



Farmer input into development of Farmstrong: Online survey

Report prepared for

FMG & Mental Health Foundation

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1 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

- An on-line survey was undertaken with a random selection of FMG clients, to obtain information to inform the development of the Farmstrong programme.
- This research was undertaken by Wyllie & Associates, who sub-contracted the administration of the on-line survey to Nielsen.
- 6000 email invitations were issued between 9 and 11 December 2014.
- 315 FMG clients completed at least part
- There were also 81 from other sources – a media release invited farmers to complete the survey
- The number of responses varied for different questions, with 251 being the highest number for the key questions (a 4% response rate for the emailed FMG sample).
- Key characteristics of the total sample included:
 - 50% were beef/sheep and 46% dairy
 - 81% were owners/part owners
 - 64% were male
 - 37% attended discussion groups

KEY FINDINGS

- 'Balancing work and family and getting time off the farm (47%) was the topic farmers were most interested in (see table below).

	Total 251 %
TOPICS INTERESTED IN	
Balancing work and family and getting time off the farm	47
How to manage tiredness and fatigue	35
How to get the best out of employees	34
Understanding legislation relating to farming	33
How to manage stress	31
How to use computers, tablets/smart phones	30
Techniques to stop worrying about work all the time	29
Succession planning	27
Financial planning	25
Time management/how to use time most efficiently	24
How to resolve conflict	24
How to plan for retirement	23
Techniques for solving problems	23
Business planning	22

- All but 12% of the participants expressed some level of interest in being involved with the programme, including a third who would be interested in participating in programme initiatives (see table below).

INTEREST IN BEING INVOLVED		Total 221 %
I would be interested in receiving information about the programme		69
I would be interested in helping provide input into the development of the programme		36
I would be interested in participating in initiatives provided by the programme		33
I would be interested in promoting the programme		23
I have services I could provide to the programme		10
I would not be interested in the programme		12

- When asked to specify methods they have found useful to help avoid or deal more easily with some of the stresses farmers have to manage, responses were dominated by two categories: time away from farming and talking to others.
- Exercise and sleep were the next most frequently mentioned.
- Farmers also provided suggestions for how farmers could get a "decent break from the farm". The first scenario was a farmer struggling financially who had no staff. The most frequently mentioned suggestions related to:
 - getting help from neighbours, family or friends
 - finding cheap holiday options
 - going during less busy times of the year
 - employing casual labour
- In the second scenario the farmer had staff and was more financially secure, but heavily involved with the farm. The dominant response related to trusting staff. This could include the need to train staff up if they couldn't currently be trusted to run the farm in the owner's absence. Other suggestions related to:
 - supporting/monitoring staff
 - changing way of thinking
 - structures to make holidays/time off happen
 - setting up to make breaks easier/ work better
 - change form of farming
 - network for information exchange/ farmer assistance (with things like finding casual labour or farm sitters, or exchanging holiday homes)
- When asked what might be suitable opportunities in their community for a programme representative to introduce some of the information related to this programme, the most common responses were discussion groups and field days (run by Beef & Lamb or Dairy NZ).
- A large number of verbatim comments have been included in the report.

DISCUSSION

This quantitative research has confirmed our earlier qualitative market research findings that work-life balance and getting time off the farm is the number one issue. However there was 20 to 30% interest in all of the other issues asked about.

There was a good level of interest in being involved in the programme from those who participated in the survey. This level of interest won't extend however to farmers in general, as the participants were those who chose to provide input into the programme and will therefore be more interested than the typical farmer. It is difficult to try and estimate likely farmer interest based on this research; it should be noted that this was not the purpose of this research.

This research has confirmed that discussion groups are a key vehicle for introducing Farmstrong to rural communities. However, it has also identified that only 16% attend discussion groups regularly. These people will be among the early adopters and should be encouraged to share their knowledge about Farmstrong within their wider community.

Field days have also been confirmed as important vehicles for introducing Farmstrong, which reinforces the importance of the Farmstrong links with Beef & Lamb and Dairy NZ.

2 INTRODUCTION

An on-line survey was undertaken with persons engaged in farming, to obtain information to assist with the development and implementation of Farmstrong, the Farmer Wellbeing Project. It was considered important for the programme to utilize and build on existing farmer knowledge and experience.

The objectives were:

1. To consult with farmers and receive verbatim comments relating to their current wellbeing actions, which can be used in programme material for the benefit of other farmers
2. To identify level of interest in engaging with the programme, including assisting with promotion and making contributions to the programme.
3. To identify level of interest in possible topics the programme could address
4. To identify local initiatives that the programme could possibly link in with

3 RESEARCH METHOD

A random selection of 6000 FMG clients were sent an email with a link to an on-line survey. The email introduced the programme, explained the desire to build on the knowledge and experience of farmers, and invited them to click on the URL if they were interested in sharing their ideas.

They were also told that they could forward the email to anyone else working in farming who they thought might be interested. The survey was also mentioned in press releases about the FMG and MHF partnership.

The invitations were issued between 9 and 11 December, 2014, and the survey closed off on 7 January, 2015. No reminder email was sent, to avoid FMG clients feeling at all pressured by the process. The email and introduction to the survey advised participants that they could choose to have their name entered in two prize draws, each for \$250, to be donated to the good cause of their choice.

