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Farmstrong Scotland Report 2023: Part 1

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Executive Summary

In 2018, New Zealand farmer Doug Avery toured Scotland with the talk “Drought, Adversity and Breaking New Ground”. Following on from the tour, to better understand how farmers and crofters in Scotland can manage their wellbeing, a steering group was set up, chaired by John Scott from Fearn Farm. The Farmstrong model aims to help farmers to manage their own wellbeing through shared learning, events and resources. To support development of the Farmstrong model in Scotland, in 2022 a survey was conducted to explore wellbeing in the farming community and to consider how best to respond to the stresses of farming and crofting in Scotland.

There were 592 responses to the survey. Results from the survey will provide a baseline to monitor changes in future years, and differences in groups over time.

Results are presented in two sections. The first section addresses levels of self-reported aspects of wellbeing which can be used as a baseline for future surveys. The second section reports on the methods identified by respondents for how they have dealt with the stresses of farming and crofting. These have been categorised into three areas; communication, wellbeing actions, and farm-related actions.

From the first section, results indicate an average score (using a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means the ‘best you can imagine’ and 0 means the ‘worst you can imagine’) for how farmers and crofters feel on a normal day of 6.5. This ranges from 0 to 10.

Farmers and crofters are negatively impacted by the challenges they face in that 30% (n = 183 / 592) never feel calm and relaxed or only do so a little of the time. Only 20% (n = 116 / 590) wake up feeling fresh and relaxed most or all of the time. Of those who do not, over 55% (n = 326 / 590) never wake up feeling fresh and relaxed or only do so a little of the time. These results indicate high levels of tiredness and anxiety amongst individuals in the farming community.

Whilst the level of loneliness in farmers appears to be similar to the general population in Scotland, survey results point to high levels of social isolation, especially amongst those who find it difficult to get away from their farm. One way to help address this would be for those who organise meetings, training, and

events for farmers and crofters to consider including opportunities for social interaction.

From the second section, in dealing with the stresses of farming, 'talking' and 'getting away from the farm' are identified as key methods which helped. There are multiple benefits from social interaction with other farmers, whether to talk about farming matters or to discuss problems with others who understood and are likely to experience the same challenges.

Acknowledgements

In addition to members of the steering committee ([additional information](#)), and colleagues at SRUC who helped in the development of the survey and to review this report, including Jason Millar, Dr Roger Humphry and Dr Sam Beechener, the following individuals contributed to the development, promotion and analysis of the survey:

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Introduction

By John Scott from Fearn Farm

Agriculture is facing unimaginable change, that will impact generations and could require complete restructuring of farming practices. Many of these challenges we can't control, they will happen regardless of how well we rear our livestock, grow our crops or manage our finances. This significantly impacts the way we think and farm, it tests our resilience and can, at times, take us down a dark path when we feel overwhelmed, anxious or simply just knackered.

In 2018, New Zealand farmer Doug Avery toured Scotland with the talk "Drought, Adversity and Breaking New Ground". When Doug visited Scotland, we were astounded by the response, highlighting the appetite from farmers and crofters, to better understand how we can manage our own wellbeing through shared learning, events and resources.

Our hope is to launch the "Farmstrong" model here in Scotland, developed for farmers by farmers. This research will be integral in ensuring we get it right and offer something that has huge benefits to all those involved, whilst also supporting and partnering with existing organisations and charities.

Results from a 2022 survey provide baseline information about aspects of wellbeing in the farming community in Scotland which can be compared with results of future surveys. This report presents partial results from the 2022 survey after initial analysis. Further reports are planned.

Background

In 2018, New Zealand farmer Doug Avery toured Scotland / the UK XXX with the talk "Drought, Adversity and Breaking New Ground". Over 2000 farmers attended to hear Doug discuss his challenges with mental health and wellbeing and his strategies for coping.

Following on from the tour, a steering group was established to review the learnings, chaired by beef, sheep and arable farmer, John Scott of Fearn Farm, Ross-Shire. John said that "when Doug visited Scotland, we were astounded by the response, highlighting the appetite from farmers and crofters, to better understand how we can manage our own wellbeing through shared learning, events and resources."

As a result of increasing concerns around farmer wellbeing a range of agricultural partners came together to launch a survey to better understand the needs and concerns of Scotland's farmers and crofters, with the view of introducing a new wellbeing programme in 2022. The purpose of the survey was to give insights "to understand how farmers and crofters are feeling, what type of activities and resources would best support them and how they should be delivered" (John Scott, 2022). In addition, the partners aim to provide insights as to how Farmstrong New Zealand, a successful wellbeing programme that helps farmers to "live well, to farm well" might be replicated in Scotland. Farmstrong New Zealand is designed to give farmers the skills and resources they need to manage their own wellbeing when faced with challenges that are often hard to predict, or control, from fluctuation in commodity prices and the weather, to changing government legislation and market pressures. The group aims to launch the "Farmstrong" model here in Scotland, in 2022, developed for farmers by farmers. Findings from the survey will be used to inform the development of the model in Scotland and to benchmark progress over time.

Although farmers, crofters and individuals who work in the agricultural sector are likely to be exposed to similar challenges, it is important to recognise heterogeneity, not least in relation to the type of agricultural activity or production system. Some will have made a personal choice to be in the sector, whilst others may have taken on a role in response to the expectation of others, such as succession on a family farm. These, and other influences will have a bearing on how individuals deal with the stresses of farming. Furthermore, different individuals can cope differently to the same challenge, and the same individual can cope differently to the same challenge over time. In considering wellbeing within farming and crofting communities, there is a need to check for generalisations to avoid assumptions about individuals.

There are a range of challenges in the sector; some perennial, others emerging from more recent changes, such as Covid, or trends, such as towards Net Zero. Since the industrial revolution and the increase in the proportion of consumers of food, compared to producers¹, there has been and is now a gap in understanding

¹ Allen, R.C., 2009. *The British industrial revolution in global perspective*. Cambridge University Press.

about how food is produced, even when consumers are interested². This gap is writ large in social media and has evolved to create a toxic environment in which farmers can be exposed to hate speech³. It should come as no surprise that the wellbeing of individuals in farming and crofting can be detrimentally impacted by perennial and more recent changes and challenges in the sector and the way it is perceived. Furthermore, the workload demands which arise from the ever decreasing numbers of people living and working on farms⁴ and perceptions of problematic levels of bureaucracy⁵ add to the stresses experienced by many.

The survey is supported by SRUC, the National Mental Health Forum, RHASS and the Scottish Government.

Methods

Questions in the survey were adapted and developed from Farmstrong NZ survey instruments. The complete survey questions are available in the [Appendix](#).

