

# Fit to Farm – Health is your Wealth

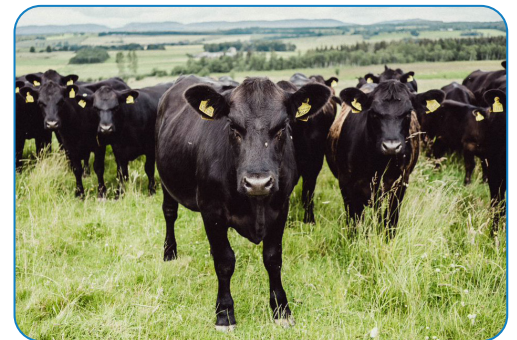


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**Farming and crofting is not just a job – it’s a way of life. Agriculture is a wonderful industry to work in but can be very physically and emotionally demanding on you and your family.**

The stress of running a profitable business, financial insecurity due to fluctuating market prices, dealing with daily issues on the farm, poor weather, family relationships, and changing agricultural policy, can all have a negative impact on your mental health and wellbeing.



Sadly, depression and suicide are the main causes of death within farming communities. Working in rural industries can be a 24/7 commitment and can be very lonely, with many farmers and crofters spending long hours working alone in isolation. Farming and crofting can also be very physically demanding on your body, therefore it is important to stay physically fit to be able to perform at your best, and ensure longevity of your career.

It is important that we all take more responsibility for managing our own mental health and wellbeing, as well as looking out for people close to us who may be experiencing difficulties. If you saw someone with a broken arm, it is likely that you would ask them how they are feeling – but because of the stigma around mental health and a reluctance to talk around the matter – it often gets ignored even when there are visible signs of stress, anxiety, or depression.

This publication provides an overview of what mental and physical health is, along with practical measures you can implement day-to-day to improve your mental and physical health and look out for others.

## Being ‘Fit to Farm’

In the agricultural industry it is good practice to regularly maintain machinery and equipment to ensure it is in safe working order. Every year, our cars get a service and MOT to ensure that they are road-worthy and in safe working order. But how often do you maintain your own physical and mental wellbeing to ensure that you are working as safely and as efficiently as possible?

***“Your body and mind are the most utilised tools of your trade” – Laura Hancock, Rural Works NZ***

Your mental and physical wellbeing is your most important asset when undertaking daily tasks, making decisions, communicating with others, and running your business as safely and efficiently as possible. However, mental and physical wellbeing is often overlooked and undervalued in the agricultural sector and this needs to change.



The European Agricultural Fund  
for Rural Development  
**Europe investing in rural areas**



**Scottish Government**  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
[gov.scot](http://gov.scot)

## Mental Health and Wellbeing

### What can you do to improve your mental health and wellbeing?

**Talk.** Dealing with anxiety or depression among other things alone is not good. One of the best things you can do is talk to someone you trust. This may be a friend, family member, or a mental health professional who can listen and support you in times of difficulty. Opening up and speaking to someone may initially feel like a frightening prospect, but taking that first step in making conversation can have huge benefits long-term.

**Take time away from the farm or croft.** Farming and crofting can be extremely consuming. Taking time out to spend with family, friends, and taking part in social activities can provide some breathing space in a completely different environment. The Coronavirus pandemic and lockdowns haven't helped widespread social isolation, but now we are able to meet with other people safely, this can have a positive impact on our mental wellbeing. Meeting other farmers and like-minded people in a social setting can be a great way to talk freely and share thoughts and experiences.



**Days off and holidays.** Farming and crofting can be a 24/7 job and it can be easy to avoid holidays and days off, particularly if you are self-employed. Planning and taking holidays is a good way to get away from the farm, spend time with family and friends, and will positively promote your wellbeing and productivity when you return to the business.

**Relaxation.** There are various ways to relax and you will know what works and what doesn't work for you. Simple things like watching TV, listening to music, reading a book or newspaper, or running a bath can all help you to relax. Mindfulness is a widely recognised activity which is proven to reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain. Mindfulness is a type of meditation focusing on breathing exercises, making you aware of sensations and feelings in the present moment. You can download a variety of mindfulness apps on smartphones and laptop/PC devices. The Headspace app <https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app> and Calm app <https://www.calm.com/> are two examples, and there will be many more you can download by visiting your App Store or Google Play.

**Low-impact exercise.** Participating in low-impact exercise such as walking, yoga, and pilates can reduce stress, and have a positive impact on your physical health as well as your mental health. Taking a dog for a walk or meeting up with a friend/neighbour for a walk in the countryside will help to reduce stress and help you to maintain low levels of physical activity. Taking part in group yoga or pilates classes with a qualified instructor will help you to meet new people, engage in conversation, reducing loneliness and isolation.

**Diet & alcohol.** Eating a nutritious diet and reducing alcohol intake will help to reduce feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression. See nutrition section below.

**Keep learning.** Your brain is like a muscle – it needs to be used to positively grow and develop. Some people like to have a vision or a project with a clear goal and something to work towards. It doesn't have to be a massive project like building a house, or driving forward a new business venture – small, achievable goals which work for you keeping you stimulated and energised will have a positive impact on your mental health and wellbeing. It could be taking time to develop a new skill or improving upon your current skills and abilities. This could be a practical activity, a hobby, interest, sport, musical instrument, arts & crafts or other activity you enjoy where you can focus your mind and challenge your brain.

**Be kind and support others.** The act of giving and kindness towards others can improve your own mental health and wellbeing. Doing something for someone else can bring a real sense of reward and personal satisfaction. It helps you to connect with others and promotes new relationships. Small acts of kindness can boost your self-esteem and benefit others during the process. Some examples may include; checking in on friends and family you haven't spoken to in a while, helping the elderly or less-abled in your community with daily tasks, offering to help a neighbour with some DIY or a project they are working on, or volunteering for a local charity.