Of those sent invitations, 205 completed the survey and another 110 did part of it. Of those who accessed it via other sources, 21 completed and another 60 completed some of the questions. All of the completed and partially completed surveys were combined for the analyses.

The number of valid responses varied for different questions, with 251 being the highest number for the key questions. This included 224 from the 6000 who were sent email invitations (a 4.2% response rate). Given the time of year and the fact that detailed responses were required to several open-ended questions, this was about the level of response expected.

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The following tables show the types of persons who responded to the survey, with comparisons where possible with FMG, Research First, and Statistics New Zealand (SNZ) data. The Research First data, supplied by FMG, is from a national random survey of 1200 farmers carried out in September 2014.

Note that for Type of Farm, in the current survey persons could be in more than one category (which is why the totals add to more than 100%), but this was not the case with the comparable FMG and SNZ data.

Similar proportions for dairy and beef/sheep were evident in both the current survey and the FMG client data base. However, beef/sheep had a lower representation in the SNZ data. The SNZ data came from analyses of Census data commissioned by Farmstrong. It was based on all persons living in rural areas whose occupation was classified as farmers or farm managers. This analysis did not get the horticulture/viticulture percentages separately identified, so this is included in the 'Other' category.

	Total 303	FMG clients 20,357	SNZ 2013 Census 48,021
TYPE OF FARM	%	%	%
Dairy	46	41	42
Beef/sheep	50	38	27
Horticulture/Viticulture	9	7	NR
Other	17	15	31

The current survey had a higher representation of non-owners than did the Research First survey.

	Total 296	Research First 1200
ROLE ON FARM	%	%
Owner/part owner	81	92
Family member of owners	4	NM
Manager	1	4
Share milker/share farmer	8	3
Contract milker/contract worker/farm worker	2	NM
Other farm employee	2	1

NM=Not measured

In the following table there were some slightly different categories for the FMG client data and these are shown in brackets. The participants in the current survey generally showed a reasonable match with the FMG clients and Census. The biggest differences were an over-representation of Canterbury/ Mid-South Canterbury (19% vs 14% for FMG clients and 15% for the Census) and an under-representation of Taranaki farmers (5% vs 9% and 8%). Both the participants (16%) and the FMG clients (17%) were under-represented in the Waikato, in comparison with the Census data (21%).

REGION	Total	FMG rural clients	SNZ 2013 Census
	292	18,187	48,021
	%	%	%
Northland/ Auckland	7	10	10
Waikato/ Counties/ King Country (Waikato region for FMG)	16	17	21
Bay of Plenty	9	7	6
Poverty Bay/ East Coast (Gisborne region)	1	1	2
Hawkes Bay	6	4	4
Taranaki	5	9	8
Manawatu/ Wanganui/ Horowhenua (Manawatu-Wanganui region)	8	10	9
Wairarapa/ Wellington/ Kapiti (Wellington region)	4	3	3
West Coast	2	1	2
Tasman/ Marlborough (Nelson/Tasman/Marlborough)	5	5	4
Canterbury/ Mid-South Canterbury	19	14	15
Otago	9	8	7
Southland	10	11	9

The current survey had almost two thirds male representation (64%), which was a little higher than the 59% in the Research First survey and lower than the 71% in the Census.

GENDER	Total	Research First	SNZ 2013 Census
	270	1200	48,021
	%	%	%
Male	64	59	71
Female	36	41	29

The Census data was based on rural persons classified as farmers or farm managers aged 15 years and over. It is not surprising that the participants, drawn mainly from FMG clients, had an older profile. The Research First survey used different age groupings. They had 59% aged 55 years and over, compared with 65% aged 50 years and over in the current survey, which was quite similar.

AGE	Total	SNZ 2013 Census
	296 %	48,021 %
Under 30	3	14
30 - 39	11	17
40 - 49	21	22
50 - 59	32	24
60 - 69	24	16
70 years and over	9	7

No comparable data on membership of farm discussion groups was available from any other source. The 37% who attended farm discussion groups included 16% who attended regularly.

MEMBERSHIP OF FARM DISCUSSION GROUP	Total
	292 %
Attend regularly	16
Attend occasionally	21
Do not attend	62

4 MAIN FINDINGS

TOPICS INTERESTED IN

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

The most mentioned topic farmers would like to know more about was 'balancing work and family and getting time off the farm' (47%). There were another five items which got mentioned by between 30% and 35% of the farmers, while all the rest were between 22% and 29%.

Dairy farmers were more likely than others to be interested in how to get the best out of employees (44% vs 35% Total). None of the other differences shown for the sub-groups in the table were statistically significant.