The first three questions gather demographic information about age, gender and living arrangements, such as if respondents lived alone or had children. The fourth question is a widely used scale of 0–10 to represent how respondents estimate their wellbeing. The fifth question is a self-report measure of frequency of a range of factors which can impact wellbeing, such as feelings of calm, freshness and loneliness. The sixth question seeks to establish aspects that respondents identify as having a positive impact on wellbeing. This is followed by an ‘open’ question about methods which have previously been used to avoid or deal with stresses related to farming and crofting life. Question eight lists options of learning opportunities which could help improve wellbeing and / or relieve stress. Question nine asks which of a range of communication methods

² Duffy, R., Fearne, A. and Healing, V., 2005. Reconnection in the UK food chain: bridging the communication gap between food producers and consumers. *British Food Journal*.

³ Dürnberger, C., 2019. ‘You should be slaughtered!’ Experiences of criticism/hate speech, motives and strategies among German-speaking livestock farmers using social media. *Int. J. Livest. Prod*, 10, pp.151–165.

⁴ Simkin, S., Hawton, K., Fagg, J. and Malmberg, A., 1998. Stress in farmers: a survey of farmers in England and Wales. *Occupational and environmental medicine*, 55(11), pp.729–734.

⁵ Heffernan, C., Nielsen, L., Thomson, K. and Gunn, G., 2008. An exploration of the drivers to bio-security collective action among a sample of UK cattle and sheep farmers. *Preventive veterinary medicine*, 87(3–4), pp.358–372.

are considered to be effective to reach the farming community about wellbeing. Question 10 includes some services, events and sources of information to gauge awareness and use amongst respondents. This is followed by a question about the suitability of the name 'Farmstrong Scotland' for a wellbeing programme. Questions 12 – 15 are related to the nature and whereabouts of farming activities. The final question asks about interest in future involvement in or information about progress with the wellbeing programme.

The online survey was prepared and hosted by SRUC. Paper copies were available on request, though none were requested. The survey link was promoted in Spring and Summer 2022 using social media and networks of partners and supporters and by farming media.

Participants

There were 592 responses to the survey. It was accessed 611 times and blank responses were deleted prior to analysis. Of the 592, 230 individuals provided their contact details for follow-up.

Age and Gender

Of the 592 responses, 201 report as being female, 366 as male, and a further 25 either did not respond or selected the option 'other / I'd rather not say'.

Table 1: Age group and gender

AGE GROUP		GENDER		
		Female	Male	N/A
Under 25	43	21	22	0
25 – 34	79	38	39	2
35 – 44	112	35	76	1
45 – 54	148	53	92	3
55 – 64	154	45	95	14
65 – 74	42	6	31	5
75 or over	14	3	11	0

More than half of the respondents are between 45 and 64 years old (148 are between 45 and 54 years and 54 between 55 and 64). 20% of respondents are under that age of 35 and 2.5% are over 75.

Regions

The survey included a question about which regions in Scotland the respondent farmed in.

A total of 506 selections were made but it should be noted that some respondents may farm in more than one region.

Of the 506, 139 are from the Highland Region, with 68 from Grampian (n=68) and 65 from Tayside. 47 respondents report farming in the Scottish Borders and the same number report farming in Dumfries and Galloway (n=47).

Table 2 Location of farming activities

Highland	139
Grampian	68
Tayside	65
Borders	47
Dumfries and Galloway	47
Argyll and Bute	23
Ayrshire and Arran	19
Fife	18
Lanarkshire	15
Lothian	15
Forth Valley	14
Orkney	12
Shetland	12
Greater Glasgow and Clyde	6
Western Isles	6

The areas least represented are Greater Glasgow and Clyde (n=6) and the Western Isles (n=6). These figures are likely to reflect the urban nature around the city of Glasgow and the small population in the Western Isles.

97 individuals did not select a region. This could be because they are not directly involved in farming or they farmed outwith Scotland.

Living circumstances

66 respondents (11%) indicated that they live alone. Of the 524 (89%) who live in households with other people, 178 live with one other adult, 150 live with one other adult and children. 122 respondents indicated that they live in a household with more than one other adult, approximately half of these households also include children. Future surveys might usefully explore aspects of multi-generational living.

Role in farming

More than half of the respondents identify as being a farm owner / part owner or related to a farm owner.

Table 3: Role in farming

Role	No.
Contract worker	9
Crofter	51
farm worker	19
N.A.	95
Owner/part owner/related to owner	335
Salaried manager	17
Tenant	46
Grand Total	572

Those who selected the 'not applicable' option were asked to provide further detail. Some respondents used this opportunity to indicate that they have more than one role, i.e. are both a tenant or contract worker who also have their own farm. Some are retired, semi-retired or 'ex'. The other roles which are cited include; agronomist, Director, related to or partner of a person who is involved in farming or crofting, or someone who just helps out on a farm or croft. Not all respondents provide details and one person said they are neither a farmer nor crofter but did not give any further information about their connection to farming.

The self-selecting nature of respondents to the survey should be recognised. Although the number of respondents provide a robust sample size of the farming population, it is likely that both individuals who have no interest in the topic of wellbeing and those who are *in a poor state of mind* may have been less likely to complete the survey.

Results

This initial report presents results from questions 1-5, 7, 12, and 15. Results from questions 6, 8-11, 13, and 14 will be presented in a future report.

Not all respondents answered every question and so the results presented below have been calculated based on the data provided, missing responses have been excluded.

1. BASELINE WELLBEING

1.1. How respondents feel on a normal day

The survey asked individuals to represent on a scale from 0 to 10, in terms of their wellbeing, how they feel on a normal day, where 10 means the best they can imagine and 0 means the worst they can imagine, based on how they felt on the day they responded to the survey.

Figure 1: A normal day

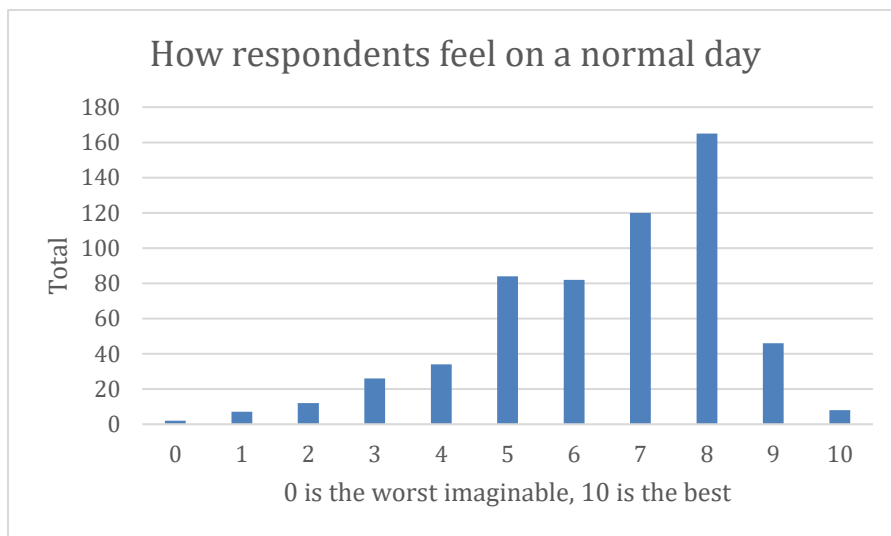


Figure 1 offers a snapshot of how respondents (n = 586) rated their wellbeing at the time of completing the survey. Of concern, 81 (14%) individuals report feeling below 5 on the scale, two of which report feeling 0, which is the worst they can imagine. The most common response is 8 (n = 165). The average score is 6.5.

1.2. How often respondents feel calm and relaxed

When asked how often they feel calm and relaxed, about one third of respondents (n = 183 / 592) said little or none of the time.

A similar proportion of respondents (n = 170 / 592), reported feeling calm and relaxed most or all of the time over the two weeks prior to completing the survey.

Table 4: Calm and relaxed

Age Group	Total	Male	Female	N.A.
< 25	17	7	10	0
25 - 34	30	12	18	0
35 - 44	30	18	11	1
45 - 54	40	25	13	2
55 - 64	55	36	14	5
65 - 74	8	7	0	1
75 or over	3	2	0	1
Grand Total	183	107	66	10

1.3. How often respondents report being physically active

Over 70% of respondents (n= 418 / 591) report being physically active most or all of the time over the two weeks prior to completing the survey. Nevertheless, 43 (7%) say they are physically active only a little or none of the time.

1.4. How often respondents report waking up feeling fresh and relaxed

About one fifth of respondents (n = 116 / 590) report waking up feeling fresh and relaxed most or all of the time. However, of the remaining 80%, 138 said that they had not woken up feeling fresh and relaxed at all in previous two-week period, that is 23% of the total; and 188 (32%) said they only feel that way a little of the time.

1.5. How often daily life is interesting

Almost two thirds of respondents (n= 375 / 589) report that their daily life had been filled with things that interested them most or all of the time over the previous fortnight. For 7 respondents, however, their daily life was reportedly interesting none of the time.

1.6. How much of the time respondents feel lonely

About one in ten of respondents (n = 56 / 589) report that they feel lonely most or all of the time. The tables below show a breakdown of the age of respondents who feel lonely most or all of the time (Table 6), and none of the time (Table 7).

Of those who provided a response to this question as compared to the total number of respondents from this age group, the proportion of adults under 25 who report they feel lonely most or all of the time level is higher than any other age group at 16% (n = 7 / 43). The trend is for the proportion of the experience of loneliness to reduce with age (Figure 1) with the main exception of 35–44 age group which had the lowest proportion of 6%.

Table 5: Lonely most or all of the time

Age group	Total	Male	Female	N.A.
< 25	7	4	3	0
25 - 34	9	4	5	0
35 - 44	7	3	3	1
45 - 54	14	10	3	1
55 - 64	15	7	6	2
65 - 74	3	2	0	1
75 or over	1	1	0	0
Grand Total	56	31	20	5

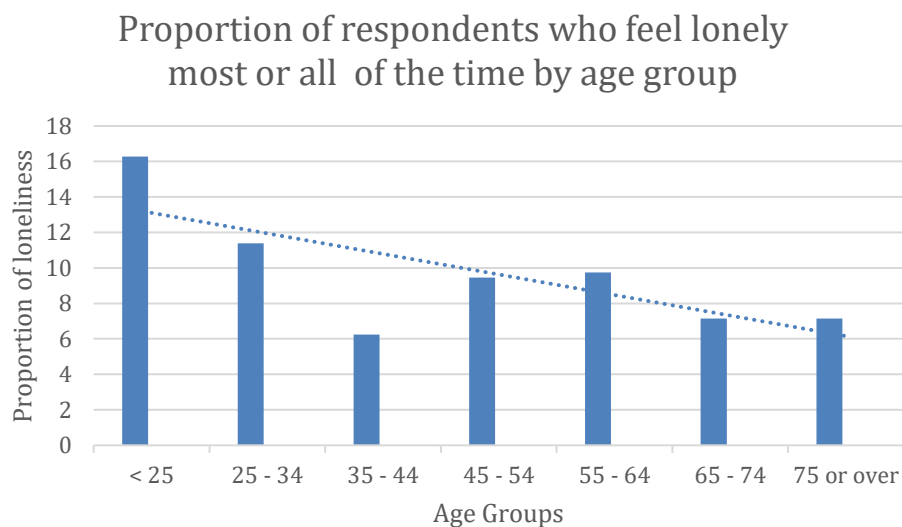


Figure 2

Of the 56 respondents saying they feel lonely most or all of the time, 42 share their home with other people.

Over a third of respondents who provided an answer to this question (n = 202 / 589) report not feeling lonely at all (Table 7)..

Table 6: Lonely none of the time

Age group	Total	Male	Female	N.A.
< 25	8	5	3	0
25 - 34	14	10	2	2
35 - 44	38	29	9	0
45 - 54	66	43	21	2
55 - 64	48	31	12	5
65 - 74	20	16	2	2
75 or over	8	7	1	0
Grand Total	202	141	50	11

Table 8, below, represents a breakdown of experiences of loneliness by the regions in which respondents farm; Highland being the area with the largest number of respondents (n = 139) and the Western Isles with the smallest number (n = 6), as illustrated in Table 2).

Table 7: Regional breakdown of feelings of loneliness

	Feel lonely most or all of time		Feel lonely none of the time	
	No.	%	No.	%
Highland	16	12	48	35
Grampian	8	12	15	22
Tayside	3	5	20	31
Borders	3	6	18	38
Dumfries and Galloway	5	11	15	32
Argyll and Bute	2	9	7	30
Ayrshire and Arran	1	5	8	42
Fife	2	11	6	33
Lanarkshire	3	20	5	33
Lothian	0	0	9	60
Forth Valley	3	21	2	14
Orkney	1	8	5	42
Shetland	2	17	6	50
Greater Glasgow and Clyde	1	17	2	33
Western Isles	0	0	3	50

Of the two regions in which most of the respondents farmed, i.e., Highland and Grampian, 12% (n = 24 / 207) said they feel lonely most or all of the time. The proportion of respondents feeling lonely most or all of the time is comparable with that in Dumfries & Galloway but is less in the Borders. However, because there are fewer respondents from the other areas, results are less meaningful at a regional level.

Lothian region is notable in that there were no respondents from the region who report being lonely most or all of the time and 60% (n = 9 / 15) of respondents from the area did not feel lonely at all. However, as the total number of respondents from Lothian was only 15, care should be taken in interpreting these results.

Also notable are some of the results from those who could be identified as farming in island communities (N.B. those on islands in Highland and Argyll and Bute, for example, are not identifiable). No-one from the Western Isles reports feeling lonely most or all of the time, and half of the respondents from the Western Isles and from Shetland said that they do not feel lonely at all.

