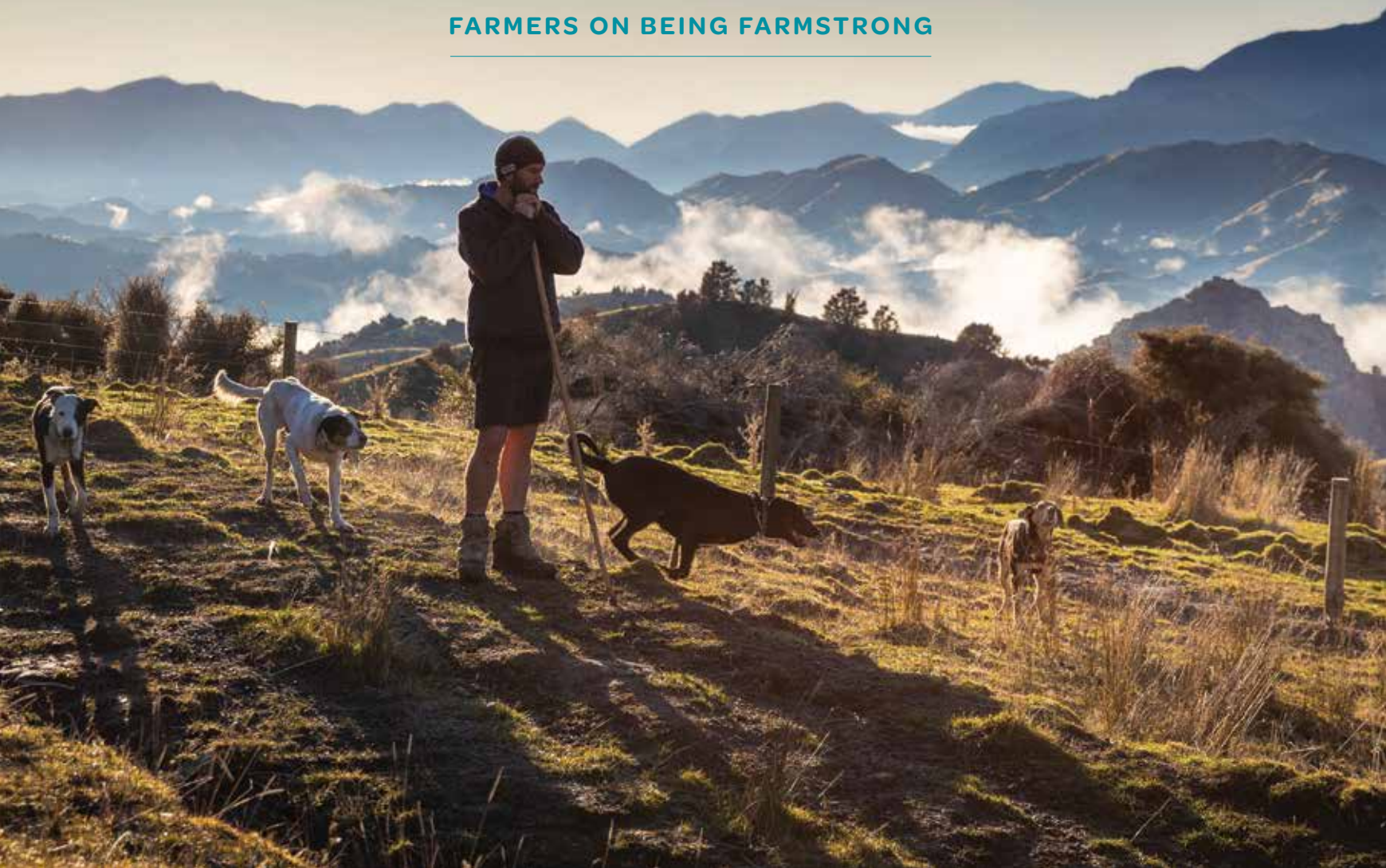




Live well farm well

FARMERS ON BEING FARMSTRONG



Live well farm well

Farmers on being Farmstrong

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Farmers on being Farmstrong

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FOREWORD

Farmer to farmer

Since Farmstrong began six years ago, we have uncovered so many stories of farmers and growers who have really taken to heart the message that to farm well, you need to live well. To have a sustainable business, you need to look after your most important asset – you, your family and your team. Developing habits that boost your wellbeing is key to this.

We have had great feedback about these stories which we have published online, on social media and in rural sector media. So much so that we have decided to publish a selection of them as a book so they can have a wider ongoing circulation.

Farmstrong is all about farmers sharing with other farmers and this book is a great example of that in action.

Many thanks to the farmers and growers who have agreed to share their stories and advice in the book. We are sure that, like us, you will find them inspirational, yet grounded in the day-to-day realities of rural life.

We have selected stories from all around New Zealand that reflect the diversity of the industry. The stories were captured at a certain point in time and some of the circumstances of those who feature in the stories may have changed since then. But the power of their insights still hold true today.

We hope that this book motivates you to lock in some wellbeing habits of your own.

Keep it handy. Share it with others.

The Farmstrong team

What is Farmstrong?

Farmstrong is a rural wellbeing programme for farmers and growers. Our aim is to help you 'live well, farm well'.

Farmstrong helps farmers and growers, their families and teams, develop habits that improve wellbeing and day-to-day performance.

We take the science of wellbeing to busy farmers and growers. We share the things you can do to look after yourself and the people in your business, so you can avoid common mental health problems, prevent injuries, better cope with ups and downs and 'live well, farm well'.

Our programme is shaped by farmers for farmers. As well as drawing on wellbeing science, Farmstrong is based on the experiences of farmers themselves who know what it takes to build resilience and keep well.

Farmstrong is a community give-back initiative, founded by rural insurer Farmers Mutual Group (FMG) and the Mental Health Foundation (MHF) in 2015. The Movember Foundation was an early founding contributor and ACC joined as a strategic partner in 2016. We work in close collaboration with industry and farming organisations throughout New Zealand.

Farmstrong has been a team effort since it began, involving a wide variety of people – farmers, growers, researchers, partnership-builders, communicators, educators, event managers and implementers. We have also invited experts who understand farming to develop tools and resources around wellbeing topics.

In 2020 Farmstrong won the Supreme Award at the New Zealand Workplace Health and Safety Awards.

What does Farmstrong do?



INTRODUCTION

Live well farm well

I come from a farming background and I know that farming, like professional rugby, has its fair share of pressures. There are always going to be things you can't control. In rugby it might be the ref, in farming it's the weather and prices.

Rugby has taught me heaps about how to look after myself and handle pressure. I reckon rugby and farming are really similar that way – there's always results to achieve and pressures to deal with. So how can we prepare for the ups and downs of it all?

Farmstrong is a rural wellbeing programme that shares tips and advice about how to stay well and get the most out of life. Developing habits that build resilience is what the programme is all about.

I've seen first-hand the positive impact Farmstrong is having on the farming community and I'm thrilled to be the Farmstrong Ambassador. We now have more than 15,000 farmers and growers saying Farmstrong has helped them. I know there are many more we can reach with the 'live well, farm well' message.

This book is full of inspiring stories from farmers and growers who have had to deal with tough times and made real changes in their lives. We can all learn a lot from reading these stories. Maintaining wellbeing doesn't happen by accident. We need to make space for it in our busy lives.

I urge you to read this book and dip into it regularly. Most importantly I encourage you to develop simple wellbeing habits in your own life. See what works for you and be open to make some changes.

I know from experience the benefits are enormous – for you, your family and the future of your farming business.

Samuel Whitelock

Farmstrong Ambassador



People who stay Farmstrong invest in simple habits. The Five Ways to Wellbeing is a pretty good place to start.



TALK & LISTEN,
BE THERE,
FEEL CONNECTED



REMEMBER
THE SIMPLE
THINGS THAT
GIVE YOU JOY



Give

Your time,
your words,
your presence



**KEEP
LEARNING**

EMBRACE NEW
EXPERIENCES,
SEE OPPORTUNITIES,
SURPRISE YOURSELF



**BE
ACTIVE**

DO WHAT YOU CAN,
ENJOY WHAT YOU DO,
MOVE YOUR MOOD



www.farmstrong.co.nz



Five Ways to Wellbeing

Whether you're an athlete or a farmer, it all starts with getting the basics right. Five simple habits make up the basics, the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing'.

Research shows that people who thrive have five things in common: they stay connected with their mates, they enjoy the simple things in life, they stay active, they keep learning and they give back by helping out friends, neighbours and their community.

These 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' can make a huge difference to your life. The key is to lock them in each day in small ways so they become a habit. These habits are what you can fall back on when you are under the pump.

Connect with others

People with strong social connections are happier, healthier and live longer. Spending time with your mates and making new friends makes a big difference to how you feel about yourself. Talk and listen, be there for others, feel connected. When you do these things, the rewards are huge.

Even when you are busy, try and make it a priority to connect with others. It may be just a phone call, a text or chat at the farm gate. And be a good listener too. It can make all the difference to how someone feels.

Give back

Make time for others. When you give your time to help others – your family, your friends, your community – not only do they benefit, it makes you feel a lot better too. There are lots of ways you can give – volunteering



at the school or in the community, helping out a neighbour, spending more time with your kids. When you do this, your world expands and you feel a lot happier.

Stay active

Keeping active is a great stress-reliever. When you work up a sweat, endorphins are released that lift your mood. You feel more positive and better able to cope. Make physical movement a habit, aim for at least some form of activity for 30 minutes a day. Physical movement clears the head for better decision-making and also helps prevent injuries.

Enjoy the simple things in life

We all get busy and it's easy for our minds to get cluttered and pre-occupied. Take a few moments each day to appreciate the things in life that bring you joy – family, friends, interests, animals, nature. Just pause

and be grateful. Think of three good things that happened today. Being grateful adds to a sense of wellbeing.

Keep learning

At whatever age, learning new things is good for you. It's good for your brain and keeps you flexible and open. It may be new farming skills, or it may be recreational activities, like learning a musical instrument or cooking something new. Make a habit of trying new things, however small, and you will feel surprising satisfaction. ●

F A
S T R



DRMONG

The image features the word "DRMONG" in large, bold, rounded letters. The letters are filled with a landscape photograph. The top half of the letters shows a majestic snow-capped mountain peak under a clear blue sky. The middle section shows a valley with rolling hills and sparse vegetation. The bottom section shows a closer view of a hillside with small, scrubby trees and a light-colored, possibly sandy or rocky, slope. The overall color palette is dominated by blues, greys, and earthy tones, giving it a natural and serene feel.



Kane and Nicole Brisco and family

Gym for farmers

A home-built gym was the start of Kane Brisco's journey from milking shed to social media influencer.

“We’ve got to treat ourselves like sportsmen, because farming is bloody hard, so fuel yourself like you would for a big sports game or event.”

Kane’s into his seventh year 50/50 sharemilking at Ohangai near Hawera, in South Taranaki. His progress in the industry’s been rapid and life’s busy on all fronts.

“We have 215 cows which I pretty much milk myself. My wife helps as much as she can with the calves, but she’s working part-time as a nurse too. We’ve also got a six-year-old girl and a four-year-old boy. The last two years have been hectic with my daughter starting school and the younger one becoming more mobile and racing around.”

Juggling these responsibilities would be a challenge for anyone. How does Kane cope? The answer might surprise you – as busy as he is, Kane dedicates part of each day solely to meeting his own needs.

“Keeping everything in balance is a constant challenge, but what’s really helped me is the notion that I can’t help anyone else unless I’m in a good place myself. As much as I love farming and spending time with my family, I also need my own time, even if it’s just 30 mins a day. It sounds selfish, but actually, prioritising my needs means I’m in the right space to help everyone else.”

As a keen ex-rugby player, Kane still loves his workouts, but he’s a long way from any gym. So he built his own. “Eighteen months ago we set up a community ‘boot camp’ here. We bought some gear in, but we use a lot of farm equipment too. The 20L water container is a classic. You’d be surprised what you can do with those

in terms of exercise. We also use things like ropes, fence posts, sledgehammers. It’s a gym for farmers.”

“You see so many farmers when they retire all bent over due to strains of farming. We use exercise to make the physical demands of our job easier.”