TOPICS INTERESTED IN	Total	Male	Female	Dairy	Beef/ Sheep
	251 %	156 %	80 %	114 %	134 %
Balancing work and family and getting time off the farm	47	44	55	51	47
How to manage tiredness and fatigue	35	37	28	35	34
How to get the best out of employees	34	35	33	44†	28
Understanding legislation relating to farming	33	34	34	32	36
How to manage stress	31	32	30	31	31
How to use computers, tablets/smart phones	30	31	25	25	34
Techniques to stop worrying about work all the time	29	28	33	35	28
Succession planning	27	29	24	25	31
Financial planning	25	24	29	25	26
Time management/how to use time most efficiently	24	23	29	28	22
How to resolve conflict	24	26	24	26	25
How to plan for retirement	23	26	18	17	24
Techniques for solving problems	23	21	26	23	22
Business planning	22	24	21	20	29†

† Denotes a significantly higher level than the Total

INTEREST IN BEING INVOLVED WITH THE PROGRAMME

Q. As we develop the programme for Farmers, would you be interested in being involved in the programme in any of the ways listed below?

The participants were shown the list below and asked to indicate their interest in being involved in the programme as it is being developed. All but 12% expressed interest in being involved in some way. As would be expected, the highest level was for receiving information (69%). There was a relatively high 36% who were interested in providing input into programme development. A third was interested in participating in programme initiatives and almost a quarter (23%) in assisting with promotion. Ten percent felt they had services which they could provide.

Males were more likely than females to say they were not interested in the programme (15% vs 4%). Females were more likely to say they had services they could provide (16% vs 6% for males). Dairy farmers were more likely to be interested in providing input into programme development (43% vs 36% for Total).

	Total	Male	Female	Dairy	Beef/ Sheep
INTEREST IN BEING INVOLVED	221 %	138 %	69 %	97 %	120 %
I would be interested in receiving information about the programme	69	72	72	67	71
I would be interested in helping provide input into the development of the programme	36	32	45	43†	35
I would be interested in participating in initiatives provided by the programme	33	33	36	35	36
I would be interested in promoting the programme	23	22	26	25	26
I have services I could provide to the programme	10	6	16†	9	9
I would not be interested in the programme	12	15†	4	12	12

† Denotes a significantly higher level

METHODS TO HELP AVOID OR DEAL MORE EASILY WITH STRESSES

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

The following table is based on verbatim responses that participants provided. These have been grouped into categories. Following the table are examples of specific responses.

There were 236 responses to this question. The table shows numbers of responses rather than percentages, as many responses were only mentioned by one or two people.

The responses were dominated by two categories: time away from farming and talking to others. Exercise and sleep were the next most frequently mentioned.

METHOD	Total 236 (n=)
Time away from farming	
Getting off the farm/ break from farm (short or longer) / holidays	57
Have regular interest outside farm	11
Do other interesting things (not necessarily off farm) - hobbies	9
Time off/ me time/ time out	6
Balance work and pleasure – limit hours work each day	4
Try not to work at weekends	2
Switch off farming in evening	2
Recognise when close to breaking and get off the farm	1
Setting family holiday at end of current holiday	1
Talking to others	
Talking to wife/partner, friends, other farmers	73
Talking to others with similar issues	5
Discussion groups/ extension days	3
Get advice	3
Getting involved in community (sports clubs, Federated Famers, other clubs)	2
Exercise and sleep	
Fitness/ exercise	16
Getting enough sleep/ well rested/ rest during day if needed	12
Planning	
Prioritising	8
Plan well in advance	3
Always have a back-up plan/ make plans for eventualities (e.g. droughts)	2
Make plan to get out of trouble	2
Be organised and ready for things	2
Succession planning	2
Concentrate on governance and planning – let others do the hard physical work	1
Setting goals	1

METHOD	Total 236 (n=)
Plan for future/ long term approach	1
Strategies for dealing with difficult situations	
Don't stress over what can't control	6
Do something you enjoy/ find positive things	5
Positive attitude/ think positive things/ appreciate the good times	3
Need to deal with issues – don't put aside	3
Don't stress about the small stuff	3
Take one day at a time/ doing one job at a time	3
Keeping busy	2
Looking at wider context (off farm involvement helps)/ putting on-farm events into perspective	2
Get on with it	2
Realise events come and go and most events are not all bad	1
Enjoy when can and suck it up when can't	1
Learning to say 'No'	1
Letting go of anger	1
Step away and view the problem	1
Being able to laugh about it	1
Acceptance that dealing with tough problems is part of the job	1
Try not to let things get to you too much	1
Get control back - take actions to address problem	1
Think of those in worse situations	1
What will be will be	1
Break task into manageable units	1
Prioritise work	1
Making a list and getting some ticked off (before prioritise)	1
Just get the job done the best you can on the day	1
Keep things in perspective – the sun always comes up tomorrow	1
Don't react straight away	1
Understand problems are part of business	1
Professional advice/support	
Use good farm consultant/advisors	5
Good support team (e.g. advisor, accountant, business mentoring)	4
Staff	
Good staff/team	5
Employ extra staff/ enough staff	2
Keep in touch with staff	1
Monitor work-life balance of staff	1
Don't employ permanent staff	1
Use casual staff strategically	1
Personal development/ therapy	
Self-management/development courses & reading/ mindfulness course	3
Counselling	2
Relaxation exercises	1
Massage therapy	1
Nutrition	
Good eating/ nutrition	2