Lanarkshire and the Forth Valley contained the highest proportion of respondents (one in five) who said they are lonely most or all of the time. Again, as the number of respondents was relatively small in both these areas (n = 15 & 14), care should be taken about drawing wider conclusions about these regions.

2. DEALING WITH STRESSES IN FARMING

When asked what methods respondents had been found useful to help avoid or deal more easily with some of the stresses faced by farmers and crofters, some consistent answers are given. The two main recurring methods are 'talking' and 'getting away' from the farm.

2.1. Communication

Talking with family

The types of talking described by respondents varies. Many describe a simple belief that it is *better to talk about things*, whether the topic is about challenges with the farm business or at a more personal level. Speaking with a spouse / partner and family members is widely mentioned and, as reflected in the quotations below, the support individuals obtained is valued highly;

- *Speaking more to friends and family and not bottling it up.*
- *Reaching out to family to work through mental issues.*

In addition, as illustrated in the following quotes, family, farm and business all merge and overlap;

- *Work closely with family, discuss any issues/potential issues fully.*
- *At the end of the day, we are a family run business, and we all have a say, and if problems occur we talk about them.*

However, as these next quotations highlight, navigating these working relationships and communications with family members appears to be complicated and / or difficult for some.

- *Sadly, I don't have many strategies, I often take out my frustrations on my extended family.*
- *Avoiding working with other family members.*
- *This [speaking to other farmers] could reduce the feeling of guilt sometimes felt by frequently burdening family with worries and concerns on the farm.*

One farmer describes their family farm partnership as problematic because of *different priorities & characters* which could cause stress/arguments and make it very difficult not to totally fall out.

Talking with other farmers

The benefit of talking with others, outside the home, who experience similar stresses in relation to *isolation, paperwork issues and finances* is identified by respondents to the survey. For some, being part of a group or collective is a useful mechanism or outlet which provides opportunities for talking. As the following quotations demonstrate, for some participants it's a more formal group such as Young Farmers, while for others it's a more informal sense of community;

- *Being part of Young Farmers is a fantastic opportunity to bring together like-minded folk who can have fun together as well as be ears to listen if you need to moan or ask for help.*
- *Being part of a small group of young(ish) farmers that are all interested in the same end goal. WhatsApp group and group meetings really help with feeling like 'you're a part of something'. Sharing the good, the bad and the ugly. Getting out and seeing farming systems has been great for all in the group I'd say too.*

- *Peer to peer knowledge exchange groups, Whatsapp groups – if you're lucky these can lead to a small circle where there is a strong bond and shared trust. Which can in turn lead to more than just sharing of technical knowledge, such as emotional support.*
- *Being part of a community of crofters/farmers in our island county, all farming the same rare breed of sheep as a loose 'cooperative'. It means I'm not carrying all the decisions and anxieties alone.*

Talking with people outwith farming

The use of the term 'like-minded' illustrates the benefit, found by many, of talking with others from farming and crofting communities who understand the challenges and faced similar stresses. However, although many respondents recognise supportive aspects within farming communities, it is clear that not everyone experiences that support.

Where respondents do not find the farming community supportive, negative aspects such as *greed and backstabbing, gossiping, and bullying* discourage individuals from talking to other farmers. In addition, for some, not only is there a lack of support within the farming community, but they also experience behaviours which have had a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing;

- *There is nowhere to turn as the farming community are not supportive of each other.*
- *Avoiding farmers and crofters for a while. The negativity of some relatively entitled people is a drain.*

However, most respondents who identify the benefit of talking with individuals outwith farming indicate that it relates to the notion of 'getting away' from farming. As the quotations below demonstrate, being able to talk with non-farming individuals is found to be useful in either hearing a different perspective or simply to change the subject of conversations;

- *Talking to colleagues/friends outside of work who, although not from farming background, appreciate challenges.*
- *I think it's important to meet up with peers away from the farming sphere of influence. Whatever it is; shooting, fishing any sport.*
- *Non farming friends & work colleagues provide perspective.*
- *More could be done with the creation of lunch clubs etc to give folk a breath of fresh air.*

- *Time off farm. Talk to people outwith agriculture.*

Communicating using social media & telephone

Farming related social media groups were mentioned by some respondents as a method which they find helpful, especially if they are part of a *very lively and supporting WhatsApp group*. Many find social media, in general, a useful tool in helping to communicate with others and maintain relationships, as the quotations below demonstrate;

- *Keeping in contact and seeing friends and family as much as possible even if just through social media if time is limited.*
- *Good communication with neighbouring farmers, Whatsapp & zoom calls.*
- *Speaking to people who are also farmers, mostly on social media. They also have the same problems and we can joke about things.*
- *I'm on a farmers wives Facebook page.*
- *Whatsapp groups with longstanding friends for "banter".*
- *Engage with positive people on social media both in the farming and non-farming worlds.*
- *Sharing our activities especially our flock on Facebook and getting positive feedback.*

However, where the potential for *utilising social media* is highlighted, so too is the potential for social media to have a detrimental influence on wellbeing. This can be in connection with the time that is spent on it, as the this quote suggests;

- *Reducing the amount of time that I spend on social media.*

It might also, as these quotes demonstrate, refer to the risks of becoming upset and frustrated by social media content;

- *Don't get wound up by things on social media, you will never win an argument with an idiot. You'll end up dragging yourself down to their level.*
- *Reading blogs, social media & posts from other farmers doing agroecological farming but can be spoilt when vegans or farmer-haters take over threads with their hate-filled ignorant lies.*

Other respondents report preferring to use the telephone to keep in touch and are pro-active in making time and arranging calls;

- *Find time to talk with other like-minded people arrange regular calls and just have a chat.*

- *Make a point of phoning 3 different people every week and checking in on how they are doing. The sense of community helps them and helps you.*

Face-to-face communication

Farm visits, meetings and conferences are all frequently mentioned as methods that individuals use to access social contact, as well as for learning opportunities. *Good communication with neighbouring farmers* is described as a method which is helpful in managing the stresses of farming. Having a *network* and regular times for meeting up are aspects which some highlighted;

- *Speaking regularly to neighbours to discuss problems or situations on each other's farms. Also helping each other out with an extra pair of hands when needed if possible.*

The above quote illustrates a sense of being part of a community, which not only has the potential to be a source of advice and encouragement but also practical help at times. Most examples given by respondents are of informal and ad hoc social support, and the quote below gives an example of how one farmer uses this approach to provide support to their farming community.

- *I have a farming friend who basically has a drop-in centre where a chat and a drink are always available, helping what can sometimes be a lonely working environment for some ... just one guy having an open-door policy to all.*

Where talking to others is widely recommended to *share problems* and to *ask for advice*, not all respondents are able to do this. One male in the 35-44 age group reported that he had *not found a method at all* for coping with the stresses of farming, and instead would *just bottle it all up inside*. The recommendation by another male farmer in the 55-64 age group is to *talk to friends that also admit to having problems in their lives*.