Kane’s boot camp workouts are a great stressbuster too. “I firmly believe when you move your body, you grow your mind too. It doesn’t have to be at the gym either. It could be stretching, yoga breathing, walking a dog. It’s just about getting out and doing something you like. How I look at it is that you have your happiness bucket and your stress bucket. If your stress bucket is overflowing, little things become huge and you can’t make decisions. I see exercise as my daily scoop out of my stress bucket and into the happiness bucket.”

With calving on the horizon, now’s the perfect time to get in shape he says. “I really noticed the first season I retired from rugby, I put on 10 kilos and did bugger all. Come calving, I was in a hell of a state. The job was suddenly more demanding. I felt fatigued and that affected my decision-making and mindset.”

Kane’s taken to sharing these insights about life on farm through social media and he’s struck a chord with others in the industry. “When we started our bootcamp, we got some great feedback. So to help more people and encourage those conversations that are a bit harder to have, we started an Instagram and Facebook page

(Farm Fit NZ), and put our workshops up on YouTube and I've been involved in webinars with Young Farmers."

Tips on nutrition are also high on the agenda.

"We've got to treat ourselves like sportsmen, because farming is bloody hard, so fuel yourself like you would for a big sports game or event. I'll have porridge or Weetbix for breakfast, work till 11.30/12 and come home to have lunch. Something that's changed over the years is I drink a lot more water. Especially in the summer and the spring when I'll add electrolytes in. Then dinner is meat and three veg. Your body needs those whole foods for proper fuel. I see a lot of young people in our industry living on takeaways and then bumping it up with lots of sugar and caffeine in energy drinks. But there's a much better way to do it for your body, your mind and your back pocket."

Kane's developed his own strategies for coping with the mental pressures of farming too. "One thing I do to deal with stress is wake up and write down my purpose and priorities every day. I feel much more energised when I understand what I'm trying to achieve, it makes a huge difference."

Kane is encouraging more farmers to share the ups and downs of farming. "I guess my mantra is: let's be proactive about our health and mental health. We do it on farm when we grow winter crops because we know we're going to need feed, but we don't often do



Google **Farm Fit NZ** to learn more about Kane's insights on how to keep well on the farm.



it with our own health. I was having this conversation with a farmer a while ago. We both agreed you have a big open space on the farm but it can still feel like a prison if you don't leave it. The answer is to make time to do the things you enjoy, whether that's going out for a fish, playing with the kids or hitting a golf ball."

"I reckon there's a 100% correlation between doing these things and how well you perform on farm. It's black and white to me. It's part of becoming a better farmer."

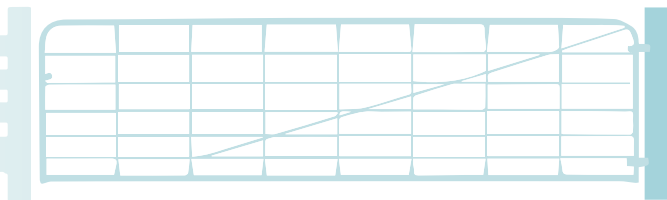
"I think as a farming community we need to be much more open about the pressures we face. People often withdraw into themselves. If you ask someone on a farm how they're doing, the most common answer you'll get is 'good'. They don't want to tell you the truth because they think you're going to judge them. We need to change the culture so people feel comfortable to talk honestly." ●

*Kane Brisco:
"Make time to do
the things you
enjoy."*



Contract milker Abbi Ayre

If you love farming, look after yourself



Contract milker Abbi Ayre learnt the hard way that no matter how busy life gets on the farm, you still need to look after yourself.

“Two or three years ago we realised that we couldn’t actually have a proper break unless we go overseas or somewhere with zero cellphone reception. So now that’s what we do.”

Abbi and her husband Frikkie work on a 900-cow dairy farm in Culverden, North Canterbury. They met ‘over the fence’ and have worked together as contract milkers ever since. Although Abbi’s not from a farming background, she’s taken to it like a natural.

“I love the fact that I get to work outdoors and that no two days are the same. Being a farmer is a bit like being a vet, a builder, a scientist, an electrician and a plumber rolled into one. You get to do all the jobs that make up farming. That’s very satisfying.”

But, like any job, sometimes you can have too much of a good thing. A few years ago Abbi says lack of downtime really took a toll on her wellbeing and she’s keen to avoid a repeat.

“I was working very long hours, often with no breakfast and sometimes no lunch. But it was my first job and I didn’t know any different. I almost didn’t carry on in the industry. Once you get tired like that, it’s a downward cycle. You start eating shitty food and then you start feeling shitty. I’m much more aware now about looking after myself and our staff too.”

The first six months of the dairy season are always particularly busy, says Abbi, as she combines helping run the business with on-farm relief work, AI technician duties and calving. Getting time off to recharge the batteries isn’t easy. The answer, she says, is to work smarter.

“In farming you’ve got external stuff like the weather and pay-out prices – things you can’t change at all. But there are other things about your operation, like staff and rosters, that you can change to make sure you and others get time off.”

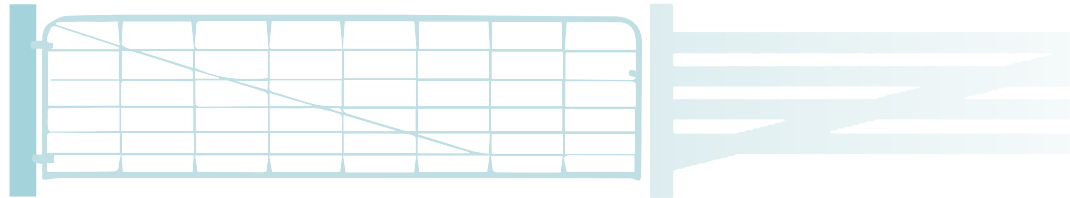
A unique challenge of farming is that people often live where they work. This makes escaping work worries doubly difficult.

“Farming can definitely put you under a lot of stress as a couple. We work together and live in the same house and we’re always talking about things that we’re going to do or need to do on the farm, whether it’s at breakfast, lunch or dinner,” she laughs.

“Two or three years ago we realised that we couldn’t actually have a proper break unless we go overseas or somewhere with zero cellphone reception. So now that’s what we do.”

The couple also schedule regular breaks for local activities. “My husband plays golf at least once a week and I do a lot for the dairy women’s network. I’m a regional leader and help to organise events around the area which keep people connected.”

Abbi says the network has played a big role in helping her feel on top of things. “Having that sort of support is just the biggest thing. I get to see a group of women on their one night off-farm and we don’t talk about cows and grass. Being in a room full of women like that is a great boost.”



As Abbi's administration role has expanded, keeping active has also become a priority. "What I found over the last couple of years is that being less active on the farm, I really needed to do some exercise. So we play touch rugby in the spring and we've started going for a walk once a week up a hill somewhere just to keep in shape. I also enjoy horse riding. Sometimes it's a little thing like walking to the cow shed instead of driving."

Abbi says maintaining a positive frame of mind also helps when the going gets tough. "You can't just focus on the problems in farming, you've got to stay positive and decide how you're going to deal with challenges and keep moving forward. There's no point dwelling on things that have happened. That's a real trap."

The biggest lesson Abbi has learnt is not to carry the load alone. "A couple of years ago, towards the end of calving, I was at one of our dairy women's dinners and the woman running it asked people to put their hand up if they'd had to deal with coccidiosis, rotovirus or crypto [cryptosporidium] and pretty much everyone's hand went up. There was this giant sigh of relief in the room because no-one felt alone any more dealing with it."



Abbi and husband Frikkie

"I've learnt that every season is different and every season has its challenges. The trouble is, when you're working in a situation where you're isolated, it can often feel like the world's falling apart. That's probably the time you feel least like going out and reaching out to others, but that's the time when you need support the most. If you're feeling under pressure, share the load and remember that you are not alone. Get out and talk to somebody, whether it's a dinner group or a b.y.o fish and chip night with neighbours and friends." 🌟



Marty Smith: "People coming into this industry are often vulnerable."

A fresh perspective

Invercargill-based shearing contractor Marty Smith has been in the shearing business for 35 years. He says what's probably changed most during that time are the people.

“Telling people to just harden up like the old days **doesn’t work**. That only sends someone further into the hole.”

Marty Smith’s love for the shearing industry remains undiminished. “I love its work ethic, its camaraderie and just seeing everyone heading out to work in the vans each morning. At one point 16 crews and half a dozen vans would head out every morning. What a great sight.”

But as much as Marty values hard work, one morning he had a moment that completely changed how he ran his business. “One of my gangers came up to me and said, ‘Hey Marty, these guys are looking wrecked.’ I said, ‘What do you mean? They’re all going to work, aren’t they?’ But then I stood back and looked at their demeanour and body language. I could see he was right.”

“There and then I decided, ‘Right, something has to change. From now on we won’t do seven days a week. We’ll knock Sundays on the head. And anyone who wants to do just half a day Saturday can go and do something else like play sport.’ And I employed another crew to take up the slack.”

It worked. “Suddenly people were happy again, they could treat it like a normal job. When I was shearing I couldn’t get enough of it, I just thought ‘gimme the work, I’ll have a day off when it rains.’ We’d go five or six weeks without a day off. That was my mindset. But I had to learn that that’s not everybody’s mindset.”

Other changes followed. Marty started exploring how he could help his crews manage other pressures. He sourced financial advice about budgeting and KiwiSaver

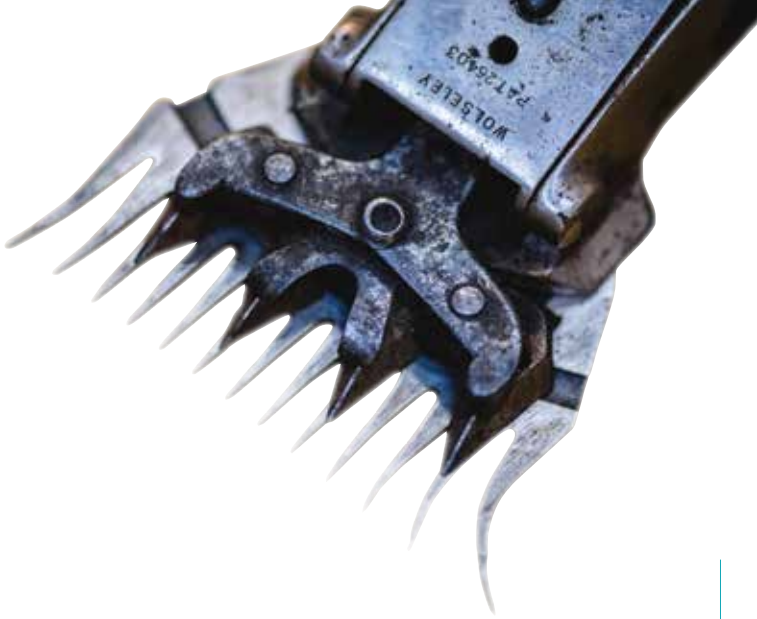
so they didn’t fritter away their hard-earned cash. He also helped them manage other life challenges.

“We’ve got a yard where we all meet in the morning. I started realising that when people turned up not in good shape to work, there was always an underlying factor. It wasn’t about the job or me. Something else was happening in their life. There was always an underlying reason why they were jumping up and down or blowing up about something small like a dog not leaping in the van. It was about the ‘top two inches’ – stress.”

“I came to realise that just like top athletes need the right mindset, so do shearers. Those top two inches need to be right. People are always going to bring the pressures of day-to-day living into their job – relationships, insecurities, losing a parent – and when people are young they don’t have the life experience to cope, so you need to be prepared to listen and help.”

That wasn’t lost on the people who worked for him. “Over the last five years I’ve had a lot of guys come up to me and say, ‘Marty, what the hell’s going on with you? You’ve gone all soft!’ I just told them, ‘I’m taking a fresh perspective’.”

“So, taking the pressure off people became my thing. If they wanted a day off, let them have a day off. People my age have their way of doing things, but my kids do things differently now. So even though they know about the importance of hard work and respect, they also know



when it's time to reach out and talk, and that's a good thing. Times change. Talking is the biggest part of preventing pressure from just building and building til it blows."

These days Marty looks after up to 30 shearers during Main Shear. Once a week he goes round the crews and makes sure everything is right, including the people.