METHOD	Total 236 (n=)
Take nutritional products/ vitamins if run down	2
Minimal alcohol during busy period/ stay off alcohol	2
Always have breakfast on time	1
Financial management	
Have source of income off the farm/ part-time work off farm	3
Budgeting	2
Work closely with bank and accountant – keep everyone informed early	2
Good financial management	1
Being open with finances with family team	1
Bring in equity finance	1
Having money in reserve for all situations – don't over commit	1
Staying out of debt	1
Other responses	
Have a beer/ odd drink or two	5
Religion/ church/ prayer	2
Delegate	2
Make time for office work – financial, compliance	1
Plan and act early before situation becomes critical	1
Knowing my own limits	1
Time management	1
All season once a day milking	1
Medical checks	1
Don't smoke	1
Keep in touch with what is going on	1
Keep learning	1
Have farm size can manage	1
Being able to draw on knowledge of farming family members	1
Tell other farmers about bad and supportive bankers	1
Go and help someone else	1
Having a good laugh	1
Money is not the most important thing	1
Sell up	1
Under-produce – keep debt and inputs down	1
Don't listen to townie 'experts'	1
Reading	1
Business partner, so each can have breaks	1
Building projects	1
Take my time while I work	1
Slow down	1
Good farming records of past farming practices	1
Go for swim	1
On-line research	1
Try not to get behind	1
Hot bath	1
Encouraging young students by having on farm	1

Examples of methods found useful

Time away from farming

Make time to get off farm, even to go to town for lunch, seems to help clear the mind and it is easier to plan ahead (Male beef/sheep farm owner, 60-69 years, Canterbury)

Have a regular outing where all thoughts about farming and business can be forgotten about for a short time (Male sheep farm owner, 40-49, Canterbury)

When we set our farm ownership goal 5 years ago we decided we wanted to enjoy life on the way and enjoy our children while they still wanted to hang out with us. We added a couple of years to the time it would take us to get there but it has given us more "me" money and more time to appreciate the things that really matter instead of just being focused on the farm and farming all the time (Female share milker, 30-39, Southland)

Switch off farming in the evening. Keep the day jobs for the day (Male beef/sheep farm owner, 60-69, Manawatu/Wanganui/Horowhenua)

On the last day of your holiday plan and book your next break off farm (Male beef/sheep owner, 40-49, Hawkes Bay)

Take time for oneself away from the day to day responsibilities (Male dairy farm owner, 70 years and over, Waikato/Counties)

Recognise when I am getting stressed and close to breaking, get off farm (Male dairy farm owner, 50-59, Waikato/Counties)

Talking to others

Ensure you regularly talk through concerns or things on your mind with your wife/partner/friend etc. A fresh perspective can work miracles (Male sheep/grazing farm owner, under 30, Canterbury)

Go and help someone else Very refreshing to find that most people worry about the same things (Male beef/sheep owner, 60-69, Canterbury)

Talking to others to know you aren't alone (Female beef/sheep owner, 40-49, Bay of Plenty)

Being as involved in the local farming community as possible as we are mostly in the same boat. And sharing my farming problems with my wife as we work closely together (Male dairy farm owner, 30-39, Hawkes Bay)

Talk about what's happening to different people and ask for help if needed (Male dairy farm owner, 30-39, Tasman/Marlborough)

Day to day stresses, I try to switch off work after the day or have a yarn with work mates about it (Male dairy/beef/sheep farm manager, under 30, West Coast)

Working closely with my husband at times of high pressure such as drought and calving. Speaking to friends and encouraging them to maintain contact with my husband (Female dairy farm owner, 40-49, Waikato/Counties)

Planning

Prioritising work load and finding out what is really important to do (Male share milker, 30-39, Northland/Auckland)

Beginning to plan for the future and the impact on the business and us as a family has been great. I think succession planning is very important for farmers (Female, grazing, family member of owner, 30-39, Poverty Bay/ East Coast)

Before starting the day prioritise the necessary acts of the day and do it, ie shift animals to new pasture. Don't add extra stuff in to fill the day, someone or something will fill it and you will have an uncluttered brain to deal with it. If the day goes well don't do more, finish earlier [your family, brain and body will enjoy the rest] (Female beef farm owner, 60-69, Otago)

You should plan well in advance, not leave things to become a problem and source of stress (Male dairy farm owner, 50-59, Northland/Auckland)

Make a plan to get out of trouble and get regular support to challenge you to stick to it (Female dairy farm owner, 50-59, Waikato/Counties)

Always had a back-up plan for when things go belly up (Male owner, grazing, 60-69, Northland/Auckland)

Investing into succession planning of key roles; this enables time off and support for inevitable family or health issues that arise (Male owner, grazing, 40-49, King Country)

Exercise and sleep

Take time out. Maybe a bike ride...exercise helps. If needed take a sleep during the day (Male 'other' farm type owner, 60-69, Otago)

I walk to work and home at end of day. Leave quad bike at farm shed instead of at home. Takes about 10 minutes (Male beef/sheep/deer farmer, 40-49, Manawatu/Wanganui/Horowhenua)

Exercise helps release stress. Getting angry then doing something physical (Male contract milker/dairy farm worker, 30-39, Northland/Auckland)

Staff

Employing a good team of people - I believe good staff help to minimise stress (Female, grazing, family member of owners, 30-39, Poverty Bay/East Coast)