2.2 Wellbeing Actions

Getting away from the farm

As mentioned earlier in this report, one method which respondents find helpful in dealing with the stresses of farming is to *get away*. For some, as these quotes illustrate, this could simply be to exercise or to socialise with others for short periods;

- *Cycling and early morning cross fit classes, something for me before the day takes hold.*
- *Early morning exercise away from the farm.*
- *Off farm interests. PT sessions, going running, going to dance class, yoga, socialising.*
- *Getting off farm and seeing what other people are doing.*
- *Cultivating off farm activities where you meet people.*
- *Try to get away one night a week even just for a fish supper on a Sunday night.*

Whatever the reason for getting away for short periods, the mental benefit of getting away and the change in perspective it can give are highlighted by the quotations below;

- *Getting off farm for an hour or two. I enjoy driving and have an old car I like to go for a drive to clear my mind.*
- *Having days away from the farm, gives a better problem-solving attitude rather than just stressing and not making it any better.*
- *Trying to squeeze in an hour of running a day to take time for myself and take my mind off the stresses of farming and general workload.*
- *Take myself away from everything that's going on and people, taking time to breath and focus on the good things in life.*

As this quotation demonstrates, there is benefit in seeing things anew on returning to the farm having been away, even for a short time;

- *Go away from the farm as often as time allows, because you'll see things clearer when you come home.*

For some, the benefits of getting away for longer periods is highlighted;

- *A night away from farm rejuvenates a person.*
- *Being away from work for an extended period a weekend or a small midweek break.*
- *Get away for a few days to stop constantly thinking Farming.*

Practical and financial pressured are mentioned by some respondents in relation to getting away from the farm, not least at busy times of the farming year;

- *Taking time off away from the farm, although this is almost impossible.*
- *I think the financial return in farming leads to a lot of the mental health problems. A bit more money allows a bit of time away from the farm - allows better quality sleep and less stress to enjoy the farm.*

- *Getting away from the farm is key! Not easy over the last couple years, with covid.*
- *Hard to switch off or take time off but sometimes just need to get away that's the hard part.*
- *Take Sunday afternoon off no matter what apart from lambing time.*

For some respondents, getting away did not relate as much to physically leaving the farm as to simply focussing on non-farming activities;

- *Making free time doing hobbies away from farm work.*
- *Having suffered depression as a younger man I find walking away if a job gets on top of me and say "Fxxx it", coming back to the job later.*

The notion of seeing things from a different perspective is repeatedly highlighted as one of the main benefits of getting away. In the next section, the way respondents have changed perspective is reported.

Changing perspective and learning techniques

Respondents to the survey report learning techniques and new ways of thinking about their mental wellbeing and / or aspects of managing on farm. Many highlight change, not least that they had learned to see problems in a different way;

- *"Chill - don't worry about the things I can't change.*
- *I stop to ask - Is it worth the blood pressure? - in other words I don't let things wind me up. I have had to learn this.*

For some, this change in thinking relates to taking a wider view which helps to see farming, and their role on the farm from perspective which helps them to cope better;

- *We need to stand back and properly recognise ourselves for what we actually do.*
- *Realising that lots of other industries actually have much more taxing levels of bureaucracy to deal with on a daily basis.*
- *Taking a break - going away. Realising things will still manage without us there.*
- *Putting things into perspective. We are lucky to do what we do and where we do it.*

- *I think it is important to be realistic- for a lot of years I thought other stock farmers were finding it less of a financial struggle. Now I think it is very difficult & it isn't a reflection on my abilities that I can't make significant profits. I can only do the best with the cards I have been dealt.*
- *I think as a farmer it's easy to concentrate on the negatives, like the calf you failed to save, and we don't really sit back and look at all the correct decisions that were made over the year like moving cattle.*

Some respondents are more explicit about changes in their mental wellbeing, and what has helped them feel better, including the quote below which illustrates a very significant change in levels of wellbeing;

- *I was suicidal 4 years ago and have completely turned the cards on my life.*

This male in the 35–44 age group included a list of methods which helped to change his life around which included; starting to believe in himself and recognising negative thoughts and beliefs, changing his diet, joining inspiring groups of his peers, getting counselling, exercise, fundraising activity, getting / paying for professional help in the farm business, mediation and a more positive outlook.

Others describe the process of taking control of bad or negative thoughts;

- *Learning to control the mind not to pay attention to the bad thoughts and not dwell on what we don't have control over.*
- *Try not to dwell on the 5 minutes of bad - reflect on the 23 hours and 55 minutes of good.*
- *Being a 'focused farmer' and brain training. Learning to control the mind not to pay attention to the bad thoughts and not dwell on what we don't have control over.*

For some it was less about changing their mindset and more changing the way they reacted to difficult situations and *walking away from conflict*, such as *walking away before the red mist descends!*

Many named Mindfulness specifically as a method they had found to help them, and many others described the process of being mindful, without explicitly naming it. Relaxation techniques are also described;

- *Learning a bit about Mindfulness and relaxation techniques - these help me to breathe more easily at times when I feel my anxieties building up or when I struggle to sleep.*

- *Learning more about the natural environment and taking pleasure in spending moments in the day appreciating what's around.*
- *Spending time with the cows in the fields just watching them.*
- *Take myself away from everything that's going on and people, taking time to breath and focus on the good things in life.*

Not only did these techniques help alleviate the stresses of farming, they also helped change the focus from negative aspects of farming life to being more appreciative of the good things associated with farming life which help to take the *mind off the wallowing*;

- *Appreciate the land around you and be thankful for where you live.*
- *Spend some time every day appreciating what I have.*
- *Stopping and looking; 5 mins sat on top of a gate just taking in the view/sounds/wildlife.*

In relation to other interventions which are specifically targeted for mental health and wellbeing, some respondents identify treatments such as *antidepressant medication, therapy, and breathing exercises*, as methods which have helped them.

Negativity in others, whether on social media, the phone or in general is found to be detrimental, so much so that some individuals took avoidance measures or chose to seek out contact with positive people;

- *Picking up the phone to fellow farmers. Although this can have negative effect if they are also having a low day.*
- *Avoiding farmers and crofters for a while. The negativity of some relatively entitled people is a drain.*
- *Meeting with as many optimistic and cheerful people as I can, both in person and online.*

Other methods used to help deal with the stresses of farming are listed below:

- Playing / coaching sport
- Running, walking, golf, hill walking, shooting or physical exercise in general
- Listening to music
- Personal faith / going to church
- Alcohol (although some mentioned that it may not be the best method)
- Dog(s)

- Better sleep
- Good food
- Reading (books / audiobooks)
- Leaving farming / selling the farm

However, not all respondents to the survey were able to identify methods which had helped them cope. Some respondents indicated that they are still seeking solutions;

- *I'm still looking. Not found anything yet.*
- *Still trying to figure that out... can't switch off enough to sort everything properly. Getting help sometimes helps but not always, as easier to do things by self. Weather drastically changes things.*
- *I have to believe that the end result will compensate for the lots of hard work, financial challenges, and regulatory quagmire that are having to be overcome just now. Eternal optimism!*

In relation to some of the practical aspects of the challenges and stresses of farming, many respondents describe a number of farm related actions which they found helpful. These are reported in the next section.

