



*Farmstrong Ambassador Sam Whitelock: "One of the ways I like to unwind is to connect with nature and go hunting."*

Stopping to appreciate the small things in life, really helps you handle big stuff. That's one of the messages coming through loud and clear from farmers involved in rural wellbeing initiative Farmstrong, says project leader Gerard Vaughan.

Over the last two years Vaughan and video maker Nigel Beckford have been busy interviewing Kiwi farmers about what they do to keep well and avoid burn out.

They've been sharing the best tips and advice in short video clips on the Farmstrong website – [www.farmstrong.co.nz](http://www.farmstrong.co.nz). The clips have proved a hit with farmers racking up nearly 300,000 views via social media and YouTube since Farmstrong launched in June 2015. The site attracts on average more than 1,000 new visitors each week.

Taking a few minutes each day to appreciate their land and surroundings was right up there among the top tips for many farmers.

"It is amazing how many farmers mentioned during our interviews that a big part of their wellbeing was taking the time each day to stop and appreciate they do have the 'best office in the world'," notes Vaughan.

King Country sheep and beef farmer Wendy Coup is one of them. She says enjoying the small stuff was a crucial part of her recovery from burn out five years ago.





*The Farmstrong video crew Mike Nelson, Nigel Beckford and Gerard Vaughan have been interviewing farmers about what they do keep well and avoid burn out.*

"When you're farming it's easy to get bogged down in just doing the next task. That's why I make a point of jotting down three good moments I've had every day in my journal. It could be something as simple as stopping the bike and sharing a moment with my dogs. Journalling helps you notice that we work in an amazing environment and that there is a lot of joy in farming life."

Vaughan said he remembered another farmer told him that he would stop and listen to the sound of a bellbird when out doing fences. Simply doing that helped him appreciate life more and manage the stress of getting through the large list of things he had to do that day.

Videomaker and self-confessed 'townie' Beckford has been blown away by the amazing natural environment farmers work in. "As a workplace it would be the envy of most New Zealanders. I guess our work shows that when people get busy, it's easy to lose sight of the big picture. You have to make a conscious effort to stop and smell the roses."

When Farmstrong went down to the Chatham Islands, sheep and beef farmer Tony Anderson said that even though it can be a harsh environment,

he had learnt to take notice and enjoy the beauty and what was happening around him. "Enjoy the tranquility. If you stop talking for a moment there's no human noise."

Finding time each day to appreciate the small stuff means we are better placed to handle life's ups and downs, says Vaughan who has designed and delivered health and wellbeing programmes for over twenty years.

"International research tells us getting joy out of simple, everyday things is one of the top five things – the Big 5 – that help people thrive and cope well under pressure," he says. "Keeping physically active, staying connected with mates, learning new things and helping neighbours and community are the others."

Over the past year Farmstrong ambassador and rugby icon Sam Whitelock has been busy promoting the Big 5 as part of Farmstrong.

"The Big 5 can make a huge difference to your wellbeing whether you're a farmer or a professional athlete. That's why making a habit of looking after your wellbeing is so important. I've been encouraging farmers to find out what works for them and 'lock it in'," says Whitelock.

"For me farming's a lot like rugby, its hard work both physically and mentally. If I never took time off to recover, I wouldn't be able to perform on the field – same goes for farming. One of the ways I like to unwind is to connect with nature and go hunting."

And connecting with nature is the theme for Mental Health Awareness Week running this week throughout the country from 9 – 15 Oct.

Vaughan believes that this message is a good one for Farmstrong to promote as it relates strongly to what farmers have said helps them look after themselves.

"What farmers are telling us is that taking time out can make a huge difference to how you feel. If you're working long hours, you need to take time to freshen up and get some balance back in your life."

"When we get busy, our minds get cluttered with all kinds of stuff. Paying attention to the world around you by connecting with nature even for a few moments, can help you to feel calm and relaxed." ■■

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