"If someone's not on top of their game, it'll be because something's not right in their life. These days, I speak up and ask, 'Everything all right mate?' Telling people to just harden up like the old days doesn't work. That only sends someone further into the hole."

"There's a lot more to shearing than how someone uses a hand piece. It's also about how people look after themselves, physically and mentally. How they eat, sleep, stretch beforehand and recover after a day on the board. If you do all these things properly you wake up a totally different person. When people don't do these things, they often look to alcohol or drugs to take the pain away, but that only makes the job harder."

Marty also realises the importance of leading by example. Despite being in the yard each morning at quarter to five, he still finds time for whānau and his other great love, rugby.

"I live on the Oreti river at home, I've got five acres here by my awa. It's only seven minutes out of the city but it's like living in the country. I've been married 40 years this year and have five kids. When you're busy the ones

“If someone’s not on top of their game, it’ll be because something’s not right in their life.”

who often miss out are those dearest to you. So after visiting sheds each day, I still make sure I get home for lunch and catch up with my wife.”

He coaches a local premier rugby team too. “When you’re at rugby practice, for that hour or so life’s trials and tribulations are forgotten about. You’re there to chuck a footy around and have a few laughs with mates. On Thursday nights we have shared kai afterwards. To me that’s about mental wellbeing as much as it is about rugby.”

The NZ Shearing Contractors’ Association announced at its recent conference in New Plymouth that it will be working with Farmstrong to improve the wellbeing of rural communities. It also launched a new industry-driven training initiative – WOMOLife – to upskill 250 shearers and wool handlers. The training will cover areas such as nutrition, body conditioning and mental skills.

“People coming into this industry are often vulnerable,” notes Marty. “Sometimes they’ve had a challenging time during their education or their self-esteem might not be where it should be and they’ll be scared of trying something new. Everything will feel a bit whakama (embarrassing) to them. As contractors, we need to take that on board so people feel supported.”

“Every contractor was a shearer once so we’re all aware of these issues. That’s why I think Farmstrong’s awesome. It gets us talking about these things.” 🌟





Dylan and Sheree Ditchfield: "If you're not right, nothing else will go right."

Fresh take on the farming life



Tough times drove Dylan and Sheree Ditchfield to re-examine all aspects of their business. They responded with a fresh take on life, farming and managing stress.

“It’s addictive. The more you get, the more you want. The more opportunities you see, the more you want to dive in. But you can get badly caught out.”

Paradise Valley, in Wendonside, Southland is aptly named – a great place to farm and live.

“The soil type here suits all weather. There’s a thick base of topsoil – very fertile, holds moisture well and has good properties for growing. And beneath it, clay and gravel, which means it’s also free draining,” says Dylan.

The Ditchfields farm 420 cows on a 155 milking platform. The couple, who came down from the Bay of Plenty in 1996, have never regretted shifting south.

“We love this community and what Southland brings. It’s what life used to be up north 10 years ago – that real sense of community. We’re in the wops a bit, but we love that, we love the quiet and being by ourselves. There was heaps of opportunity when we moved here. We loved the challenge of things and our business quickly grew two or threefold. We were successful but we worked really hard.”

The couple started a family and enjoyed good times and spectacular business growth for a number of years. But things got tricky when the recession hit.

“Before the recession, we’d expanded extensively, accumulated a lot of debt and that put us in a really hard space. To cut a long story short, we had to turn our business on its head.”

The stress took a toll on Dylan’s health and well-being. “I got to the point where I’d hit the ceiling. I couldn’t let go, I never saw my family and my wellbeing became a real issue.”

The experience made him re-examine all aspects of his business and life. His key insight was that during his years of success, he had neglected the most important aspects of his business – himself and his family.

“Typically in our industry, the work ethic is high. We’re out there to progress and grow our business. That’s naturally how things go. And for me, it was at the expense of myself, my family, our business, our people.”

“The focus on growing wealth and expanding has become ingrained in our industry over the last few generations. It’s addictive. The more you get, the more you want. The more opportunities you see, the more you want to dive in. But you can get badly caught out. If you haven’t got the tools and skills to manage your way through, you’re vulnerable.”

Those tough times drove Dylan and Sheree to find a healthier and more sustainable business model.

“We had to come up with a better vision and purpose for our business. We had to ask ourselves, why are we doing what we’re doing? If your family’s not right, you have to ask yourself the question, ‘why have you got into farming in the first place?’”

“Stepping back and taking a ‘helicopter’ view helped us make better choices in business, as well as personally.”

Change meant a fundamental shift in approach and priorities. First, the Ditchfields sought outside advice. They set up an advisory board that allowed them to tap



into business and financial expertise.

“My advice to anyone who finds themselves in my situation is get mentors. Surround yourself with people who have been through it all before,” says Dylan.

Next they lightened their workload, handing over the day-to-day running of the farm.

“Now we operate with a manager, a 2 IC, an assistant and some casual staff. Sheree and I are involved in the farm’s governance, the oversight and organisation of operations, but I don’t physically milk the cows or have anything to do with the day-to-day running of it,” he says.

“We’ve transitioned our business. Our focus is now on our people, coaching them to drive our business and get the performance. Our philosophy is that if we fix the people side of our business, everything else follows,” says Dylan.

With more time on his hands, Dylan made improving his own health and wellbeing his number one priority. He now schedules regular exercise and breaks off the farm and makes sure he eats and sleeps well so he has the energy and freshness to make good decisions.

“First and foremost, farming well is about taking care of yourself. By taking better care of yourself, you are taking better care of your partner, your family and your business. If you’re not right, nothing else will go right.”

“Resilience in farming is all about having the energy to be the best you can be. I now devote around a third of my week to looking after my wellbeing.”

The Ditchfields also made an effort to simply enjoy life more, get off the farm and out into the community. “Our community is close, so there’s plenty of opportunity to mix, whether it’s the pub or social sporting events. But you have to get out your door and go and get involved. That’s vital.”

Transforming their business has been such a rewarding experience, that Dylan and Sheree recently began a new business venture – Farming to Freedom – offering workshops for other dairying couples in the region. Their dream is to play a part in reshaping the dairy industry.

“We wanted to give something back. Basically, we were in a really hard space and when we got out of it, we thought everyone else already knew this stuff, but they didn’t. We realised very few people talked about these things and we needed to help.”

“We’re targeting young couples in the Agri business. Many of them are hurting financially, but they’ve had the courage to come. It’s been inspirational working with them and seeing the penny drop and their attitudes change.”

“What you see develop,” says Sheree, “is a kind of calm in the storm, because people have an enduring sense of purpose that can sustain them year in, year out.” 🌱

FUNDAMENTALS

Sleep – the performance wonder-drug

Getting enough sleep is like a performance wonder-drug. It helps you make better decisions, feel great and be psychologically and physically stronger.

Farmstrong research shows that lack of sleep consistently comes up as one of the biggest concerns among farmers and growers. There are three main problem areas: feeling there is not enough time for sleep because there's so much to do, wanting to get to sleep, but having trouble nodding off, and waking during the night and worrying.

Not enough time for sleep? Think again.

Everyone knows we have to sleep, but it's tempting to try and take shortcuts. Every day on farm there is a list as long as your arm of things to do. Particularly during the busy times it's easy to see sleep as a drain on our time, so we cut back. It's also easy to think that we might be being lazy or a wimp if we sleep a bit more.

However, consider the following:

- According to sleep researchers nearly everyone needs between 7–9 hours sleep a night. Very few can get away with less over the long-term.
- Not getting enough sleep can increase your risk of heart attacks, strokes, accidents, depression, weight gain, lower your immune system and decrease your

ability to solve problems. It also puts us at higher risk of an accident. These are big downsides that will badly impact on your business and family life.

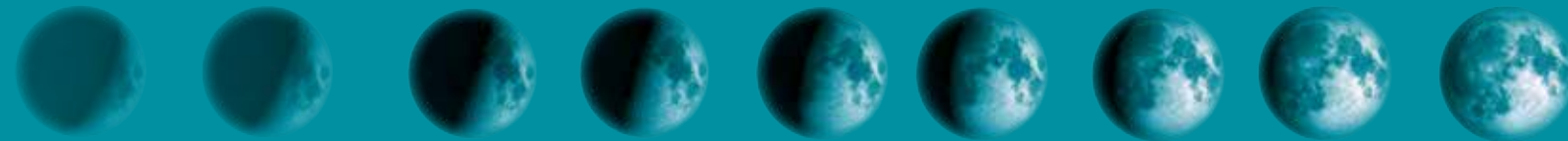
Can't get to sleep? Try this.

If you're having trouble getting off to sleep, sleep experts recommend:

- End screen time early in the evening if possible.
- Cool your core body temperature down. Having a hot shower can do this as it draws heat from your core and actually cools you.
- Dim the lights as you get close to bed time.
- Avoid caffeine from the afternoon and keep alcohol intake moderate.
- Make your times for going to bed and getting up as regular as possible.
- Write down what you've done well during the day and what you're grateful for.

If it's hard to sleep because you're going through a stressful time, don't be tough on yourself. That's just one extra stressor you don't need. Getting to sleep can't happen by force of will, only by letting go.

When life is really stressful, you may need to look at other strategies to get some better sleep such as sharing your worries with someone you trust, asking for help, getting more exercise, having relaxation routines and



healthy thinking practices to get some perspective. There's plenty of information on these areas on Farmstrong's website. www.farmstrong.co.nz

Waking and worrying? Five great solutions.

A very common reason for not being able to get back to sleep is lying awake worrying. Typical things farmers have told us trigger early morning worrying are: the weather, financial problems, the amount of work to do the next day and relationship problems with employees or family. Worrying can consistently keep you awake from the small hours until just before dawn, when you might snatch half an hour's sleep before being cruelly awakened by the alarm clock. This can trigger further worry about not getting enough sleep.

Here are some things you can do to trick the worrying brain into calmness:

- Slowly count backwards from 30 in time with your breathing. Why backwards? Because you do have to concentrate a little bit to count this way, it means the mind can't think about other things. If your mind wanders from the counting start back at 30, this stops you cheating and slipping into worrying again. You probably won't be able to get past ten before you're back asleep. Counting in time with your breathing relaxes your body.
- Write a to-do list late in the day and make an agreement with yourself that you will tackle these

tasks in the morning. This tells your worrying brain that you have things under control.

- If you're feeling riled up and tense, with a racing mind, get up and do some stretching. It's worth learning proper techniques in advance, e.g. from the gym or a yoga course.
- Don't turn the light on if possible as this disrupts the sleep cycle. If you decide to get up, keep a small torch on hand to avoid tripping over things.
- Learn some relaxation techniques like meditation, a body scan, visualisation or breathing techniques. Then if you wake and can't get back to sleep use this time to practice them in bed.

Use sleeping medications sparingly

Sleeping meds can be useful if you are desperate for some good nights of sleep. But don't become reliant on them. Make sure that a doctor has prescribed them because you should not be on sleeping meds for too long. Some are sedative in nature to relieve anxiety and over time can become addictive.

If you continue to struggle with sleep, think about seeing a sleep specialist. Investing in this type of expertise is money very well spent. ●

This material is based on content from Hugh Norriss and sourced from the Farmstrong website.



“A good laugh and a long sleep are the two best cures for anything.” Irish Proverb



“It’s important to maximise your sleep, so we’re in bed pretty early during the milking season, say 9.30 or 10pm. Even things like buying a really comfortable pillow or mattress are important. Don’t underestimate the power of a good pillow and mattress to get a better night’s sleep.”

Trish Rankin, sharemilker

“You definitely need to know when to pull the pin each day. Don’t get bogged down in that one job. I know what it’s like, I have done a fair bit of it myself. I’ve woken up at 2 in the morning and what hasn’t been done goes around in circles in my mind. It’s a real trap.”

James Bruce, sheep and beef farmer


“Sleep’s massive. Most of us need 7 to 9 hours of sleep each day to give our bodies a chance to repair and re-energise for the next day. Without the right amount of sleep, you won’t function at your best. When I am having trouble sleeping because of worrying about things, I write them down on a bit of paper and save them for the next day.”