2.3.Farm-related Actions

Delegation, Getting help, Farm management change

With less people on farms one respondent felt that there just isn't a proper work life balance. Many farmers highlighted methods which involved *looking at ways to minimise workload* as being effective in helping them to deal with stresses.

Many highlighted different ways of getting help with farm activities;

- *Getting more help with some of the work.*
- *Getting help from friends/ contractors /family to help at busy times.*
- *Friends and family have been invaluable in helping on the farm.*
- *Hand over responsibility to my son.*
- *Employ a consultant that you trust to help deal with banks, accountants, department.*
- *I have found recently that better delegation of workload to employees, contractors and professionals has helped.*
- *Learn how to pay for professional services without resentment- such as accountants, SAC, financial advisers.*

Despite the fact that not all farmers find it easy to ask for, fund or get help, one farmer felt that it is important to *'let your want be known'*, whilst another highlights the benefit of *seeking help early*.

Other respondents describe other methods which related to problem solving and time management as being useful;

- *Deal with issues promptly. Try and change a known situation to avoid the stress points.*
- *Getting on with completing jobs, even if you have fallen behind, slowly step by step reduces being overwhelmed.*
- *Keep calm and think things through, don't make rash decisions. Don't overstock your land, produce quality rather than quantity.*
- *Pay attention to office duties not just outdoor work.*

Identifying problems and learning about how best to respond was felt by one crofter to be an approach which was helpful;

- *I take time to do things for me, I do at least one home study course each year, by learning more I can react to problems on the croft more easily and help to stop them before they become a problem.*

For others, changes in the way they manage their farm had made a difference;

- *Changes in management techniques.*
- *Changing our management approach to Holistic Management which has helped us to better balance our social needs.*

Clearly some respondents associated improvements in managing the stresses of farming with farm-related actions, rather than actions which promote wellbeing.

Discussion

This survey has sought to gather intelligence about wellbeing in the farming community in Scotland and has collected a range of qualitative and quantitative data and findings are useful in building a comprehensive understanding of the sector. Repeating this survey in future years will allow changes to be mapped over time. The term 'farming community' is used to refer to those involved in food production in agriculture and it can include individuals who may not be directly involved in animal husbandry or growing crops; the term farming and crofting communities is used interchangeably.

In relation to their wellbeing, in response to the question about how farmers and crofters feel on a normal day, the average score is 6.5. As this is a one-item scale, i.e., it is arrived at with only one question, it is a relatively 'blunt' measure of wellbeing and as such, care should be taken not to use it outwith the context of the wider findings of the survey. However, as a baseline measure which can be repeated in future years, it will be useful to track changes over time and also to map these changes to the Office of National Statistics (ONS) personal wellbeing average score in Scotland (currently 7.45⁶). The ONS score is arrived at by a different route and therefore direct comparison is not possible.

In relation to a sense of feeling calm and relaxed, over 70% of respondents (n = 422 / 592) only feel calm and relaxed some of the time or little / none of the time. This suggests that huge proportion of individuals in the agricultural sector live in a tense or stressed state. Not only is this not conducive to wellbeing, but prolonged exposure can also have detrimental impacts on physical health⁷.

Given the manual nature of many farming related activities, it is perhaps unsurprising that the majority of respondents report being physically active. Caution is required, however, in relation to interpreting these results. Some farm-related activity, especially when repeated throughout a career or lifetime (as many individuals undertake farming tasks at both ends of the age spectrum), can cause 'wear and tear' at best, and have an injurious physical impact at worst. It is worth considering the Goldilocks Principle⁸ in that the activity undertaken by many working in agriculture may not be the best fit in relation to maintaining their physical health. Furthermore, there are likely to be negative impacts of pain and injury acquired through farming activities on musculoskeletal (MSK) wellbeing as well as mental wellbeing. A recent study⁹ analysed the relationship between MSK pain, wellbeing and sleep in female farmers and suggested that

⁶ [Personal well-being in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

⁷ O'Connor, D.B., Thayer, J.F. and Vedhara, K., 2021. Stress and health: A review of psychobiological processes. *Annual review of psychology*, 72, pp.663-688.

⁸ Holtermann, A., Mathiassen, S.E. and Straker, L., 2019. Promoting health and physical capacity during productive work: the Goldilocks Principle. *Scandinavian journal of work, environment & health*, 45(1), pp.90-97.

⁹ Shin, D.S. and Jeong, B.Y., 2022. Older female farmers and modeling of occupational hazards, wellbeing, and sleep-related problems on musculoskeletal pains. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(12), p.7274.

strategies to improve sleep and wellbeing would help alleviate or prevent MSK pain.

Results from this survey reveal that, whether from sleep deprivation or poor sleep quality, over 80% of respondents do not wake up feeling fresh and relaxed. There are multiple negative effects from sleep loss, from health, productivity and safety¹⁰ to emotional empathy¹¹ which could have a detrimental impact on the wellbeing of individual farmers and their businesses. The combination of workload and sleep deprivation can make it more difficult for individuals to deal with stressful situations, and even less stressful issues can be more problematic, as illustrated by the comment below;

Lambing is complete, and almost finished calving, but tiredness has set in and even the smallest of issues get me down.

Despite the demands and stresses of farming and crofting, many respondents feel positively about the *terrific lifestyle* it affords. The overwhelming response (two thirds of respondents, n = 3785 / 589) of those who find daily life interesting illustrates that there are individuals who take *time to enjoy nature and the life cycle* of livestock and who *spend some time every day appreciating what they have*.

The notion of *taking time to think positively, taking a step back to think, to see the bigger picture* and to *focus on one step at a time* are all phrases used by respondents about how they deal with challenges. This approach does not deny negative aspects of farming but involves a perspective, often learned and requiring some element of choice, to focus on positive aspects of farming and crofting life;

Noticing the bad, but then remembering for every bad thing, there are 9 good ones (that are easy to forget about).

Respondents indicate that not only is it easy to forget about positive aspects, it can be easy to let negative thoughts and worries spiral. Respondents outlined many negative aspects of farming and crofting which are not easy to deal with

¹⁰ Hillman, D.R. and Lack, L.C., 2013. Public health implications of sleep loss: the community burden. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 199, pp.S7–S10.

