Milker

Robyn is a successful contract milker of 650 Cows with her husband Greg. They have two teenage kids. Robyn has always been very independent. Life before Dairy involved being a rural professional working for Fonterra. She loved the lifestyle and being around energetic people daily. She went to work, got paid well and had time and energy for socializing with friends. She was in a really good space. Two major events then happened in Robyn's life. Kids came along and they accepted a 50/50 sharemilking opportunity. All of a sudden Robyn felt like "I had lost my identity, I gave up not only my lifestyle but also my ability to financially help the family out". Isolated and on the farm looking after young kids, Robyn developed Post Natal Depression, although at the time did not realize it, but remembers clearly one day when a family member said "you need to get over this shit". This comment did not help.

Disconnected and away from family and friends in rural New Zealand with lots of self-doubt, Robyn's wellbeing drove downwards into a dark rabbit hole. She was reluctant to ask for help and found it very hard to integrate into a new rural community. There were times when Greg would find her doing the farm accounts at 2am as Robyn couldn't sleep. During this stage they went 5 years with only 14 days off the farm. These were scary times for them both.

However, Robyn did find the strength to talk with a doctor who prescribed her with medication. Robyn says "For me depression is constant fear, anxiety and self-recrimination, it is not rational. The medication works for me. If I am off them and are going downhill, Greg will notice and politely remind me to get back on them. I can cope much better with the daily pressures that life throws at me and I feel more balanced. I still have down days, but if I wake up and feel average, I'll make an extra effort to find a couple of small wins during the day and celebrate them. Cats and dogs are great therapy".

After coming second constantly in interviews and getting disillusioned on the 50/50 pathway they sold their cows.

Now as a tutor for Primary ITO and working part time for Dairy NZ, Robyn feels very proud of being in a position to give back to an industry that has been her life. Robyn's positivity and welcoming nature blows me away. When you walk into their house it is filled with one liners on the walls which serve as motivation to stay positive and seek out the joy in life. When she talks about the love she has for her kids, it radiates out of her. They have an open door policy which constantly means lots of teenagers mooching around the family home on the weekends and school holidays, this is something Robyn encourages and absolutely loves.

How Robyn stays well:

- I tell my kids when I feel down. They need to realise life is not perfect.
- I celebrate the small wins I have during the day.
- Boot camp. Wow this has been a revelation for me. I never realised just how good your mind feels after exercise. Boot camp is the only thing I have found that makes me feel good for days not moments due to the endorphins released by the brain. Being around other farming women, watching them grow as people while getting fit at the same time has been extremely motivating and we have a real sense of community sprit starting to build.
- Audio books. Getting lost in a story and shutting off life for a while. Beauty of these is I can listen anytime even when I am working on the farm.
- Having pride in myself by watching my calves grow. Recognising it is my hard work that has made them look so good.
- My biggest pick me up is when hubby gives me a cuddle and asks how I am doing.

CONCLUSIONS

The thing about mental wellness is that it is an ongoing challenge, but I now reflect on it as an enjoyable journey. I have been in dark places before and the one thing I am certain of in life is that I don't want to go back there. For me it was about incorporating daily techniques which keep me above the line. Truth is, I love having a beer with my mates but if I have too many, too often and don't exercise I will start to feel down. For me it is everything in moderation.

For Rural and Urban folk alike, the techniques are the same. What do you do for yourself each day that makes your mind feel good? When you have achieved looking after yourself, then there is an opportunity for you to look elsewhere within your life and see if you can make a positive difference in someone else's life. Small things like telling your kids or parents you love them, asking a work colleague if everything is ok or even smiling at a stranger in the street. These small but generous offerings could be the difference between that person having an average day or a great day.

Resilience is about having tools to bounce forward from the bad times. Use the recommendations from others within this report to help you bounce forward in your times of need. We all have down days, we all second guess ourselves and yes we all have a red brain sending anxiety into our thoughts. Choose to live well and remember:

“Behind every sunset is a sunrise”

RECOMMENDATIONS

If you only have 5 minutes a day

- Breathe. Just close your eyes and listen to your breathing.
- Sip on a calming tea (Chamomile is good) or make a wholesome smoothie, visit <http://eatwellnz.co.nz/creating-the-perfect-balanced-smoothie/>
- Act like a kid. Laugh and be young.
- Take a chair outside and sit in the sun in a quiet place.
- Connect with loved ones via a short phone call.
- Take a quality multivitamin to account for nutritional shortfalls in your diet. Magnesium will aid in a good night's sleep.
- Celebrate the wins you had today.

If you only have 10 minutes a day

- Do something just for you. I cannot stress this enough. If you are not looking after yourself you will find it harder to look after family, friends and your business.
- Stretch your body.
- Take a walk. Just go outside, get your heartrate up and mindfully observe the beautiful world around you.
- Reflect on the positives in your life. Remind yourself of the things to be grateful for so that no matter what the day brings, you can recall all the positives.
- Plan your healthy weekly meals. Write them down to help you stay on track for when you get busy.

If you have 30 minutes today

- Set some goals - giving yourself opportunity to have a sense of achievement when a goal is reached.
- Involve a mentor in your life, someone who will motivate you.
- Get moving. 30 mins per day of moving your body will do wonders for your mental wellness.
- Read a book. Keep learning no matter what age you are.

Incorporate these into your daily/monthly/yearly plan

- Limit alcohol and sugar intake. If you can try and only drink during the weekends or special occasions. This will improve your sleep so you'll wake up with more energy to exercise which will send endorphins to your brain to keep your mood lifted when the tough times do get thrown at you.
- Prioritise the importance of 7 - 8 hours' sleep per night. Turn your phone off 1 hour before bed.
- Organize a lunch/dinner with friends/family.
- Talk about how you are feeling. We all have struggles. A problem shared is a problem halved.
- Take on a sporting activity goal. This could be as an individual or a team event to engage your mates to achieve the goal together. Many people who do not exercise much find great motivation with exercising as a group.
- Time off the farm. Take a decent holiday.

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