Sam Whitelock, Farmstrong Ambassador



Jack Cocks with his partner Kate and kids Jess and Tom

Lucky to be **alive**



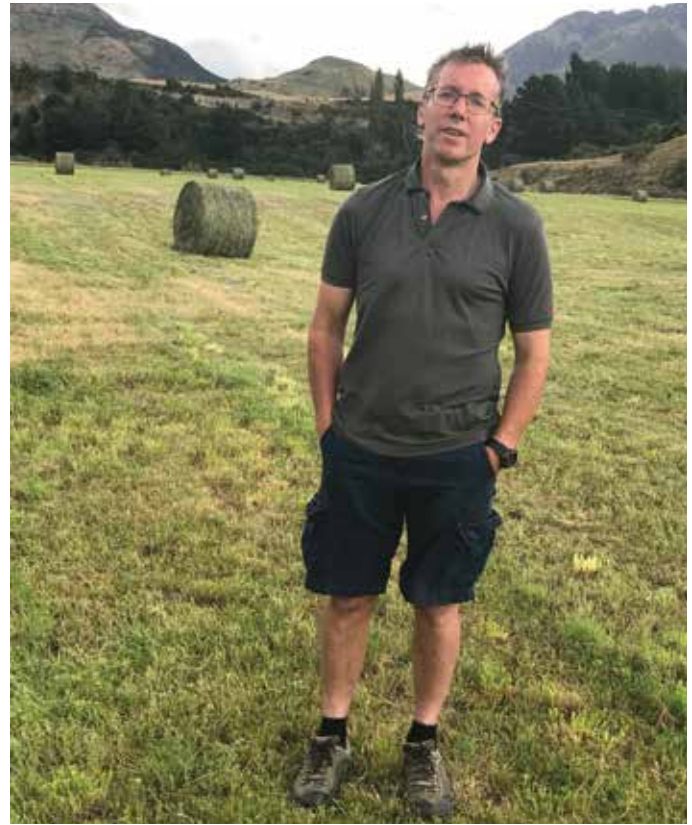
Sheep and beef farmer Jack Cocks almost died from an aneurysm. Now he's sharing with other farmers what his recovery taught him about resilience.



Jack's part of the team that runs Mt Nicholas, a high-country merino sheep and cattle station, on the western shores of Lake Wakatipu. "I grew up on a sheep and beef farm, went to uni, travelled overseas and came back and worked in an agribusiness consultancy. My wife Kate and I came here to work in 2009. There's a team of four of us that run the farm. It's probably more of a democracy than a lot of farms but it works well. It means we can use all our different skills."

Jack says Mt Nicholas is a great place to work and raise a family (they have two kids). "Although we're in an isolated situation, there is a team of us here so we might see more people during our working day than many sheep and beef farmers. I really love what farming offers – that mix of running your own business as well as working outside doing practical things. We enjoy a huge variety of work."


All that was suddenly at risk when he suffered his aneurysm in 2013. "I'm very lucky to be here," he says, remembering the night it happened. "I was born with a malformation between some of the blood vessels in my brain. That caused an aneurysm to form. I had no idea I had it, let alone what an aneurysm was! One night I was reading in bed, my wife Kate was away working at a tourism event down at the woolshed and I got a splitting headache so bad I was sick a few times. I rang her and said, 'you've got to come home'. She came home



expecting the house to be in chaos but found it dark and quiet and me in bed – pale, cold and sweating. While she was ringing 111, I had a seizure."

"A helicopter arrived in the middle of the night. By then my lungs were bleeding and I was unconscious. On the way to Dunedin hospital I had a cardiac arrest. They did a CT scan and found my brain was full of blood. In layman's terms, the neurosurgeon drilled a hole in my skull to relieve the pressure. They thought I'd be dead that day ... but somehow I survived."

What followed would test anyone's resolve. Jack spent four months in hospital and had eight surgeries over the next two years. He recovered to 70 percent and then spent a further two years doing rehab



“Staying connected and spending time with my family, our staff and mates was another big one. That was key for morale.”

and recovered to 90 percent before another serious setback required a further half a dozen surgeries and another four months in hospital followed by more rehab. “I couldn’t brush my teeth at one stage because of nerve damage to my spine and I had to learn to walk again using a walking frame. So it was a journey full of setbacks,” he says.

But Jack kept going through it all – the stints in hospital, the endless rehab, the setbacks. Cut to the present. “I’m about 90 percent recovered now. My balance and eyesight aren’t 100 percent, but basically I’m back to normal, working full-time, and I feel incredibly lucky to be here.”

Jack’s journey impacted his life in other ways too. Laid up in hospital, he did a lot of thinking about what was

helping him get through and remain positive. “I figured out I needed five things. Most farmers would think up these things sitting in their tractor or standing in a milking shed, but I had to figure it out in a hospital bed,” he laughs.

“The first two were the importance of contribution and stimulation – being able to contribute to our household and our farming business and get stimulation from that. For example, when my arms were messed up, just being able to hang out the washing was an accomplishment.”

“Staying connected and spending time with my family, our staff and mates was another big one. That was key for morale.”

“Keeping fit was important too. I soon learnt that exercise is great for the mind. It just feels good to be moving round. When my arms were weak I did weights every couple of nights in the lounge to regain some strength. I did a lot of walking too.”

“The last thing I found really helped was having a laugh. It’s important to be able to laugh at yourself and not take life too seriously,” he says.

He also came up with a strategy for managing stress as he battled to get well – focus on the process.

“If you can just focus on the process of something rather than obsess about the result, I find it really helps. In a farming context, for example, instead of worrying about your lambing percentage, if you just focus on putting the

“If you can just **focus on the process of something rather than obsess about the result, I find it really helps.”**

ram out, getting the genetics right, keeping the sheep healthy, feeding them properly, all those process things, then before you know it you’ve reached your result. That’s been a big thing for me. When I had a setback I just focused on the practical steps I needed to take to improve things. Before I knew it, I was back at 90 percent.”

There’s no doubt that Jack’s experience has given him a greater appreciation of life and farming as a whole. These days he sees the ‘big picture’.

“As farmers we’re buffeted by so many external factors beyond our control that it’s easy to focus on the negatives and forget about the good things that are constantly happening. That’s why it’s important to celebrate your wins. Instead of thinking, ‘it’s too dry’ or ‘there’s a big snow on the way’ or ‘the dollar’s too high’, why not celebrate the fact that your ewes are in tremendous order, your feed is finishing your lambs well or your animal health programme means your cattle are healthier than ever. If you stop to notice and celebrate these things – and it could be as simple as just writing them down – I’m convinced it keeps you and your business in good shape.”

Jack’s been giving talks to other farmers about what he has learned and has completed a Kellogg project at Lincoln University exploring how farmers cope with adversity.

“I interviewed farmers who’ve faced adversity and



change – personal, financial or climatic – and pulled together some simple ideas on what can make farmers more resilient. As farmers we are buffeted by so many external forces that we do need to be resilient.”

“The things I did – exercise, rest/recovery, focusing on the process during my rehab, celebrating success and connecting with and learning from others – really worked for me. I’m happier and more content, I’m also fitter and stronger when I’m working in the business. My life is better balanced now.” 🌟



Megan Whitehead, Gore's champion shearer

The making of a world record



Gore shearer Megan Whitehead recently set a new women's world shearing record clipping 661 lambs in nine hours. It's a remarkable achievement for a 24-year-old who has only been shearing four years. Here are some insights into how she did it.



“If you want to get better at something, you’ve got to learn to work outside your comfort zone.”

How did you feel the day after?

“I felt quite normal really. Not too bad. I was a little bit tight in some of my muscles but overall I felt pretty good. It was a relief.”

Why did you get into shearing?

“I love the physical side of shearing and the competitive side too. In shearing, you get paid on how hard you want to work. I get a lot of satisfaction from pleasing the farmers and leaving work every day after reaching my targets. It’s very satisfying. It’s also fun racing people every day. I love that side of it.”

Tell us about your preparation for the record. What did you do?

“To break the record, I did a lot of training and completely changed my diet. I was going to the gym six nights a week after shearing. I was doing a lot of mobility work and cardio work. I’ve always stretched before work.”

“I quit caffeine, alcohol, sugar and bread and most dairy products for seven





Megan with former record holder and champion shearer Emily Welch, who was there on the day to support her.

months. I was eating a lot of high protein foods – salmon and fish and small amounts of red meat.”

“I also went over the mental side of things – learnt breathing techniques such as box breathing where you hold your breath for five counts and then breath out for five counts. It’s a good way to relieve stress.”

“I also did 20-minute meditations. That relaxes you too. When you’re shearing you’re constantly thinking. It’s such a big mental game. You’re hitting targets and pushing yourself to the limit.”

What was the biggest challenge on the day?

“To set a record, it’s not just the physical side, you’ve got to be mentally strong and prepared as well. You constantly need to keep yourself in a positive and good head space.”

“During the last run, the sheep weren’t quite sitting, so the last run was mentally very tough. I wasn’t too tired at all, but it was just mentally draining to stay focused.”

“But there was no way I was ever going to give up. When you really want something, and love doing something so much, you just keep pushing through. That’s why I had Dad as my second. He was constantly talking to me and keeping me positive as well. It was a real team effort.”

What did you learn from the experience?

“You do go through a lot of pain in shearing, but if you come to terms with it, it becomes your friend after a while. You’re working alongside it all the time to push yourself to be better. You have to push yourself out of your comfort zone. That’s the main thing I’d say. If you want to get better at something, you’ve got to learn to work outside your comfort zone.” 🟡



Hamish Murray, committed to team-building

Lessons from the best

High country sheep and beef farmer Hamish Murray spent a year on a Nuffield scholarship studying businesses with high-performance team cultures. What he discovered was that before you can work on your team, you need to work on yourself.

“Everyone talks about these companies in Silicon Valley and how they’re so great. **What do they do to make people love working there?”**”

Hamish Murray has an impressive CV. He’s played top-level sport, studied overseas and now works with a team of seven full-time staff running Bluff Station in the Clarence River Valley. The diversified operation includes 5500 merino ewes, 950 Angus and Hereford breeding cows and 750 beehives.

“I love the variety of farming. The particular valley and property where we are just gets into your blood. It’s isolated and beautiful. I love being outdoors with our animals. I’m happiest when I’m out riding a horse and shifting stock. I spent the earlier part of my life getting an education and learning to do things other than farming, but for me coming back to farming was about giving my children the opportunity to grow up the same way I had. Learning to dam a creek, ride a pony, shoot a rabbit, those kinds of things. That’s the main reason we love doing what we do – just being able to have our children (seven, five and three) as part of our working life,” he says.

But none of that prepared him for the drought of 2014/15 that hit Marlborough and North Canterbury. “I’d always pushed myself physically and mentally in anything I’d done. But I’d never reached breaking point. We ended up with stock on 14 different properties! Trying to keep everyone going when you had no control over anything was so draining. I reached an emotional breaking point I hadn’t experienced before,” he remembers.

“The funny thing at the time was that I didn’t think I needed any help! It wasn’t until my sister pulled me aside and told me to get some professional help that I began to realise. It still took me another six to eight months to begin that journey, which has now continued for more than five years!” he laughs.

Hamish’s saving grace was that he loved learning as much as he loved farming. “Anytime I’m learning something new, I’m excited and energised. So that’s what I did. I realised there must be a better way to look after myself and staff we work with, so began a journey to discover my own values and source of energy, learning to lead myself before I could lead our team.”

First, he began by analysing his own strengths and weaknesses with a professional coach from outside the farming world. He quickly realised the traditional concept of ‘the boss’ having all the answers was not only personally unsustainable, it was holding others back.

“The biggest thing I learnt is that leadership means dropping your ego and getting out of people’s way. Once you work out what fills your cup – what you’re actually good at – you’re much more open to getting help with the rest. But to do that, you need to drop that idea of being ‘the boss’. For me now, leadership is about asking the questions that help others achieve. It’s more of a coaching role.”

Hamish’s Nuffield studies involved spending time with a range of businesses from Silicon Valley, California

“The particular valley and property where we are just gets into your blood. **It’s isolated and beautiful.** I love being outdoors with our animals. I’m happiest when I’m out riding a horse and shifting stock.”



to Health Care in the Netherlands and the Crusaders rugby franchise in Christchurch. Their constant focus on 'soft skills' and shared values wasn't lost on him. He soon started applying the approach to his own business.