Monitoring work life balance of managers and encouraging them to take weekends and leave (Male, grazing, owner, 40-49, King Country)

Having a good team of staff where we share the road together (Male share milker, 30-39, West Coast)

Keep in contact with employee. We like email communication with them if we can't meet in person (Male dairy farm owner, 40-49, Waikato/Counties)

Strategies for dealing with difficult situations

Don't stress about small stuff. Don't dwell on what ifs. Make decisions and move on (Female beef/sheep farm owner, 50-59, Poverty Bay/East Coast)

When we are really short of feed the best thing you can do is take your men for a drive and look at other farmers and you realise you are not the only one (Female, beef/sheep family member of owners, 50-59, Southland)

Concentrate on things where you can make a difference and give little time and thought to things outside of your control e.g. payout (Male dairy farm owner, 60-69, Otago)

You must discipline yourself to DEAL with issues, don't put them aside, they will not go away. Once issues are dealt with harmful stress is largely eliminated (Male sheep farm owner, 60-69, West Coast)

When the 'things needing attention' - make a list - ideally physical rather than in the head and start ticking them off as you deal with them. Once you get this going you can start prioritizing, but the most important thing is to start with action and getting some ticked off (Male beef/sheep farm owner, 70 years and over, Waikato/Counties)

Looking at the wider context of your problem. Off farm involvement helps broaden the issues and to put them in perspective (Male beef/sheep farm owner, 40-49, Southland)

Get control back eg buy feed, get contractor (Male mixed stock farm owner, 50-59, Southland)

Doing a farming job that you love. We run the replacements on our property and when it gets to the stage where nothing is going right I'll go to the yearlings just to sit in the paddock. They run over and fuss over me and make funny noises. It's the only thing some days that makes me still love my job. Basically just finding something that takes it all away that fills the soul with relief or joy (Female contract milker/ farm worker, under 30, Waikato/Counties)

Life experience, learned not to sweat over the little things, take a deep breath to two and work out what is a WOFT and what is not a WOFT. (Waste of f...ing time) (Beef/sheep farm owner, 50-59, Manawatu/Wanganui/Horowhenua)

Dealing with one thing at a time and parking other issues (Female dairy farm owner, 30-39, Waikato/ Counties)

Does it matter in 6 months' time? NO? Don't stress. YES? Deal with it (Female, grazing, owner, 50-59, King Country)

I know doing what relaxes me is tending to trees on the farm. This temporarily takes my mind off the stressful stuff (Female dairy farm owner, 60-69, King Country)

Trying to find some positive things, even small things (Female dairy farm owner, 50-59, Waikato/Counties)

Enjoy life when you can and suck it up when you can't (Male dairy farm manager, 40-49, King Country)

Financial management

I find good financial management helpful. Accurate budgeting and updating of cash flows so you know where you are going (Female beef/sheep farm owner, 30-39, Otago)

Have money in reserve for all situations, don't over-commit, have outside sources of income, spread your risk, work with bank, accountant and lawyer, keep everyone totally informed early (Dairy farm owner, 60-69, Hawkes Bay)

Other responses

Knowing my own limits, recognising when I need time out (Female dairy/beef farm owner, 50-59, Otago)

Have a good business partner, we give each other breaks as required, and work together very effectively on all aspects of operation, lots of discussion (Female beef farm owner, 40-49, Waikato/Counties)

The use of a good farm consultant can help a lot in these cases (Male dairy farm owner, 50-59, Canterbury)

Building resilience into my character on purpose by learning to understand myself better & practicing skills as I learn them. We diary time specifically to learn more skills - one course or seminar or book... (Female mixed cattle farm owner, 40-49, Wellington/Wairarapa/Kapiti)

Delegating more responsibility and letting youthful enthusiasm take on the day to day activities on the farm. This has freed me up to focus on other things such as drainage, fert policies and genetics etc (Male beef/sheep owner, 50-59, Manawatu/Wanganui/ Horowhenua)

Have a suitable farm size that is easy to manage, and gives plenty of free time (Male owner, equine, 50-59, Hawkes Bay)

IDEAS FOR GETTING DECENT BREAK FROM FARM

Q. From our research we have found that one of the issues farmers appear to find particularly challenging is getting a decent break away from the farm on a sufficiently regular basis. It would be helpful to learn how farmers have addressed this challenge, so that these ideas can be shared with other farmers. Please list any suggestions you have for the following two scenarios:

- a. Farmer employing no permanent staff and struggling financially*
- b. Farmer employing permanent staff but who is still heavily involved on the farm (somewhat financially secure)*

The table below shows the number of responses provided for the two scenarios. Examples of specific comments follow the table.

For the first scenario, where the farmer was struggling financially and had no staff, the most frequently mentioned suggestions related to: getting help from neighbours,

family or friends; finding cheap holiday options; going during less busy times of the year; and employing casual labour.

With the second scenario, the dominant response related to trusting staff. This could include the need to train staff up if they couldn't currently be trusted to run the farm in the owner's absence.

Other suggestions related to: supporting/monitoring staff, changing way of thinking, structures to make holidays/time off happen, setting up to make the break easier/work better, and changing the form of farming. A few also suggested ideas that related to having a network for information exchange/ farmer assistance, with things like finding casual labour or farm sitters, or exchanging holiday homes.