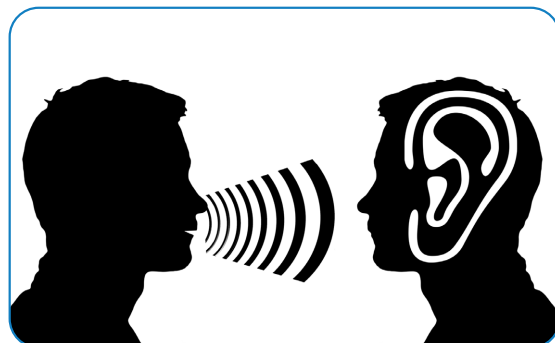
## How to help someone else

Do you know someone who is struggling and in need of some support?

**Be there for them.** Take time to reach out to the individual, give them a call, go round and visit them, or offer to go on a walk. No-one expects you to be an expert – by simply being there for someone in times of hardship can be a big help to their mental health and wellbeing.

**Listen.** Listening is one of the most powerful things you can do. Communication is more than just talking. Communication involves active listening, being genuine, and having empathy. When actively listening to someone, your attention is focused on the individual, allowing them to speak freely without judgement.

**Respect.** Everyone at some point in their lives will experience worry, anxiety, stress, or fear, among other things. It is important to treat them in the same way that you would like to be treated yourself in such given situations.



## Physical Health and Wellbeing

*“Movement is medicine. It is medicine for the mind, body, and soul.” – Dr Keith Johnsgard / Laura Hancock*

Exercise is one of the most effective ways to improve our mental health and wellbeing. It is well documented now that taking part in regular exercise helps to promote positive thoughts, diverting feelings of anxiety or depression, and helping to reignite positive energy and motivation.

### Rural Athletes

Athletes, by definition, are known to be very physically active, at the peak of their physical fitness. The word ‘fitness’ itself is commonly used in our everyday vocabulary – but what does it really mean?

Fitness can be defined as being ‘fit for purpose’.

In the farming and crofting industry, fitness can be defined as “having the physical capabilities enabling us to practically perform in our working environments” – Laura Hancock, Rural Works NZ.

Rural occupations can be very physically demanding, including manual tasks such as lifting, carrying, bending, stretching, and weight-bearing activities. As you get older repetitive movements and physical tasks can start to have a negative impact on your body and your ability to carry out tasks effectively and efficiently. Therefore, it is crucial to maintain your physical fitness to continue to be ‘fit for purpose’ minimising your risk of injury and ensuring longevity of your career.

### Movement snacks and exercises

Keeping physically active is important for our physical, and mental health. Exercise encourages the body to release endorphins which helps to improve our mood, productivity, and reduce feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression. Exercise also promotes better sleep which is important in improving our wellbeing.

Movement snacks are simple, easy exercises which can be integrated into our everyday lives helping to maintain mobility and enhance our natural basic movement patterns. Movement snacks are relatively short, don’t take much time or space, and can significantly improve your strength and flexibility over time.



By integrating bite-size movement snacks into your daily routine or work activities will help you to:

- **Perform with more effectiveness and efficiency**
- **Increase movement adaptability and physical durability**
- **Maintain optimal brain function**
- **Sleep better and have more energy during the day**
- **Increase resilience to mental and physical challenges**

A video produced by the Farm Advisory Service in partnership with Emma Forster at PeaceFit Ltd. illustrates a variety of movement exercises you can do at home and integrate into your working day.

Link to video: <https://www.fas.scot/publication/health-is-your-wealth-peacefit-movement-plan-for-scottish-farmers-and-crofters/>

## Nutrition

Maintaining a good diet provides the foundations to improving your mental and physical health.

A podcast produced by the Farm Advisory Service in partnership with Anna Groom from AEG Nutrition explores the topic of nutrition in an agricultural context, and provides practical guidance to farmers and crofters looking to improve their diet.

Link to podcast: <https://www.fas.scot/publication/health-wellbeing-and-nutrition-with-anna-groom/>

### Links to webinar series

As part of the Health is your Wealth series, the Farm Advisory Service recorded 4 webinars which you can watch online at your leisure.

Webinar 1 – Doug Avery – Discovering your Talents. Growing your Wellbeing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-pcVmpcsZ0>

Webinar 2 – Laura Hancock – Enhance the Tools of your Trade

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3XyFjGJNdjM>

Webinar 3 – Laura Hancock – Adapt Movement, Improve Performance

Head to [www.fas.scot](http://www.fas.scot) and search for 'Health is your Wealth' to find this webinar.

Webinar 4 – Mental Health Support for Rural Industries

Head to [www.fas.scot](http://www.fas.scot) and search for 'Health is your Wealth' to find this webinar.

### Details of support organisations and resources:

**RSABI** provides practical, emotional and financial support to all people involved in the Scottish agricultural industry. The service is available to those previously and currently involved in farming, crofting and occupations related to agriculture in Scotland.

Helpline: 7am – 11pm: **0300 111 4166** / <https://rsabi.org.uk/Home-Page>

**Farming Community Network (England & Wales)** has over 400 volunteers across England and Wales, many of whom are involved in farming, or have close links with agriculture, and therefore have a great understanding of the issues that farmers, farm workers and farming families regularly face. Volunteers provide free, confidential, pastoral and practical support to anyone who seeks help, regardless of whether the issue is personal or business-related.

Telephone helpline: **03000 111 999** / E-helpline: [help@fcn.org.uk](mailto:help@fcn.org.uk)

Farm Well: <https://farmwell.org.uk/>

Samaritans: <https://www.samaritans.org/> / Call: **116 123**