"Soft skills are things like the way you communicate, make decisions, reflect and feedback as a team. Everyone has a preferred style based on their nature so it's about developing that self-awareness together as a team. Making an effort to understand why people are the way they are."

"We've also done an exercise with our team to agree on what values will drive decisions in our business. Ours are – stand together and celebrate success; back yourself and own it; have fun – 'this is it' and 'be your best self'. We try to have one or two team sessions each year to look at ourselves and refresh those ideas."

Hamish's family has also worked out their 'why'. "We've agreed as a family and a business that we want to share the joy we get out of farming and help the people who work with us to grow. If we can share our land and produce and experiences with others then we'll enjoy our farming."

He's confident it's paying dividends. "Obviously you can't put a dollar value on it, but in the last five years our staff turnover has been minimal so that's a great measure. It sounds a 'soft' thing but as farmers it's really important to create an environment that allows others to flourish. That's how you attract and keep good people. We've learnt our staff are every bit as ambitious as we are."

"Everyone talks about these companies in Silicon Valley and how they're so great. What do they do to make people love working there? It was great to dig in and see what made those places tick and apply some of those things back in my own business."

"So even though we are a long property and it can be about two hours from one end to the other, we still make time for face-to-face communication, not just about the business, but taking time to understand about people's



families and building trust and relationships around those things. Because when the chips are down, that's what keeps people together and pulling in the same direction."

His own life has achieved a better balance. Despite the demands of the business, every three weeks or so, he heads off-farm to recharge his batteries whether it's to play team sport or go for a bike ride.

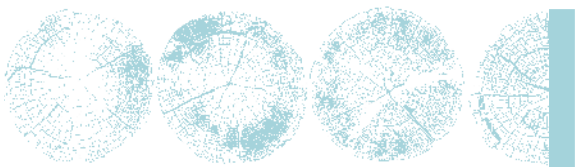
"Sometimes it's not until you get to breaking point, that your own learning and reflection kicks in. The journey for me started at a real low, but now I look back and think I'm incredibly lucky to have had that experience. The support I've had from my family and our team, the groundwork we've done together as a team has really given me the confidence to keep learning and grow our business." 🟡



Jason Halford: "When your bucket's full it's full."

'Falling off the perch'

Jason Halford's thriving sharemilking career was brought to an abrupt halt by burnout. Now he's sharing his story to help others avoid a similar fate.



“I was absolutely terrible at having time off. That’s why I burnt out. The sheer physical nature of the job broke me.”

In the space of eight hectic years dairy farmer Jason Halford went from being crowned New Zealand’s farm manager of the year to ‘falling off the perch’ with fatigue.

His career path in the industry was fairly typical. “I was a real hands-on farmer for 20 years. I’m a practical person, I learn by doing things, so I went dairy farming at 16. I did that for four years, made butter for a year at a dairy company in Pahiatua, did my OE, came back, got a degree and became a farm manager. I’m very passionate about farming and I loved working with people and animals. I’ve always been a worker. My parents were workers too.”

That drive and passion soon paid dividends. By 2011 Jason was earning accolades at the NZ Dairy Industry Awards. “I never thought I’d win that award, but I did and that’s something no one will take away from me. I look back on those times with great pride. Winning that award really grew my confidence as a farmer.”

His ambitions grew too. He planned to double his sharemilking business to 600 cows within three years. Understandably, much of his focus was on results and earnings, with farm ownership the eventual goal. But he was in for a rude awakening.

“Foolishly, I never stopped to listen to my body. I would just go and go, even when my body was telling me, ‘come on, time to pull back a bit’. I never thought I’d ever get to the day where I was sick of milking cows, but it just happened overnight.”

Jason recalls that day well. “It’s a bit like a Lady Di moment for me,” he laughs. “I was tending lame cows, my back was sore, I was tired of picking up cows’ feet and it just kind of broke me. I rang a friend of mine absolutely in tears and said, ‘I can’t do this anymore. This has taken too much of me.’ Now I’m a guy who wears his heart on his sleeve, but I’d never been like that before. I wasn’t just tearful, I was broken. I was just sick of working.”

During his recovery the reasons for his sudden collapse became clearer to him. “Farming’s an all-consuming job. I was the sort of person who would go and fix a broken gate at any hour, whereas someone else would’ve left it ‘til the next day. But the perfectionist in me wouldn’t allow that. Like a lot of farmers, I wanted to score an A-plus for everything I did. When I didn’t, I would beat myself up mentally.”

“So, everything in my life was out of whack. I had the option of reining it in too. I could’ve employed more staff, but I had to do everything myself. And I was absolutely terrible at having time off. That’s why I burnt out. The sheer physical nature of the job broke me. If I look back now, I was a zombie.”

It wasn’t just Jason who suffered either. He had a partner and young children. “I remember a conversation I had with my wife. I asked her how much of the parenting I was doing. And she said, ‘what do you reckon?’ And I said, ‘thirty, forty percent?’. And she went, “No, five

percent'. And I thought, 'oh man, that's shit'. I had kids who were five and three and I hardly saw them."

"I look back now and I just wasn't present. If anyone on-farm asked me for anything, I'd do it in a flash. But the people I loved the most were the ones I felt I could be apart from the easiest. I just thought, 'oh they'll understand'."

Once the penny did drop, Jason did whatever it took to get his life back in balance, but it was a long haul. "It took me nearly 18 months to recover from farming like that. It wasn't like next day I was fine. You actually do deplete your body so it completely runs out of energy. I felt like I'd worked the lives of two men. I think a lot of farmers are like that and we talk about it like it's a badge of honour, but that's not something I'm proud of anymore."

His route back to health came via the most unlikely venue – the local tennis club. "Tennis saved my life. I joined the community club at Takapau and the friends I gained from that were huge. It felt so good to get off-farm, get a break and socialise with other people. It got me out of that 'groundhog day' work pattern. If I hadn't had my tennis, I would've just kept grinding away. Tennis gave me a mental break too. When you're playing, you're not thinking about the farm, you're thinking about the ball coming back."

Jason also got involved running the club and enjoyed that. "I was Hawkes Bay volunteer of the



“We all want to provide our families with this great lifestyle, but if you’re not going to be there for them, what’s the point?”

month at one point, helping out as Vice President. That community aspect of life – giving your time and something back to others – felt very rewarding and helped me get back on my feet too.”

Regular exercise off-farm has since become a mainstay. “Farmers are physically strong people, so doing something active in my spare time is a big thing for me. I’d say to any farmer reading this, challenge yourself to train for and complete a big walk or a 10k fun run with your family or a group of mates in the next 12 months. You’ll come back feeling refreshed.”

He’s keen to share other painfully acquired insights as well, beginning with the importance of downtime. “To be a high-functioning person on-farm you need recovery time. The All Blacks don’t play 50 tests a year, but as farmers we often think we can do it, but you just can’t. It’s not possible. It’s going to catch up with you.”

“I think the longest stretch I had off in ten years was a week! So put yourself on the roster and back your team. If they aren’t up to it, train them better. Dairy NZ has fantastic resources.”

He offers similar advice on managing stress. “When your bucket’s full, it’s full. Don’t keep tipping in more challenges, decisions and problems so it’s overflowing. Look at the jobs that you don’t need to be doing. Do you need to be at every milking? Don’t put the cows on once a day, put yourself on once a day.”

Jason worries that the buoyant state of the industry could encourage others to over-work.

“Yes, there’s never been a better time to be a dairy farmer, but you’ve still got to make sure that you’re working to live, not the other way round. These high payouts are all well and good, but your body won’t care about that. When you’re tired, you still need to stop.”

“I think the bigger question farmers should ask is this – why are we farming? We all want to provide our families with this great lifestyle, but if you’re not going to be there for them, what’s the point?”

“A cow eats grass, produces milk and goes to the cowshed, but that doesn’t have to be the limit of our lives. We can live more broadly, but to expand our world and meet people outside farming, we have to schedule time off.”

“What I went through was horrible. At one point, I was so disconnected that even my dog wouldn’t come up to me! That was an awful place to be and that’s why I’m speaking up now.” ●



FUNDAMENTALS

Understanding stress and burnout



Sarah Donaldson of TEA Health and Wellness is a clinical psychologist from a farming background in the Wairarapa. She has extensive experience working in the farming sector. Here are her insights from an interview

with Farmstrong into how farmers can manage stress and burnout.

What does dealing with stress have to do with farming?

Farming offers a unique set of circumstances in that there are a lot of factors that are outside someone's control, such as climate, schedules, prices and so on. Also, farming is not just someone's occupation or livelihood, it is also their lifestyle and family life. That can really up the ante in terms of stress.

How does stress work and affect our performance?

The easiest way for farmers to think about stress is to see it as a physical thing. We all have stress hormones in our body. They are activated on a daily basis. They help pump us up, get us out of bed and down to the yards to get the job done, but if we are feeling overwhelmed, under threat, have too much to do or feel everything is out of our control those hormones pump up even more. The difficulty comes when the hormones pump up our arousal levels for too long without a break. That's hard for our body to sustain.

What's the difference between healthy and unhealthy stress?

From an evolutionary point of view, we're built to use stress hormones to pump us up to face challenges and then to come down and have some recovery time before we go up again. Healthy stress gives us energy, it helps keep us motivated, focused and alert. That's when stress works well for us. It's when those levels of arousal are ongoing and we can't sustain them that the cracks begin to show.

What are the main signs of unhealthy stress?

The signs of unhealthy stress are when our thinking becomes a bit jumbled and we have lots of intrusive thoughts. When we are constantly thinking, 'What have I got to do next? What else have I got on? How am I going to manage that?' That intrusive kind of thinking can be draining and distressing for people.

On the physical side of things, unhealthy stress makes it hard for people to switch off at the end of the day. It often means we're not sleeping well or waking up during the night thinking about what we've got to do the next day.

How can I keep track of whether I'm stressed or not?

One of the biggest signs of stress I see is irritability. People lose their tolerance and little things start to bug

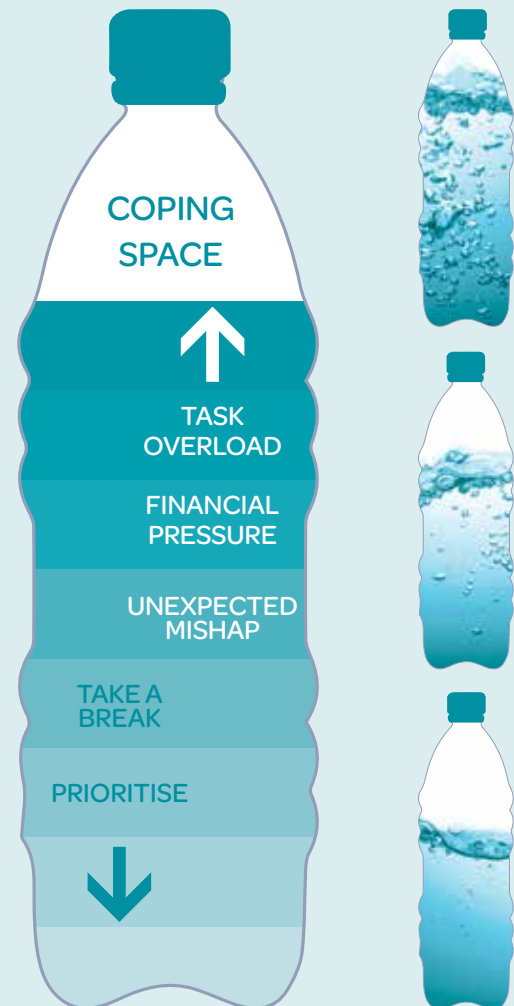
them a lot more. That means you have a pretty short fuse and partners, kids and animals can often feel the brunt of that.

Irritability is often the first sign, feeling tired and losing a bit of motivation are others. Feeling churned up inside is another. If our thinking loses focus, becomes jumbled or we find it hard to make decisions that's another sign of unhealthy stress.