IDEAS FOR GETTING BREAK FROM FARM						No staff/ struggling 176 (n=	Have staff/ somewhat secure 166 (n=
Getting help from neighbours, family, friends							
Do swaps with neighbours/another farmer						36	2
Help from neighbour						25	0
Help from family						30	0
Help from friends						23	0
Town friends/family/ someone wanting farming experience						5	0
Owner manage the farm						0	1
Pay your children to help						1	0
Someone wanting work experience						1	0
Farm swap						1	0
If have spare house rent out, exchange rent for milking						1	0
Cost and timing							
Find cheap holiday options						20	2
Go during less busy time of year						13	5
Choose time to go to minimise disasters						0	1
Swap/trade something with farmers who own batches						0	1
Casual labour							
Use (reliable) casual labour/ relief milkers						14	15
Retired farmers						13	1
Farm sitters						3	1
'Young'/ students						5	1
Use WWOOFers						2	0
Hire backpackers						1	0
Job share short-term worker with neighbour						1	1
Get staff with partners keen for relief work						0	1
Relief farm manager						0	1
Hand over to staff							
Trust your staff/ up skill if you can't						0	50
Learn to delegate						0	14
Good staff thrive on responsibility/ give them a chance to prove themselves/ step up						0	7

IDEAS FOR GETTING BREAK FROM FARM		No staff/ struggling 176 (n=	Have staff/ somewhat secure 166 (n=
Need to have trustworthy staff		2	3
Might be surprised how staff step up to responsibility/ how well they do		0	4
Offer incentive so do best job		0	3
Get the most capable doing the most important work		0	3
Try to find good staff		0	2
Understand not likely to be up to your standard		0	2
Engage staff in management decisions so better able to handle business when you are off farm		0	1
Value your staff		0	1
Learn to empower staff – take pride in developing them		0	1
May well be a positive experience for staff		0	1
Increase farm worker to manager role		0	1
Train a supervisor		0	1
Provide remuneration for extra responsibility		0	1
Supporting/monitoring staff			
Have neighbour/friend check on staff		0	4
Keep in touch (phone, email, Skype)		0	3
Have someone staff can go to if problem			2
Allow staff to ring you or someone else with questions		0	2
Contact details for emergencies only		0	2
Leave contact details		0	1
Have open air ticket so can get home if emergency		0	1
Need someone staff respect		0	1
Allow permanent staff to get help while you are away		0	1
Provide extra assistance for permanent staff		0	1
Changing way of thinking			
Change thinking patterns/attitudes about taking time off		2	2
Realise that no one is indispensable		0	4
Get a mentor – work out your value to the business		1	1
Get advice on how to improve profitability		2	0
Consider that breaks may make farm more productive		1	0
Make farm labour a high financial priority		1	0
Don't be afraid to ask		1	0
Structures to make holiday/time off happen			
Plan in advance/ book it early/ ring fence time off – work around booking		4	3
Go overseas		1	2
Put money aside regularly for holiday/ put aside cattle for holiday fund		2	0
Wife to organise holidays		0	2
Set one day aside every two weeks		1	0
Belong to a holiday club		1	0
Get involved in activities that take you off the farm		0	1
Have wife who enforces the break		1	0

IDEAS FOR GETTING BREAK FROM FARM		No staff/ struggling 176 (n=	Have staff/ somewhat secure 166 (n=
Get support to stick to plans for time off		0	1
Put small amount of money aside for occasional relief milker		0	1
Setting up to make break easier/ work better			
Have procedures and plans in place for staff/ good instructions		0	8
Have written task sheet		0	4
Simplify the farm operation		1	1
Do as much as can before going		1	1
Do practice run with staff and have holiday at home		0	1
Talk with all external people involved with farm		1	0
Simplify any water issues		1	0
Slowly build up systems (to allow for taking more time off)		1	0
Set up farm for easy care at certain times of year		1	0
Open the gates		1	0
Milk once a day		1	0
Advise staff early		0	1
Structure work roster well ahead, so people can plan		0	1
Set up remote management system		0	1
Employ additional staff to get ahead prior to a break		0	1
Work it out together with staff		0	1
Discuss with staff well in advance so they get the feel for additional duties		0	1
Change form of farming			
Sell the farm/ get out of farming		5	0
Corporatise		1	0
Get bigger farm where can employ staff and pay for relief milker		1	0
Network for information exchange/ farmer assistance			
Need for farm sitting service		1	1
Need confidential data base of casual workers		2	0
Set up hub where farmers can call for help and get matched up to someone		1	0
Set up network so farmers share other farmers' holiday homes and arrange farm sitting		1	0
Other			
Just do it/ go		0	4
Husband and wife have turns to have holiday/ partner milks/ teach wife to milk		4	0
Start by just going for short period (1-2 days)		2	2
Don't take phone on holiday/ turn phone off		0	3
Get involved with training schemes – free labour		1	1
Employ an overseer/ get outside management		1	1
Farmers reluctant to offer help as don't know what to offer in return		2	0
Talk about issues to Rural Support Trust/ they may be able to organise farm minder		2	0
Employ someone to learn his role		0	1
Get input from farm advisors		0	1
Accept invitations to events		0	1