¹¹ Guadagni, V., Burles, F., Ferrara, M. and Iaria, G., 2014. The effects of sleep deprivation on emotional empathy. *Journal of sleep research*, 23(6), pp.657–663.

and many felt that *doing this job if you are prone to the black dog must be extremely difficult.*

And I know it's easier said than done, but only fret the things you can control yourself. I've seen so many farmers worrying lately about fertiliser, fuel, electric, etc., but we cannot influence that as an individual.

Respondents describe use of a range of recognised approaches for promoting wellbeing and good mental health. 'Self-talk', such as the example, '*I try to give myself a good talking to*', and managing negative thoughts, are elements of cognitive behavioural therapy¹² which have been identified by many respondents in this survey as helping to deal with stresses of farming. The practice of taking time to focus on the present, such as *spending time with the cows in the fields just watching them* is an aspect of Mindfulness¹³. The practice is described by many respondents in their comments about helpful methods, and the word Mindfulness used specifically by 13 respondents, either in relation to personal practice, use of an app or attending a class. This indicates that individuals within farming and crofting communities are using a range of evidence-based strategies to help manage their own wellbeing.

Antidepressant medication, therapy and counselling are all mentioned, but only minimally in the results to this survey. This may be because the focus of the survey is about wellbeing and not mental health *per se*. Possibly it may be a reflection of the problematic nature of access to mental health services in terms of anonymity and proximity to / availability of services in rural areas¹⁴. Also, it may be an indication that self-management is a method which aligns to characteristics traditionally associated with farming people, such as stoicism and lower levels of help seeking behaviour¹⁵. Perhaps awareness of these characteristics prompted some respondents to this survey to mention and promote the notion of asking for help and seeking help in a timely manner. Therefore, where there is an evidence base for the effectiveness of strategies

¹² [Welcome to Living Life for Farming – LLTTF4 Farming](#)

¹³ [Mindfulness – NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

¹⁴ Parr, H., Philo, C. and Burns, N., 2004. Social geographies of rural mental health: experiencing inclusions and exclusions. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 29(4), pp.401–419.

¹⁵ Hull, M.J., Fennell, K.M., Vallury, K., Jones, M. and Dollman, J., 2017. A comparison of barriers to mental health support-seeking among farming and non-farming adults in rural South Australia. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 25(6), pp.347–353.

which promote wellbeing¹⁶ ¹⁷, and whilst survey results demonstrate their use in the farming community as effective methods of dealing with the stresses of farming, it is important that individuals who would benefit from a mental health treatment are not discouraged from seeking help by the notion of trying to self-manage.

In relation to loneliness, results indicate that approximately 10% of individuals feel lonely most or all of the time. This is similar to findings reported in a 2018 review of social isolation and loneliness in Scotland¹⁸. Definitions used in this review (Appendix II) are useful in providing clarity about the differences between loneliness and social isolation, and between social networks and social support.

For some respondents to the survey, methods to help deal with the stresses of farming involve avoiding negative people, including on social media. One of the farmers who commented about the negative influence of wider society believes that there is a need for recognition of the value of farmers and farming, in order to help individuals take better care of themselves. She questioned how individuals who feel *so completely undervalued, unappreciated and continually criticised* would even consider themselves as being worth taking care of.

The impact of negative people and comments can be considerable at the best of times, but this is likely to be worsened if the number of social interactions experienced by an individual is limited, and there are fewer positive interactions to dilute the effect. For those in farming who are socially isolated, the need to avoid negative people, whether in person or via social media, may be all the more pressing.

Despite the overwhelming recommendation to talk about problems, both farm-related or wellbeing-related, clearly not all individuals in farming and crofting communities find they are able to do this. These are aspects of culture within

¹⁶ Goedendorp, M.M. and Steverink, N., 2017. Interventions based on self-management of well-being theory: pooling data to demonstrate mediation and ceiling effects, and to compare formats. *Aging & Mental Health*, 21(9), pp.947-953.

¹⁷ Mackay, L., Egli, V., Booker, L.J. and Prendergast, K., 2019. New Zealand's engagement with the Five Ways to Wellbeing: Evidence from a large cross-sectional survey. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, 14(2), pp.230-244.

¹⁸ Teuton J. Social isolation and loneliness in Scotland: a review of prevalence and trends. Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland; 2018.

agriculture which may not be conducive to open conversations about aspects which some may feel as associated with weakness or failure. Hence, reports given by respondents to this survey about their experiences of problems such as with lack of profit or of negative outcomes on farm, of when they struggle with their mental health and wellbeing, and simply of times when they feel down, can make an important contribution to normalising the notion that “it’s ok not to be ok” in the farming community, which may help to influence culture change.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Results from this farming survey indicate that more than half of farmers feel so tired and / or anxious that they do not even feel refreshed when they waken up after sleeping. Almost a third indicate that they have little or no time in which they feel calm or relaxed.

Recommendation 1: Strategies for farmers to address anxiety, to alleviate workload and to improve the quality of sleep should be explored.

Approximately one in every ten farmers is likely to be lonely, and feel that way almost, if not all of the time. Importantly, results show that $\frac{3}{4}$ of this group is likely to be living with others and only a quarter live alone. The prevalence of loneliness is all the more pertinent because the ‘antidote’ to loneliness, talking, is a key method of managing the stresses of farming. This report includes the various contexts used by farmers for talking; from face-to-face contact at farmer meetings and on farm, to telephone and social media. Talking to family and spouses is a central component for some, whilst others sought social support from their farming neighbours and wider farming community. Clearly for many, the farming community offers a spectrum of supportive options but for others, it is not seen to offer any support.

Respondents describe the benefit of formal activities, such as farmer meetings, farm visits, groups on topics such as Agritourism, and conferences in that they provide opportunities for social contact and for building trusting relationships.

Recommendation 2: Activities to build and promote social cohesion in farming and crofting communities are required to reach individuals who do not access the supports that are available, and to address suspicion. Activities which connect individuals, even when these are not directly for

the purpose of wellbeing, should be available for farmers and crofters to access.

Recommendation 3: Organisations and agencies which deliver knowledge transfer activities, learning opportunities and other events for farmers should consider how to include opportunities for informal social interactions and how they might facilitate social networking. Cost benefit analysis of the provision of events in locations across Scotland should acknowledge the 'soft' or indirect benefits they provide.

The range, complexity and 'wickedness' of many farming challenges are plain in the comments from respondents, even when they were not asked about these directly. This report in no way seeks to diminish these challenges nor the negative impact they can have on individual farmers and crofters. However, methods used by farmers to respond to these challenges and to manage the resulting stresses they cause include strategies to manage negativity.

These strategies can involve avoiding or minimising interactions with negative people / forums and instead prioritise communication which builds a sense of connectedness, commonality and is solution focussed;

Recommendation 4: Methods, tools and interventions which support individuals to learn / adopt ways of thinking more positively about themselves, their farming activities and farming more generally should be promoted and shared widely.