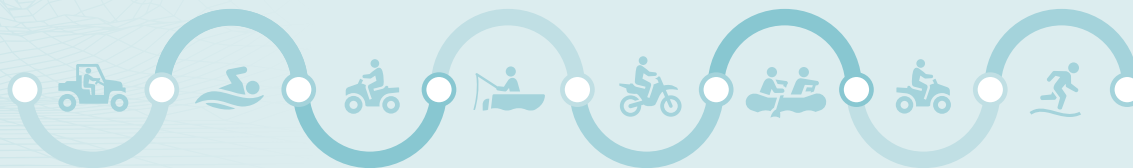
You use the example of a bottle to keep track of stress levels? How does that work?

The coping bottle example imagines that everyone's got a two-litre bottle inside them and when a demand comes along, it fills up the bottle. If we are docking and going hard out, it fills up the bottle, then when we stop and recover, the level in the bottle comes down again.

But what often happens is that multiple demands build up – a tractor blows up, financial pressure comes on, there's an outbreak of something on the farm – so all these factors build up and before you know it you are up to the top of your bottle, there's only the neck left! So it only takes the smallest thing to cause an explosion because you have no space left to cope. It's often the smallest thing or muck up at work that sets it off. It's not really about that event, it's the fact that the person is full up with everything else. People need to be aware where their bottle is at.



FUNDAMENTALS



So how can I stop my bottle from filling up?

The biggest thing is awareness. Knowing that when you've got a bit on your plate it can take its toll. That's not a sign of personal weakness. It's the same for everybody. If you feel like you or a partner are not coping, it's about being proactive and coming up with an action plan. Instead of trying to do everything, it's about asking yourself what are the one or two top things I need to work on right now. Is it de-stocking, fertiliser, getting extra staff on – what's going to make the biggest difference? Focus on the top two things and park everything else. Once you are feeling back in charge your stress levels will go down.

What's burnout?

Burnout is essentially your body hitting the wall and saying 'I've had it. You should've given me a break and you haven't.' Your body is letting you know that it is mentally and physically exhausted. It can no longer sustain being pumped up. That's when people feel really low and flat. It's also when our immune systems become compromised and we are more likely to get sick. People become more susceptible to things like the flu at the end of a busy period.

What's wrong with just toughing it out and working through? Isn't taking a break only going to make things worse if you're busy?

No one can stay at the top of their game doing 100 percent on an ongoing basis and remain efficient. It's

just not how we are built. If you want to be sustainable you've got to inject recovery periods. Sometimes that's a bit challenging for people. They think the harder they work, the more they'll get out of it. But it doesn't work like that. You'll start to become more inefficient and make mistakes or become stale and unmotivated.

How does thinking in helpful ways reduce stress?

One of the things that helps us become more resilient is how we interpret a situation. For example, here in the Wairarapa we've been in the grip of a drought for a couple of years. If you're thinking is 'How long is this going to go on? This could be the worst season yet,' then my questions to you would be, 'how do you feel when you think like that and how does that help you?' And the answer is, it doesn't help you at all, except to wind you up. And it doesn't give you any actions you can do to make things better.

So, if you can look at a situation in a more helpful way it gives you better balance and helps contain distress. A more helpful approach would be, 'Yes, it's a bit of a tough year but the long-range forecast is more promising and every farmer in this area has been through this before and got through ok. We've just got to tighten the reins and learn what we can for next time.' Helpful thinking is about catching those negative thoughts and then thinking about the situation in ways that reduce stress rather than increase it.



What are some of the other things farmers are doing to deal with stress?

If you are struggling to cope with stress, that's when it's good to talk to others about it. Surround yourself with people who are upbeat and pragmatic and able to give you a different perspective.

Connections with family and friends, professionally and in your community, are a big part of staying well. Everybody needs to be able to call on extra resources from time to time. These people may see options you can't.

How can you build resilience to cope with busy times on the farm?

When people are under pressure the things that go out the window are often the factors that keep us well. Things like socialising with other people, exercise, nutrition, continuing to learn, contributing to the community. That's your off-farm stuff. Getting off the farm – whether it's hunting, motocross or kids sport – it gives you respite. Building in those enjoyable activities is really important.

How do you deal with stress as a couple?

Communication is obviously key. It's about talking through issues together, formulating a plan and sharing the load to get things back on track. Again, it's all about awareness. Realising when you or your partner's coping bottle might be full.

What's your main message about dealing with stress on the farm?

The biggest thing to manage stress on the farm is to inject recovery periods into your days and into your weeks. Time for lunch, time to join a sports club, time for holidays. Make those breaks part of your business plan. Don't think of recovery time as a luxury, think of it from a business perspective.

Wellness is not some fuzzy idea, it's about keeping fit and well so you can be sustainable in your job over the long term. If you want to stay in this amazing industry, you've got to be proactive about your health. ●



“Mental fatigue is a real hazard on the farm. It impairs you like alcohol would and leads you to make decisions you normally wouldn’t. If you are fatigued operating a quad bike or two-wheeler you could potentially have an accident that stuffs up the rest of your life.”

Stu Richards, Farm manager 2016

“I think in farming we often expect too much of ourselves. We’re expecting to win like the All Blacks, and then when we don’t, it’s like the wheels have fallen off. Farming shouldn’t be like that. It’s all about taking it a step at a time and actually appreciating the small steps.”

James Bruce, sheep and beef farmer

“I think farmers are classic at looking after their stock and their pasture and their buildings and their machinery, but they just work themselves into the ground. Burnout is a real thing.”

Siobhan O’Malley, Sharemilker of the Year, 2017



“At a *Healthy Thinking* workshop, Dr Tom said to me that it might just be burnout and I needed a break. I sat back in my seat. I hadn’t thought about that. It was probably true. You don’t think that you do, until somebody points it out.”

Stephen Andersen, horticulture manager



“The number one thing is to look after myself. If I don’t look after myself, I can’t look after my family, our team, our farm.”

Dylan Ditchfield, dairy farmer

 FUNDAMENTALS

A helpful thinking tool – catch it, check it, change it

The farming life is full of challenges and difficulties. Our thought processes, how we think about what's in front of us, has an enormous impact on our behaviour and ability to enjoy life.

Can we change the way we think and behave to be more positive? Is there something we can do to address a downward spiral of negative thoughts and emotions? The answer is definitely yes. A simple tool we recommend is called Catch it, Check it, Change it.

The negative thought cycle

When we notice something negative happening, or think about something going wrong, it triggers an emotion. The emotion might be frustration, anger or sadness and may lead to lashing out, berating others, or withdrawal. These can lead to a downward spiral where negative thoughts, emotions and behaviours reinforce each other.

One way to break the cycle is by noticing the negative thought and applying Catch it, Check it, Change it.

Catch it

When you get upset about a situation, imagine standing outside yourself and hitting the pause button. Take a deep breath, then see if you can catch your thought, notice the emotion you are experiencing, and any impulse to behave in a certain way.

Check it

Then examine the thought and decide if there is a more positive interpretation without denying the reality of the situation. Try to be curious about what's going on, rather than assuming you have all the facts. We often decide that the thought we're having is the one and only reality, whereas almost always there are a number of interpretations about what's happening, or what someone meant by what they said.

Change it

We can then change the thought to a more helpful interpretation, or at least reserve judgement. More positive thoughts will lead to easier emotions and calmer behaviours. If you do discover that the situation is the worst possible scenario, at least you have given yourself breathing space.

Applying this technique helps us get better at understanding how our thoughts affect our emotions in the long term and will ensure we are less prone to depression, anxiety and angry outbursts. 🟡

Source: Hugh Norriss, Farmstrong's content adviser, Farmstrong website. We are indebted to the BBC online health programme Headroom for the 'Catch it, Check it, Change it' concept.

“Just stop what you’re doing, jump in your ute, grab some fish and chips and watch the waves at the beach or go grab a coffee in town and chew the fat with a mate. If you just remove yourself from your work environment, even for a little bit, it really helps to put life back in perspective.”

Mark Meyer, Kaipara









Simon and his three daughters (from left to right) Kody, Jessy and Sammy

Live for **the day**

Simon Cook owns a five-hectare Kiwifruit orchard in the Bay of Plenty, runs a contracting business and holds a number of industry governance roles. Finding a work-life balance is critical to managing his busy life.

“It’s so easy to get isolated and trapped in your own space and your own head sometimes. That’s why you’ve got to make time to do other things.”

“You’ve simply got to make time for other things,” says Simon.

Sounds easy, but it’s a hard-won insight. Simon enjoyed a successful commercial career in Auckland before he took up orcharding in 2003. At first, he admits he was very hands-on. His ‘lightbulb moment’ was a conversation with orchard adviser and Kiwifruit pioneer Mike Muller, a legend in the Kiwifruit industry.

“My father and I were both flat out and stressed out, trying to keep up with everything. Mike was blunt and just told us that we needed to run the business, not be in the business. It was true. So I appointed a manager to take over the day-to-day running and that’s what freed me up to do the stuff I’m doing now.”

Simon still faces the same pressures anyone in industry faces, but work-life balance is part and parcel of the way he runs his operations.

“There’s always a big to-do list on an orchard and I live on-site as well. We’re a seven-day-a-week business and we’re also working in a weather-dependent industry, so we have to work when it’s fine.”

“The two main crunch times for us are spring when we’re doing things like spraying and harvest. I spend most of harvest sitting in a truck carting a lot of fruit round the district. It’s busy but I love that change of pace.”

Though he enjoys the busy times, he still makes time for the things he enjoys.

“I can always tell when I’m feeling a bit under the pump,” he says. “If I’m losing sleep then that’s a sign. Mainly that’s just down to the hours you have to put in sometimes. It’s a matter of recognising that and making time to get off orchard when you can. If you don’t, everything suffers.”

“For example, we work with our customers to make sure everyone in our team can still get a day off every weekend. There are times of the year we can’t do that, but most of the year we can. I actually lost a customer this year because I refused to do all his work on Sundays.”

Simon’s got a couple of past-times that regularly get him off the orchard and help him recharge. In winter, he plays senior club rugby and Golden Oldies rugby.

“Even at 45, I still love playing. I go to training a couple of nights a week over winter and play on Saturdays when I can. Why am I making time for this? At the end of the day, money’s not everything. I believe your own lifestyle is more important.”

There’s a back story here. Simon’s father-in-law owned a successful engineering business, got through to his mid 70s and retired. His dream was to sail round the world. He bought a yacht, but then got cancer and died before he could live his dream.

“That taught me a pretty good life lesson,” reflects Simon. “You only get one go at life and you’ve got to make time to enjoy what you’re doing.”

Family time’s an important priority. Simon’s got three

kids aged 11 to 14 and loves to take them wake boarding and water skiing in Lake Rotoiti. He sold up some shares in Zespri to buy the boat. "That's costing me dividends, but I'd rather have the memories than the money."

Simon's been in the industry long enough not to take anything for granted. "When PSA hit in 2010, we went through two years of dire times so things can easily change. Fortunately, since then it's been an upward trajectory. People aren't worried about getting paid these days, they're worried about getting through the volume of work."

"So, we're surfing a wave at the moment. It's a fun industry to be part of and everyone's doing well, but you've still got to remember to enjoy life while you can."

"My advice to anyone new to the industry is plan for the future but live for the day. If you're always focused on the future, you won't have enough time to enjoy today."

"The other thing is don't try and do everything yourself. Delegate. I remember when I was doing all the accounting work and billing for my business, I was reluctant to hand that over to somebody else. But now I love having an office administrator. That took a huge amount of workload off me."

"It's important to realise that no-one is indispensable and it doesn't actually help the business. If you're trying to do everything yourself, you'll never get anything done."

Simon's a fan of Farmstrong, which has started working with the horticulture sector.

"I think Farmstrong's fantastic. I like the way it encourages people to get off farm or orchard and get involved in their community. It's so easy to get isolated and trapped in your own space and your own head sometimes. That's why you've got to make time to do other things."

Last year Simon led the horticulture team in the annual growers versus farmers cricket match at the Te Puke Cricket Club. He also plays twilight cricket once a week over summer.



Wake boarding is a favourite leisure activity for Simon and his family.


"It's all about having a bit of a run around on a Tuesday night and a beer after. That social side, mixing with others, is so important to keep you fresh. Something like that becomes a real highlight in your week and something to look forward to, no matter how busy you are." 🌟





Chris Biddles, lucky to be alive

Farmers are not 'bulletproof'



Fatigue impairs people's ability to notice and respond to hazards on the farm. Northland beef farmer Chris Biddles learnt that lesson the hard way. He's lucky to be alive following a horrific accident in 2019.