IDEAS FOR GETTING BREAK FROM FARM	No staff/ struggling 176 (n=	Have staff/ somewhat secure 166 (n=
Alternate days off with staff	0	1
Slow down, be calm	0	1
Farm may look better when return	1	0
Get employer to step in	1	0
Learn to trust people	1	0
Go somewhere where not much driving	1	0
Go somewhere where don't know anybody	1	0
Talk to WINZ to get subsidy for relief milking		0
Holiday close, so can pop back and check	1	0
Get campervan and share with employees	0	1
Take small amounts of time off	0	1
Financially assist staff's time off occasionally	0	1
Get better organised – connect with people in similar situations	0	1
What is point of staff if you don't take days off	0	1
Don't worry about how much it costs	0	1
Address issues in marriage	0	1
Good roster system, so staff do work while boss has break	0	1

Examples of ideas for getting decent break from farm

Getting help from neighbours, family, friends

Talk to neighbours and family members who know the farm and get them to take over while you are away. Trust needs to be learnt for some farmers as it doesn't come naturally (Male beef/sheep farm owner, 40-49, West Coast)

Build relationships with neighbours so you can help them if they need time off and vice versa (Male beef/grazing farm owner, 50-59, Manawatu/Wanganui/Horowhenua)

Get the neighbour to feed the dogs, even 24 hours away locally feels like a mini break to me. It doesn't have to be expensive (Beef/sheep farm owner, 50-59, Wellington/ Wairarapa/Kapiti)

Swap with neighbour - we milk cows for someone and then they look after ours (Female mixed cattle farm owner, 50-59, Manawatu/Wanganui/Horowhenua)

Back in the old days in small country communities the neighbours looked after one another. Perhaps neighbours on the same road need to form a group when they each support the other to have time away (Female, beef farm owner, 50-59, Northland/Auckland)

Labour should not be the first thing cut from the budget if finances are tight. Talk with farming colleagues if you are struggling to get away, usually there is someone who can help you for a day or two (Male share milker, 30-39, Waikato/Counties)

Ask for help from a good neighbour. Let someone know that cares about you how you are struggling. We are on this scenario and though it only happens on the worst occasions family does come in (with no experience) and help out, so does a good employer (Female contract milker/ dairy farm worker, under 30, Waikato/Counties)

Don't be afraid to ask! Family and friends are usually only too happy to help out. You may not get whole days off farm - but maybe a series of part days where unskilled people can fill in to help (Female dairy farm owner, 40-49, West Coast)

Doing an exchange with a neighbour. Get them to look after your farm for a week and you look after theirs in return (Male share milker, under 30, Otago)

Casual labour

Lincoln university agriculture students look for 12 week placements over the summer period. This is a good option as it allows permanent staff time off in the summer (Female contract milker/ dairy farm worker, under 30, Southland)

There are often casual workers or retired farmers in the area who are capable of handling the farm for a couple of weeks during a quieter period of the year. You have to take the plunge for the first time but in my experience the chances are that you'll come back and the farm is looking better than ever! (Male beef/sheep farm owner, 70 years or over, Waikato/Counties)

Advertise for retired farmers to come and farm sit. Lots of 60 plus cockies out there with bugger all to do (Male beef/sheep farm owner, 30-39, Bay of Plenty)

Employ additional staff to get ahead prior to a break or employ relief staff during your absence (Male 'other' farm type owner, 60-69, Otago)

Job share a short term worker with a neighbour (Female dairy/beef/sheep owner, 40-49, Otago)

Cost and timing

Take a break between calving and mating then another break in autumn. Even just a day off the farm can change attitudes. Rent a beach house for a week - it's cheaper than going overseas and more relaxing (Female dairy/beef farm owner, 50-59, King Country)

Go in the winter. Talk to other farmers in the area and find someone in a similar situation. Over winter you should be able to run both farms easily. So farmer one can go away for a week while farmer two looks after both farms and then switch. Staying with family/friends is a good cheap trip. And remember, if you were at home you would be eating, using power etc so that is money you can still spend on holiday. And set up an automatic payment each month and put even \$5 per week into a savings account for holidays (Female share milker, 30-39, Southland)

Accepting offers of accommodation from friends around the country or house swapping cottage accommodation to minimise holiday costs. Husband and wife taking turns to have a holiday while the other remains at home. Taking holidays in the local area rather than further afield to minimise costs (Female beef/sheep owner, 40-49, Canterbury)

Change way of thinking

There needs to be a change of attitude that stops a farmer from thinking only he/she can run the farm as is needed. Seeking some good labour to fill the gaps is worth every cent spent. This should be a high financial priority. A farmer's health is pivotal to the ongoing success of the farm, not something that should be under-estimated, so money must be available (Male dairy farm owner, 50-59, Hawkes Bay)

Learn delegation skills. Learn that to drive your business forward requires you to take time out to dream, imagine, and have a "helicopter" view of your business at times (Male owner, grazing, 40-49, King Country)

Value time out and cost it in the budget (requires a change in thinking!) (Female owner, grazing, 50-69, King Country)

