

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Farmstrong research hears from farming women about their wellbeing

Research by Farmstrong, looking at the wellbeing of women in farming in New Zealand, has confirmed much of what women involved with Farmstrong have been telling us. Having well researched findings to back-up what we've been told, gives us confidence on the most important areas to focus on.

Farming Women on their Wellbeing is based on over 800 farming women who completed either online surveys or in-depth face-to-face interviews. These results were supported by analysing existing research on wellbeing across rural New Zealand and internationally.

"The large response to the survey has been very pleasing as it shows there's a high level of interest by women in their personal wellbeing and that of their family, friends and community," said Farmstrong Project Manager Gerard Vaughan.

The research included a wide cross-section of women involved with farming, from those working full-time on the farm in any role, to others living on a farm, but working off-farm.

From the research, the top three things women thought were most likely to help increase their wellbeing were:

- more time off the farm
- getting more or better quality sleep
- getting more exercise.

"This report will likely confirm a lot of what women on-farm already know. But, having tangible data, facts and verbatim directly from such a large sample of New Zealand farming women, is a really solid basis to inform planning and solutions," said Mr Vaughan.

The findings also showed that women had high interest in a number of topics that Farmstrong covers, such as nutrition and thinking strategies to deal with the ups and downs of farming.

"Respondents also expressed high interest in topics we haven't covered extensively yet, including mindfulness, relaxation techniques, self-confidence and self-compassion. So there are opportunities for us to see how we can add value to what others are already doing in these areas.

"In addition, women said they'd like more stories on the practical things other women are doing to look after their wellbeing, so we'll focus on that more too, along with the link between wellbeing and injury."

"A strong message this report reaffirms for me is the incidence of farming womens' struggle to care for themselves in the midst of farming, family and community," says King Country Sheep and Beef Farmer and one of the interviewers for the research, Wendy Coup.

"At the end of the day, our wellbeing is one of the biggest challenges we face, because it comes down to how much we value and love ourselves. Guilt can play a big role here, but we need to know it's ok to give ourselves permission to have a break, find time for ourselves and recharge. It's ok to say no and put yourself first."

Farmstrong will use the findings to inform the content of our resources, from women farmer-to-farmer stories, short topic-based tips to more in-depth educational resources that we'll develop with input from topic experts.

The findings will also be shared with other rural organisations to inform our discussions with them and help identify the opportunities we can work together on.

Completing this research would not have been possible without the support Farmstrong received from Farming Mums NZ, Dairy Women's Network, Beef + Lamb New Zealand, Rural Women New Zealand, Agri-Women's Development Trust, Farming Women Tairāwhiti, NZ Young Farmers and off course, all the farming women who so kindly participated in this research.

A copy of the research report *Farming women on their wellbeing* can be found on the Farmstrong website at <https://farmstrong.co.nz/research-insights/>

### Key findings

Here are the wellbeing issues that ranked highest in terms of having a 'large' or greater negative impact.

- My workload/fitting everything in (40%).
- Feeling fatigued/exhausted (34%).
- Not enough time for myself (32%).
- Lack of sleep or poor quality sleep (32%).
- Not enough time off the farm—either by myself or with family (29%).
- Challenges with important relationships i.e. husband/partner, parents, in-laws, farm owner, workers (27%).

Here are the top three things women thought were most likely to contribute to increasing their wellbeing.

- More time off the farm.
- Getting more or better quality sleep.
- Getting more exercise.

These are the wellbeing topics that women expressed 'high' interest in.

- Nutrition (26%)
- Exercise (25%)
- Self-confidence, self-worth, self-compassion (24%)
- Thinking strategies to deal with ups and downs (22%)
- Happiness (22%)
- Mindfulness and relaxation techniques (21%)

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The group reporting the highest levels of reduced wellbeing were women working fulltime as sharemilkers/contract milkers. The interviews particularly highlighted the vulnerability of younger women trying to navigate their way through early careers in farming. Challenges mentioned included:

- new relationships or lack of close relationships
- the expectations of parents or in-laws
- living away from family support
- working long hours with little or no regular time off
- being a new mum
- dealing with mental health issues and financial stress.

There was also a link between injuries and wellbeing issues. One-fifth of the women reported having an injury on the farm in the last 12 months and, of these, 61% felt a wellbeing issue had contributed to their 'worst injury' in that time.

### **About Farmstrong**

Into its fourth year, Farmstrong is a wellbeing programme that helps farmers to see themselves as the most important asset on the farm.

It focuses on wellness not illness, and with resources and advice on its website, provides farmers and growers with information they can use on a day-to-day basis that will help them in the long run to live well and farm well.

**ENDS**