“That’s the danger of fatigue. You do something you wouldn’t normally do.”

Chris runs Te Atarangi Angus stud at Te Kopuru, south-west of Dargaville. The family has poured 36 years of hard work into the thriving 1,000 ha, 260-cow operation.

Chris says he knows only too well the connection between feeling stressed and exhausted and making the poor decision that almost cost him his life. He flipped his quad bike after taking it down part of a ridge he doesn’t usually go down.

He managed to avoid being crushed by the bike. However, he suffered serious damage to his ankle and shoulder. He’s had multiple surgeries on his ankle and was wheelchair-bound for a period of time.

“I was really tired and I knew I was tired, and because of that, I made a dumb decision. I was riding the quad along a ridge to the safe place I usually go down, but I went past it and tried another place. As soon as I put the nose of the quad over the hill I knew I was stuffed.”

“I whacked it into 4-wheel drive quickly, but it just flipped. Luckily it catapulted me off and I landed quite a bit in front. But the quad was coming down behind me so I was scrambling. Then it landed on my ankle. There was virtually nothing left of it, so it’s pretty amazing I’m walking now. I broke my shoulder in half as well.”

The road to recovery for Chris is going to take a while. “Those days of 12 or even eight-hour days on the farm are long gone for me now. Fatigue is a huge risk. I remember being told at an ACC presentation years ago that ‘You’ll make a decision at 2pm on your quad if you’ve been riding all day that you would not make at 8am in the morning.’ That proved to be so true.”

“That’s the danger of fatigue,” he says. “You do something you wouldn’t normally do.”

Chris says farmers need to stop thinking they’re bulletproof.

“You need to take stock of your situation. You have to listen to your body when it’s telling you that you need a break or some time out.”

Since his terrible accident, Chris has implemented several new safety measures on the farm to ensure accidents like that don’t happen again.

Chris’ top tips

Talk – In our team meetings, we discuss people’s physical and mental state. We now share that sort of stuff.

Things can wait – We’ve reduced our working hours. And we simply don’t have the long days that we used to have. Everyone has agreed not to start a new job after 4pm when fatigue may be setting in.

Check in on your wellbeing – Diary in a weekly reminder to check in with yourself about how you’re feeling physically and mentally.

Slow down – Sit down with a cup of coffee and ask yourself ‘If I keep doing everything the way I am, am I putting myself and other people at risk? Do I need to slow down?’ 🟡

Postscript: Since this story was written, Chris had his injured leg amputated below the knee. He has had a prosthetic limb fitted so he can ‘get back to working full-time on farm’. We wish him all the best in his recovery and thank him for continuing to share his story to help prevent on-farm injuries to others.



Amber Carpenter with husband Fraser, Oliver and Noah

From fashion to farming

Amber Carpenter swapped the world of fashion for dairy farming. In 2017, she and her husband Fraser won Auckland Hauraki Share Farmer of the Year. Here's what she learnt along the way.

“We looked at everything that we could control to get us through. Staying calm, working it out and writing it down. That’s what relieves stress.”

Amber and Fraser milk 550 cows in Paparimu, south of Auckland and manage a team of three. The two met at a 21st while Amber was working for fashion house Karen Walker. It was an unlikely match-up. Amber was a Buckland’s Beach ‘city girl’, Fraser was a fourth-generation dairy farmer.

Initially Amber continued her fashion role, commuting two hours into the city, but as country life grew on her, she decided to switch careers. “When Fraser moved from farm assistant to farm manager, we made a decision to go sharemilking,” she says.

The pair are now into their sixth season and married with kids. It was a steep learning curve at first, admits Amber. “I was used to being in a busy office environment. So being at home in an isolated environment with a newborn baby was a huge change. I missed the interaction with others and the challenge.”

Amber soon discovered that study was a great tonic for the way she felt. First, she completed a Kellogg’s research paper into reducing dairy farm greenhouse gas emissions through farm diversification and now she’s studying towards a Diploma in Agribusiness.

“I really thrive in that classroom setting, talking about things outside my own bubble. When I got back, Fraser said, ‘Oh, there’s the Amber I’ve been missing’.”

Since then, the pair have made a conscious decision to make work/life balance one of their core business values. “When we first started, it was just work, work, work.

To be fair, we both get a lot of energy from working and are very goal-oriented. But now we work equally hard at balancing work, family and time off to do other things.”

They’re mindful of their team’s work/life balance too. “Our weekly rosters include people’s off-farm extra activities. If someone wants to play soccer one night, they just let us know and maybe that person finishes early or we milk earlier.”

The pair have scheduled regular recovery time into their busy farming calendar. Amber heads off-farm to play netball and connect with friends and also sets aside ‘me time’ for trips into the city.

“Sometimes as a farming mum, you feel that guilt, that you’re being selfish, but I’ve learnt that if I don’t take time for myself then I’m not going to be a great mum or partner. I need to allow myself time out to do exercise or have coffee with a friend or get my hair cut. I need that space in my life, otherwise I get grumpy. As much as I’d love to be a stay-at-home mum, I’m just not that person. I need something for myself to be a better mum, wife and friend.”

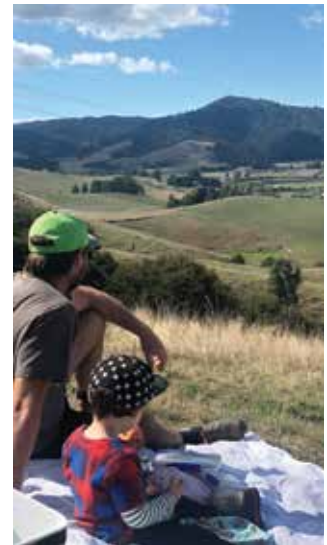
Amber says she and her husband are ‘active relaxers’. Trouble is the nearest gym’s an hour’s round trip away. So the pair invested in a personal trainer who visits and runs workouts for them on-farm. They also book a decent break away each year, no matter what’s happening with the payout.

“I remember in our first year, even when the payout was horrible, we did a trip to Taupo and gave ourselves the challenge of not spending much – like, where’s the cheapest place we could eat and stay? It was fun,” she laughs.

Managing financial pressure was something Amber was already well used to as a fashion industry buyer. She says the main thing is to focus on what you can control. The recent drought has been a good test of that. “Obviously we can’t change the fact there’s no rain, so we thought outside the box and looked at different feed options. We explored bread and biscuit off-cuts locally and in the end we harvested some of our green feed maize earlier. We looked at everything that we could control to get us through. Staying calm, working it out and writing it down. That’s what relieves stress.”

She says the dairy industry is also very supportive. “One thing I’m passionate about is working with organisations such as the New Zealand Dairy Industry Awards and Dairy Women’s Network. These off-farm involvements have been wonderful. It gives me a break from our farm business and, as we are all dairy farmers and experience similar challenges, we can help each other out. They’ve become a big part of our support network.”

Back on farm, Amber says achieving work/life balance will always be a work-in-progress. “It’s about finding what works best for you. The main thing is: be kind to yourself. Whether it’s a drought, a low payout or calving in a cold winter, work out what you need to get through. It might be exercise, a hobby or a roster that works better for you. No one gets it right all the time, but if the intention’s there, it’s much more likely you’re going to have a good day.” 🟡





Dairy farmer Paul Walker

'A banter over a beer'

Taking time out to spend with your mates is a great stress-reliever. But letting off steam is only part of it. Being a good listener is important too.



Sam Whitelock pays a visit to Paul Walker's farm

Paul and Pip Walker run a 300-cow, 90-hectare dairy farm in Pongakawa, just south of Te Puke, in the Bay of Plenty. Pongakawa can get very wet in winter and Paul's farm is low-lying, just above sea level.

"If we have a cold, wet winter it can be a real slog. Sometimes it lasts into November. When you're pulling calves out of mud, those winters can feel very long. And if your animals are under stress, it puts you under stress."

Two years ago Paul formed 'Benaud's Backyard Bumpkins' (after legendary cricketer Richie Benaud), a social cricket team comprised of local farmers and growers. Once a week for 16 weeks every summer they get together to 'recharge their batteries', get some exercise and more importantly, have a 'banter over a beer'.

"I find talking to others really helps relieve stress. When you live where you work, you definitely need an

excuse to get away. It might be just one night a week, but the cricket makes you get off the farm and allows you to 'let off steam' with other guys who can relate to your situation. They're doing long hours like me. They know how stressful flooding can be. They get it."

"Our partners and wives have all commented how beneficial it's been. That's why they're keen to make it happen too. The trick is to just plan for it and find the time like any other task on the farm."

"In farming you could just keep going 24/7 if you wanted to. There's always something else you can do. But no one can go 'hammer and tongs' the whole time. You've got to look after yourself or you're not going to last. Sharing the journey with others is a big part of staying well." 🟡





Sam Whitelock – Farmstrong Ambassador

‘Don’t let a setback define you’

Rugby legend Sam Whitelock has learnt a lot about dealing with stress and pressure. With his sport and farming background, he is the ideal Ambassador to relate his experiences to New Zealand’s farmers and growers.

“It was a really successful year but I knew that if I did it the next year I was going to crash and burn, get injured. Mentally I would not have been in a good space.”

Sam Whitelock grew up on a dairy farm in the Manawatu, according to him ‘the scrawniest of four boys’. The farm was a couple of minutes south of Linton Army Camp.

“Dad met Mum when he was down south shepherding and the story goes he stole her away and took her way back north. Our upbringing was very much like any other country kid. We were pretty rough and ready round the edges. It was full on, with four boys under five.”

Sam went to a small country school with a lot of cousins, then intermediate and on to Feilding High School.

“We were always rugby mad but we didn’t realise any of us had the potential to play at top levels. It wasn’t until I overheard a teacher say I could represent New Zealand that my thinking changed.

“When I left high school, I came down to Lincoln University, and met my wife Hannah on my first day. That’s when my rugby really took off. I ended up playing for Canterbury and in the space of 12 months I went from playing club rugby to starting for the All Blacks.

“It all happened immensely fast. I still don’t know how or why it happened but I’m really happy that it has. It’s been awesome and I’m still enjoying it now at 32.”

A few years ago Sam joined Farmstrong as its Ambassador, helping to get the ‘Live Well, Farm Well’ message out to farmers and growers via media interviews, videos, print resources and face-to-face events.

Sam knows from personal experience the

challenges which farmers regularly face. His Mum and Dad have two farms with two and a half thousand cows – his older brother is leasing one of them – and have always loved farming. But he has seen them go through some pretty tough times and seen the pressures they have been under. That’s what inspired him to get involved in Farmstrong.

“Mum and Dad had been farming for 35 years – they can roll with the punches to a point. But it’s much harder for those who are just a few years into farming. Thinking about that made me think that Farmstrong was a great initiative to be a part of.”

Sam says it has been a very rewarding role, with many people opening up to him about the challenges they face. “People come up to you and they shake your hand, look you in the eye and say thanks very much. You can tell they want to unload about the pressure they are under. They come up to me because they know I am involved in this area and Farmstrong is doing such great work. It’s cool that I can share with them the things I have learned over the last five years.”

Sam has had a hugely successful rugby career culminating in being named captain for the national side in the 2021 season. To last the distance, he has had to find ways to look after himself.

“2017 was a massive year for myself and my family. I had just been named captain of the Crusaders,



the Lions were coming, the All Blacks hadn't really performed as well as we could have, we were trying to buy a farm, my wife Hannah was due with our first child – we had all these different things going on.”

“I was really happy that I got through that year. I played good rugby but what I learned was that I couldn't carry on that way. It was just too full-on. It was a really successful year but I knew that if I did it the next year I was going to crash and burn, get injured. Mentally I would not have been in a good space.”

Looking after yourself involves a number of things. A good night's sleep is near the top of the list for Sam.

“Sleep is massive for me – making sure I get enough and it's good quality sleep. That year in 2017 I was up in the middle of the night with a thousand things going through my mind. I would get out my note pad, write down the things that were on my mind and then forget about them. As soon as I put it down on paper,



it made things seem simpler. It allowed me to prioritise things.”