Contemplate that holiday does not need to be costly and a break may make work more productive (Male beef/sheep/deer owner, 50-59, Poverty Bay/East Coast)

Fact is you need to get off no matter what financial circumstance is. In past when my husband and I were together we would have a break separately, not ideal but at least we both got a break or got a milker in, as tho you think "you cannot afford" you can "not afford not too" (Female dairy/beef farm owner, 50-59, Otago)

Structures to make holiday/ time off happen

Plan early so labour can be arranged. Don't wait until you need the break (Male dairy farm owner, 60-69, Hawkes Bay)

Ring fence time off and share this with someone who will help him to stick to it (Female dairy farm owner, 50-59, Waikato/Counties)

My wife & I belong to a holiday club; this makes us have to take a holiday for up to 3 weeks every year. (Male dairy farm owner, 50-59, Manawatu/Wanganui/ Horowhenua)

Hand over to staff (if have staff)

Learn to delegate, world won't end just because everything isn't done your way (Male dairy farm owner, 50-59, Northland)

It is hard but give the employee the chance to run it on his own you will be surprised at how they will accept the challenge (Male beef/sheep farm owner, 60-69, West Coast)

Learn to empower your staff to take over and trust them. Take pride in developing their ability to manage when not there. The chance can be rewarding if time preparing them is well done (Male dairy farm owner, 70 years and over, Waikato/ Counties)

Have trust in your staff. It won't always go the way you want but it doesn't anyway (Male sheep/beef farm owner, 50-59, Otago)

Having good systems around staff training and support to ensure you feel comfortable when going away that they have the task in hand. Providing good work conditions for the right people - so that you are attracting reliable employees for a long period of time (Female beef/sheep owner, 30-39, Otago)

Book a flight as the priority, make staff aware they will have to cover well before, and let them take control. Don't be too critical when you get back. The cost of their mistakes is small compared to your health (Male beef/grazing farm owner, 60-69, King Country)

Plan well in advance and give the staff member a chance to step up and prove themselves while you are away. Even perhaps offer an incentive so they do their best job. Have a neighbour or someone you trust check in while you are away (Male share milker, under 30, Otago)

Lots of procedures and plans in place for staff. Have a neighbour or friend check on them (Female share milker, 30-39, Wellington/Wairarapa/Kapiti)

Setting up to make break easier/ work better

Train staff up to be able to run the place while you're gone. Once you think they are trained do a practice run (holiday at home), so if anything goes wrong or there are questions you are there to fix/answer. And the week before you go away get as much of the stuff done as you can in advance so that staff only have to get the basics done while you are away. Always make sure staff feel confident that they can ring you (or someone else you have arranged) if they are unsure of something while you are away. There are no stupid questions! (Female share milker, 30-39, Southland)

Talk to the staff and work it out together, don't just turn up and tell them...After all they are humans as well (Male share milker, 50-59, Waikato/Counties)

Just do it, but leave farm well set up so people cannot fail. Ask a neighbour or friend to back staff up. I am doing this next week, I am leaving a daily check list (tick list format)so all the things that I do on auto pilot are recorded to be done, (my list has a colour coded answer system... Green good, orange monitor, red action needed immediately). Leave list of suppliers and breakdown contacts, contact main suppliers so they are aware you are away and staff may want supplies, ensure adequate supplies of all regularly use items ie fuel, dairy shed supplies, animal health remedies. Leave contact address in case emergency (Female dairy/beef farm owner, 50-59, Otago)

Network for information exchange/ farmer assistance

Perhaps a hub could be set up where farmers can call when they need help and they are matched up with someone who is in the position to help (Female, grazing, family member of owner, 30-39, Poverty Bay/East Coast)

A farmer network could be set up so farmers can use other farmers' holiday homes for a break away. The network could also arrange "farm sitting" services using recently retired farmers (Male sheep farm owner, 50-59, Southland)

Other

Look into helping with training schemes, free labour in return for trainees getting work experience and practical hand on roles (Female dairy/beef owner, 30-39, Waikato)

Just take a day off and fix the cock-ups the next day (Male share milker, 30-39, Hawkes Bay)

Very hard, start by just going for a day, better than not going at all (Male beef/sheep farm owner, 60-69, West Coast)

Short breaks from the farm

Weekly half day breaks would, long term, have more benefit than a couple of weeks off once a year. Those breaks could be social, sporting or other activities unrelated to farming. Working men's clubs usually have travel sections offering cheap travel (Male beef farm owner, 70 years and over, West Coast)

A break away may not be possible, but becoming part of the wider community so that he is taken away from the routine more often and focus on something else for a time, so they learn to grow more time for them . Small steps (Male beef farm owner, 70 years and over, West Coast)

If only option is to work some short days then do it. Say no work between milkings or after stock work Wednesdays and Fridays. Turn phone off, rely on message systems, check at a set time (Male dairy/grazing farm owner, 50-59, King Country)

Just a few hours off farm can work wonders. A drive up into the hills, a stop to enjoy the view and a glass of wine works for us.

The break is often in our thinking. Training our minds to be friendly with us! Organizing children away for a weekend & only doing basics then 'fun' simple activities (including a sleep) (Female mixed cattle farm owner, 40-49, Wellington/Wairarapa/Kapiti)