

survive and thrive



on the farm

This booklet has been produced to help create awareness about farm stress, the signs and causes of stress and to provide you with some practical skills to help you and your family cope with farm stress.

Farming is an occupation, but it is also a way of life. Unfortunately the demands of the farm can put you and your family under a great deal of pressure.

Living and working on the farm provides constant reminders of its uncertainty and instability. This is reinforced by the growing evidence that farm life is going through a process of change. In addition, past events involving agricultural disease such as foot and mouth, adverse weather conditions and the ongoing climate of uncertainty has given rise to increase levels of stress.

Stress can cause serious health problems for many farmers and their families.

Admitting you are worried about yourself, your family or farm isn't a sign of weakness. This is the first step to managing stress.

WHAT IS STRESS?

The term stress originates from the world of engineering, where it relates to the capacity of a physical structure to withstand strain. However, structures exposed to stresses and strains over a period of time can begin to experience damage.

This is also true of people, although stress among individuals is more complex. It is recognised that the farming community face a number of particular stressors and that an accumulation of stress can take its toll on the physical and emotional health of individuals and their families.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF FARM STRESS?

Stress can:

- Occur suddenly - without warning, for example heavy rain might destroy your winter crop or the identification of a reactor in your herd.
- Build up in a single day - as one thing after another goes wrong for example, that vital piece of farm equipment breaks down, calving complications end with you being unable to save the calf and the additional cost of vet fees.
- Snowball over a long period of time - due to poor cash flow, high debts, or where fodder is decreasing as weather conditions worsen.
- Arise as a result of life events - such as bereavement, poor health, relationship difficulties within families, extended families or between generations.
- Occur within ourselves - how we react to stress depends on how we view the situation, in other words our stress depends on the inner beliefs and values which we use to deal with events in our lives.

'Do you see the barn half full or do you see it half empty.'

HOW DOES STRESS AFFECT YOUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING?

The first step in managing stress is to recognise the symptoms.
It is important to have any symptoms checked by your family doctor.

On Physical Health

- Headaches
- Tight feelings in the head
- Face looks pale and drawn
- Neck ache, backache and general aches and pains
- Breathlessness
- Palpitations
- Chest pains
- Raised blood pressure
- Skin problems
- Recurring infections
- Digestive problems and ulcers
- Heart disease

On Emotional Health

- Increasingly worried
- Loss in self confidence
- Constant feelings of guilt and hopelessness
- Tired but can't relax
- Negative attitudes
- Irritability
- Tearful
- Feeling that you are letting others down such as parents, family and friends
- Loss of the ability to make decisions and become forgetful
- Experience poor concentration and confusion

On Life

- All work and no time for self, family or friends
- Loss of sense of humour
- Increase in alcohol consumption
- Decline in personal appearance
- Changes in routine- stop attending your place of worship, community groups or special events.
- Avoid contact with outside services such as bank manager, tax man, farm suppliers
- Seeking isolation
- Becoming angry and lashing out often towards anyone that may try to help

On Work

- Increased risk of accidents
- Decline in farm or home appearance
- Decrease in care for livestock and pets
- Poor working relations with family members and farm employees
- Complaints from farm suppliers
- Low productivity

SURVIVE AND THRIVE ON FARM STRESS

What can you do to tackle stress?

- **Recognise** - The most valuable resource you have is **your health** so take care of it.
- **Shun the 'super person' urge** - Some people expect too much of themselves and get into a constant state of worry because they think they are not achieving what they should.
- **Take one thing at a time** - When you are under pressure, an ordinary day's work can seem unbearable. Tell yourself this is temporary and you can work your way out of it.
- **Work through your anger** - Having an outburst may give you a sense of righteousness, or even power, but it generally leaves you feeling foolish and sorry in the end. The energy resulting from anger is better used to handle a distasteful chore such as cleaning out the cow shed.
- **Give in occasionally** - If you find you are getting into frequent quarrels with family or neighbours, it is easier on the system to give in once in a while even if you feel you are right. If you yield, you usually find that others will, too.

SURVIVE AND THRIVE ON FARM STRESS

- **Take time with family** - Use that Sunday lunch or evening meal to relax with the family and catch up on the good things that are happening.
- **Talk it out** - Admitting you are worried about the farm isn't a sign of weakness. Talk your problems out with a trusted friend. Get professional help if you are experiencing severe distress (see the back page for useful contact numbers). Remember professionals are trained to offer support in confidence.
- **Take care of your body** - Get adequate rest, nutrition and exercise. Well nourished, rested people can withstand stress better. Farmers may feel they get enough exercise, however in addition to work, leisure activities such as walking, running, cycling raise the pulse rate and bring fresh oxygen to the muscles
- **Turn your crises into challenges** - Shift from worrying about problems to problem solving.
- **Act on** - Recognise things you can change and learn to accept those situations that are outside your control *'Knowing the difference is the key to survival'*.
- **Laugh** - **Look for the humour in everything you do.**

DON'T FORGET WHY YOU CHOSE THIS WAY OF LIFE,

Farmers should remember the particular kind of pleasure that their way of life still affords. You may find a moment of happiness with your family, a pet, a reliable piece of machinery, the willing help of a neighbour, the sound of the diesel tractor starting in the early morning, or the song of a blackbird. Many of these pleasures go some way to relieve stresses and strains.

What can friends or farm supporters do to help?

A tactful and caring approach made to the family as a whole or to the individual can go a long way.

- **Listening makes a difference** - People often want to talk about their problems and concerns without being offered solutions.
- **Openly discuss stress** - Attempt to establish what the main difficulties may be and work together to identify solutions to address the problems.
- **Direct the individual towards appropriate help**
Support is available from a number of sources. (See the back page of this leaflet for some relevant helpline numbers).
- **Equip yourself with skills** - There are courses available on stress management which will provide you with skills to support individuals who are distressed. For Information on courses contact The Health Promotion Department
Tel 02871 865127

SOURCES OF HELP

Your local family doctor

Rural Support Line

A confidential listening ear and sign posting service for farmers and rural communities

Tel: 0845 606 7 607

Rural support website; www.ruralsupport.org.uk

The Samaritans

24 hour confidential telephone listening and befriending service for people who are lonely, suicidal, depressed. Tel: 08457 909090

Aware Defeat Depression

Information, self help and support for individuals suffering from Depression. Services in Enniskillen, Omagh, Strabane and L/Derry. Telephone 028 71 260602

Cruse Bereavement Care

A confidential counselling service to help individuals and families cope following the death of a loved one.

Omagh and Fermanagh area. Tel 028 8224 4414

L/Derry. Tel 02871 262941

FARM SUPPORT

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)

Omagh: 028 8225 1020

Enniskillen: 028 6632 5004

Coleraine: 028 7034 1111

Ulster Farmers Union

Strabane: 028 7188 2542

Limavady: 028 7776 2996

Enniskillen: 028 6632 6622

Omagh: 028 8224 3057

Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association

Tel 028 8676 5700

Northern Association of Citizens Advice Bureaus

Tel 028 9023 1120



Design: Westcare,
Health Promotion,
Graphics Unit.

Tel: 028 7186 5221

Funded by The Department Of Health, Social Services & Public Safety
An Rionn Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí