

Stay Farmstrong this summer

SAM WHITELOCK

THIS summer I'll be making a real effort to connect with mates and recharge my batteries.

That's how I manage the pressure of professional sport so I can stay on top of my game.

Whether you're playing rugby or farming, taking time off to rest and recover is a massive part of keeping well.

I can identify with many of the challenges farmers have to deal with – the pressure to meet targets and achieve results.

Then there's the stuff you can't control. For me it might be the ref, in farming it's the weather.

What's unique about farming is that people also live where they work – it's hard to get away from it all. That's why organising some time off farm is so important.

Too much of one thing, whether it's sport or farming, can wear you down.

Doing other stuff you enjoy – fishing, surfing, team sport, kids sport, motocross or contributing at community events keeps you fresh.

I play rugby because I love rugby but I also make sure I go hunting with mates to relax and unwind.

I head into the bush, turn off the phone and forget about rugby.

This summer I'll also be spending time with family and friends at the beach.

That means I'll be in the right frame of mind to give it everything I've got when we start training again.

Decent rest and recovery will make you feel more energised and efficient when you are back on the job. You'll think more clearly and make better decisions and cope with the ups and downs of farming more easily.

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Sometimes taking time off can be challenging for people.

They think the harder and longer they work, the more they'll achieve. But no-one can go hard out all day, every day, all year without breaks. It's just not how we're built. That's the stuff of burnout.

The key to taking a break is to make it part of your business planning. Book it in the diary and stick to it.

People who cope well under pressure

have other things in common, too. A big one is staying connected with mates. When you're under the pump it's good to talk about things and share the load. That can make a huge difference to how you feel.

Farming can be an isolated occupation and carrying the whole load on your own can weigh on you.

So make a point to catch up regularly with a neighbour or a mate to talk about how things are going and find out how they're doing.

If you're having an issue on the farm the chances are someone else in the area has had a similar problem.

Everyone's been there and everyone needs support. So get on the phone.

You can get so much motivation and support from talking over things with others. These small daily connections can really make a big difference to handling stress.

Over summer I like to connect with friends outside rugby so I can talk about things apart from my work – whether it's going down the road to a barbecue or inviting a couple of mates I haven't seen for a while to dinner, connecting with people outside work really freshens me up and keeps life in perspective.

Summer's a good time to work on the basics too – sleep, eat well and keep in shape.

When your body is getting seven to

nine hours of sleep a day it has a chance to re-energise.

Whether you're farming or playing pro sport, you need the right fuel in the tank so try to eat more nutritious, unprocessed food and not to skip meals.

And whether you're a farmer or a lock, keeping the body flexible will definitely extend your career.

A few simple stretches before you hit the woolshed, the milking cups or the tractor will help prevent the strains and niggles that wear you down.

Check out Farmstrong's Turn on Your Core warm-ups this summer – this 10-minute routine has been specifically designed to keep farmers Farm Fit. I've tried it and I recommend it.

Taking my breaks and working on these simple habits really helps me cope with the ups and downs of sporting life. I know they will also be incredibly useful when I am back farming.



All Black Sam Whitelock can relate to the challenges farmers face to meet targets and achieve results.

And that's what Farmstrong's all about – looking after the farm's number one asset, you.

Remember, investing in your wellbeing

means you will have some to draw on when you are under the pump.

Have a great Christmas and all the best for the New Year. ■



Sam Whitelock talks to a group of farmers about Farmstrong, a rural wellbeing programme.



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