Recommendation 5: When farming and crofting are discussed publicly, consideration should be made about how to present challenges in a way which, without diminishing their impact, is not overwhelmingly negative but also includes solutions and positive aspects, with a mind to the potential impact on the mental wellbeing of individuals.

This section has reported many methods used by individuals to manage the stresses they face as farmers and crofters. It is important also to note that some farmers had yet to find useful methods and said that they *haven't found a way to deal with the stress*. The words of one farmer are a fitting conclusion of this report;

Learning to look after our own emotional welfare is important and will be beneficial to us all.

Limitations

Survey results are useful in providing a baseline to monitor changes in future years, and differences in groups over time. As one respondent commented, *how people answer this depends on their state of mind at the time* and therefore the data provided acts as a snapshot of wellbeing. Questions were not intended to provide diagnostic data about mental health and therefore results do not represent prevalence of aspects of mental ill health in the farming community.

Additional Information

Doug Avery Tour

Further information about the Doug Avery Tour is available here:
www.dougaveryscotland.co.uk

Farmstrong Scotland Steering Committee

The steering committee includes:

- Tim Bailey, Chief Executive SAOS
- Matthew Currie, Savills Director & Farmer
- Rebecca Dawes, Jane Craigie Marketing and Rural Youth Project
- Jock Gibson, Farmer & Butcher, Edinvale Farm, Forres
- Emily Grant, Forrit Farming & Consultancy
- Alan Laidlaw, Chief Executive, RHASS
- John Scott, Farmer, Fearn Farm, Tain (Chair)
- Retired from the group – Nina Clancy, previously RSABI

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Appendices

Appendix I

Questions from Farmstrong Scotland survey, 2022.

Question 1

What is your gender?

Question 2

Which age group do you belong to?

Question 3

Do you live alone?

How many adults, other than you, are in your household?

How many children (under 18 years) are in your household?

Question 4

In terms of your wellbeing, how do you feel on a normal day? On a scale from 0 to 10, if 10 means the best you can imagine and 0 means the worst you can imagine, please indicate how your health is TODAY.

Question 5

Over the last two weeks...

How often have you felt calm and relaxed?

How often have you been physically active?

How often did you wake up feeling fresh and relaxed?

How often has your daily life been filled with things that interest you?

How much of the time have you felt lonely?

Question 6

Which of the following do you think would have a positive impact on your wellbeing?

Increased contact with family and friends

Increasing the amount of exercise I do

Volunteering in my local community

Helping other farmers/crofters

Spending more time taking notice of the small things in life that bring me enjoyment

Spending more time learning new things

Increasing the amount/quality of sleep

Having more time away from the farm

Improved physical health
Reducing injuries at work

Question 7

What methods have you found useful to help avoid or deal more easily with some of the stresses farmers and crofters have to manage.

Question 8

Which of the following topics would you be interested in learning more about?

Adapting to change
Balancing work and family and getting time off the farm
Business planning
Financial planning How to get the best out of staff
How to manage tiredness and fatigue/how to sleep better
How to manage and resolve conflict
How to meet new people/become more confident and sociable
How to plan for retirement
How to use time most efficiently and prioritise tasks
How to use computers, tablets/smart phones
Succession planning
Techniques for solving problems/decision making
Techniques to stop worrying about work/to manage stress
What other topics would you be interested in?

Question 9

In your opinion, which of the following would be the most effective ways to share information about wellbeing with farmers and crofters in Scotland? Please tick the three most effective ways from the options below.

Dedicated social events (e.g. comedy nights, sports activities)
Email newsletters
Farming and agriculture press and media
Gatherings*
Short courses
Social media e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc
Stands at Agricultural shows, marts etc
Telephone information line Text / messaging
Website

Please use this space to add any further suggestions:

Note:* A gathering could be: NFUS, grazing groups, monitor farms/on farm events, agricultural and breed societies, young farmers

Question 10

Which of the following have you heard of, and which of these have you accessed? Even if this means just looking at a website or taking a leaflet from a stand.

Are EWE Ok? (Young Farmers)

Breathing Space

Doug Avery/Resilient farmer tour

Living Life to the Full for the farming community

Farmstrong NZ

RSABI

Mind Your Head (Yellow Wellies)

Wellbeing information/support from local NHS or community services

Please use this space to identify other sources of wellbeing information or support that you think is appropriate for farmers and crofters:

Question 11

If we were to develop a wellbeing programme for farmers and crofters in Scotland do you think Farmstrong Scotland would be a suitable name?

Please use this space for other name suggestions and any further feedback:

Question 12

What is your role on the farm? Please select the one that best applies.

Owner/part owner/related to owner

Salaried manager

Farm worker

Tenant

Contract worker

Crofter

Other

If other, please specify:

Question 13:

Do you employ any staff? Please select the one that best applies.

Yes

No

Not relevant

If you answered yes to the above question, how many staff do you employ?

Question 14

What type of farming/growing are you involved in? Please select all that apply

Beef or Sheep

Pigs
Poultry
Deer or camelids
Dairy
Cereals,
Potatoes & General Cropping
Horticulture, including Fruit and Vegetable Crops (except potatoes)
Diversification/tourism
Other

If other, please specify:

Question 15

Which region(s) do you farm in? Please select all that apply

Argyll and Bute
Ayrshire and Arran
Borders
Dumfries and Galloway
Fife
Forth Valley
Grampian
Greater Glasgow and Clyde
Highland
Lanarkshire
Lothian
Orkney
Shetland
Tayside
Western Isles

Would you be interested in being further involved in the programme?

Thank you for the time you have taken to complete this survey and to consider your answers.

For more information or if you have any concerns about this survey, please email wellbeing@sruc.ac.uk

APPENDIX II

Extract from Social isolation and loneliness in Scotland: a review of prevalence and trends. Edinburgh: NHS Health Scotland; 2018.

“Key Concepts

Social isolation and loneliness are distinct concepts.

Social isolation refers to the quality and quantity of the social relationships a person has at individual, group, community and societal levels.

Loneliness is a subjective feeling experienced when there is a difference between an individual’s felt and ideal levels of social relationships.

Social isolation and loneliness are not necessarily linked, as people who are socially connected can feel lonely and socially isolated people may not feel lonely” (p.3).

“Social networks refer to the number and frequency of social contact in families, workplaces and neighbourhood. •

Social support refers to the quality of relationships in terms of providing, for example, emotional or practical support “ (p.4).

“Recent work suggests that 11% of the adults in Scotland feel lonely often and 38% feel lonely sometimes.⁴ This is at the upper end of UK estimates, although the sample size is relatively small.* Although rates of loneliness vary with age and gender, there is some evidence to suggest that adults in midlife and the ‘oldest old’ † are at increased risk” (p.7).



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