Sam believes in using pressure to achieve things but it has to be the right amount of pressure. The 2011 World Cup was a time of massive pressure as we had not won a World Cup in 24 years. Within the group, the mentality changed to viewing pressure as a good thing, walking towards it, rather than running away and hiding. Media pressure was also relentless so they had to find ways to relax and get off the treadmill.

Another valuable lesson from the pressure-cooker world of rugby was learning how to deal with a loss. The crucial thing, says Sam, is not to let a setback define you.

“This is something we talked about after we lost the semi-final to England in the 2019 World Cup. We didn't perform as well as we would have liked. We can never go back and change that. But the thing is, I am not just a rugby player. I am also a husband, a father and a son, a brother, a friend, a university graduate, a Farmstrong Ambassador. I don't let rugby define who I am.”

“It's the same thing for farmers and growers who have to deal with a weather event or some other big setback that puts massive pressure on them and their families and communities. You can't let that one thing sum up who you are. I know it sounds easy to look at it



like that but sometimes that is all you need to do.”

“I get home and the kids don’t care whether you’ve won, lost or drawn, whether you’ve been the best or worst player on the field. They just want to see you and wrestle with you on the couch.”

Getting perspective on problems is vital for wellbeing, and so too is keeping in touch with mates and staying connected, says Sam.

“There are a lot of different tools like Snapchat or Zoom and Teams to keep families connected, especially when you can’t catch up in person like during Covid. For me I love getting on the phone and asking someone how their day has been and what’s been happening. Sometimes it’s a quick call but other times you talk about things that you normally wouldn’t.”

“Connection is massive, especially with kids and my wife at home. When you’re away, some days you just have to ring home and not give any advice because you are not there. Just listen – sometimes that’s all that’s needed.”

Being a good listener however doesn’t always come naturally, says Sam.

“With listening, the best technique I have been shown is to embrace silence. If you ask a question, just wait. Sometimes it gets to a stage when it is



uncomfortably awkward but just before you go to speak the other person will say something and you actually break down that barrier.”

Getting your feelings out rather than bottling them up is “something that works for me”, says Sam.

“Some days I will get home and I will be a little bit short. I will just ‘turn the tap on’ and I let everything come out. Hannah will listen to everything and say nothing and that is all I need. Get it all out rather than have the tap half on, dripping constantly.”

After rugby finishes Sam will go back to working in farming. He says that what he has learnt in his role as Farmstrong Ambassador will be hugely valuable to help him and his family to “Live Well, Farm Well” in the years to come. ●

You Matter, Let's Natter

Sam on what makes a good listener



Choose a good time.



Begin with a simple question like 'how are you getting on?'



Be comfortable with silence, let the other person do the talking.



Don't jump in with your solution to the problem.



Keep an open mind and be non-judgemental.

Sam Whitelock
FARMSTRONG AMBASSADOR





Being a good listener



What makes a good listener? As part of Farmstrong's 'You Matter, Let's Natter' initiative at Fieldays, dairy farmer Paul Walker spent a day trying out his listening skills. Here's how he went.

"Just staying focused and concentrating on what the other person's telling you takes practice and is definitely a skill. Another thing I struggled with was to listen rather than provide solutions. As farmers we're so used to problem-solving but it's not that helpful if you leap straight in with all the answers. It's like you're passing judgement."

"One of my apprehensions was that I wouldn't be qualified to help, but you soon realise people have their own solutions and ideas. They just want to talk and the fact you're a farmer is a real plus. That's the beauty of farming - we're not in competition with each other. We can share ideas and information without it being detrimental to our businesses."

"I think farmers are definitely dropping their guard a bit these days. There were plenty coming forward to me with all sorts of stuff. We're getting past that thing of someone asking 'how you doing?' and the other person just going 'fine'."

"As farmers we need to use everything at our disposal to look after each other. One of the easiest resources we have is a set of ears! I spoke to a lot of farmers at Fieldays and you could just see when they walked away that their backpack didn't feel quite so heavy. There's no doubt that having a friendly ear to turn to is much better than having none." 🌟







“The traditional view of a shearer was a hard-working, beer-drinking man who rolled up to the shed, bored into it and started sending sheep down the porthole. Now, most shearers are much more like athletes. They eat healthily. They do warm-ups and stretches. They look after their bodies, take their breaks and rehydrate regularly so they can think clearly. It’s a different game.”

Mark Barrowcliffe, NZ Shearing Contractors’ Association



Dairy farmer Duncan Rutherford

Creating a decent work culture

A thriving Canterbury dairy operation puts as much thought into looking after its staff as it does stock and pasture.

“... you do have to look after yourself and your staff because if you don’t, you won’t enjoy farming as much, your business isn’t going to thrive and people won’t want to work for you.”

Dairy farmer Duncan Rutherford has plenty to keep him busy in Waiau, North Canterbury. He manages an operation with 14 staff, 2,300 cows, as well some sheep and beef, on a 3,300 hectare property.

Duncan’s career mirrors the way the industry itself has changed in recent years. “This farm used to be a reasonable sheep and beef farm, but the flats were hardly farmed because they were so dry. Being able to irrigate changed all that. It’s been a huge transformation.”

The main challenges for the operation are climate-related – water restrictions and drought – but Duncan’s put farm systems in place to minimise the pressure on staff. “We make sure our farm managers always have a lever to pull in terms of buying feed or de-stocking. There’s always a way out for them so they don’t get stressed.”

Duncan has created a workplace culture where people’s wellbeing is at the forefront of the way the whole business runs. “Day-to-day dairy farming can get pretty mundane, so you need to create a good team culture. I’m lucky I’ve got managers with good people skills who look after staff and create a decent culture. I don’t want junior staff coming to me not happy.”

“Farming can also get stressful at times and the pressures are different for everyone. If there’s a drought, for example, the farm owner and the farm manager will be getting stressed out, but if it’s a wet winter it’s the junior

staff that get stressed cos they’re out in the mud every day. It’s about being aware of things like that.”

Breaks and time off are essential to keep people fresh and on top of their game, says Duncan. “We’re lucky because we’re large enough to have a decent staff roster so people can get their breaks. But it’s also about running an efficient farming system so people aren’t out there working all hours of the day.”

Staff also get a chance to unwind. “We always have drinks on a Friday night and encourage people to get off-farm and play sport. We don’t see it as downtime, we encourage these guys to get out there and have other interests.”

“Being a good boss is just about treating people as you’d want to be treated yourself. Work hard but keep the hours reasonable. Make people feel valued and celebrate milestones along the way. For example, we have a staff dinner after we finish calving.”

There’s an important safety angle too. “ACC have got stats on the number of injuries that happen when people are tired and stressed out. It’s definitely unsafe for people to be operating gear when they are fatigued. We monitor our staff closely to see what tasks they can perform and how tired they are.”

Being the boss comes with its own stresses too of course. Duncan says he’s learnt to recognise the signs and take action. “If I notice myself getting a bit short



Duncan (left) hosts a barbecue for locals and Farmstrong Ambassador Sam Whitelock.

with my family that's when I know I need to get running or biking. I like training for adventure races and keeping fit. I'm training for the GODZone [three to four-day race across NZ wilderness] – that's the biggest race I've done."

Duncan uses an advisory board to share the load managing the business. "We have a couple of guys on it who are good mentors. I can bounce ideas off them and if anything is worrying me, we catch up four times a year and sort it out. A problem shared is a problem halved, as they say."

Duncan hosted Farmstrong Ambassador Sam Whitelock for a day. He says it gave him a real insight into the link between wellbeing and performance in both sport and business. "He's a great ambassador – what you see is what you get. It was an eye-opener for me about how much top athletes look after themselves to operate at peak levels. For example, I remember him talking about how important sleep is."

"I think rural people are starting to open up a bit more and realise this stuff is important. That you do have

to look after yourself and your staff because if you don't, you won't enjoy farming as much, your business isn't going to thrive and people won't want to work for you."

"The main thing is: surround yourself with good people. Create a positive team. If you look after your staff, they'll look after you." 🇳🇿





Brad Woodford and family

Learning the hard way

A farm manager has to deal with a lot of pressure and responsibility – targets to meet, owners to please. One particularly stressful experience taught Brad Woodford the value of looking after himself.

“Just getting out there and doing other stuff, meeting other people was by far the best way to cope with the pressures of being a farm manager for me.”

Years ago Brad Woodford was managing an 800-hectare sheep station when he got into an employment wrangle with the overseers. Long story short, there were millions of dollars at stake driving inadequate staffing levels and unrealistic and hurried production targets.

“They wanted hogget’s lambing at 90 kgs first year, when the mothers were only 55 kg average cull ewes!” recalls Brad. “But the non-farming investors had been informed this would happen, so unfortunately for me, when it obviously didn’t happen, their strategy was to blame the manager.”

Months of stress took a toll. “I was between a rock and a hard place. My reputation was at stake. I was one of those people who go into their shell when they’re stressed and don’t say anything. Some people put on a bit of a show or cry for help or get angry, but I never said anything to anyone, including my wife.”

He eventually realised it was a burden they shared. “All I could see was my own stress trying to get the job done, but if you’re stressed, of course it impacts your wife and kids too.”

Eventually things resolved in Brad’s favour and he and his family moved off that farm and got on with their lives. But the experience stayed with him and he’s worked differently ever since.

What did he learn? First, ask for help and don’t battle on alone. “Things got so tough for me that I rang

the Rural Support Trust and they were a huge help. I didn’t even need to meet anyone, just ring. But, like a lot of people, it took reaching crisis point to make that happen, which was crazy.”

The other issue he regrets ignoring was workload. “For over a year, I didn’t even have a shepherd. That was silly. I eventually put my foot down and demanded one, but I should have done it much sooner. I think you have to make sure you’ve got the tools and help you require so your efforts on farm are sustainable. We all try to give it a go, the old ‘I can do it alone, I can achieve it’ attitude, and often you can, but sometimes you need to be honest with yourself.”

When he left that farm, Brad went to great lengths to get some balance back in his life. “I spent time with my family in Whitianga, we moved closer to family, I started playing rugby again, which was a huge help because, recreationally, I’d got to the point that I was doing nothing.”

“When I was a younger shepherd I’d played rugby, but when I started managing I was sole charge, an hour and a half out of town and afraid of injury. So I stopped playing rugby and had no balance at all in my life other than drinking with my neighbour, who in hindsight, was probably in the same boat as me. Then when we left to manage a larger farm we were the only ones on the road – so we had no neighbours to hang out with! I was very isolated.



Brad (above centre) playing for Maramarua against Te Kawhata.

“Fortunately for my wife, she made lots of nice friends at the playcentre as our children were only young, but I was on the farm the whole time. I think the entire time we were there I went to one playcentre function – I should have gone to all of them.”

“So, when we shifted, I got involved in other community activities like kids sports and joined the school PTA, helped out on fundraisers and the like. I started to feel way better in terms of my wellbeing. The rugby club was a rural one so there were also other guys I could talk to about farm stuff. Just keeping fit did a tremendous amount for me too.”

Brad’s family also scheduled more breaks off-farm. “My in-laws have a bach at Whitianga so we started going there every other weekend or so. It was hard leaving the farm at first, but then you realise nothing’s going to die in two days, so you’ve just got to have a little bit of faith and go. Just getting out there and doing other stuff, meeting other people was by far the best way to cope with the pressures of being a farm manager for me.” ●



Dairy farmer Marc Gascoigne

Dealing with stress on the farm

The day Marc Gascoigne told family and friends about how stressed he felt was the moment his life began to improve.

“Really good friends of mine had no idea anything was wrong. Only I could decide to get help and get better.”

His message to other farmers who may be struggling with the ups and downs of farming is ‘stop bottling it up, start talking.’

“Really good friends of mine had no idea anything was wrong. Only I could decide to get help and get better,” he recalls.

Marc and his wife Maria run a successful 150-hectare, 450 cow, family dairy farm just south of Cambridge. The farm’s production rates and results are impressive enough to feature in industry case studies.

But years of long hours and pressure had taken a toll on Marc’s wellbeing. A few years back he started to feel ‘under the pump’. The trigger was continued wet weather over winter and spring.

“Weather was one of my main pressures. You can’t control it and if you’re talking about mental wellness that was certainly my biggest challenge. Wet weather makes everything difficult and adds a lot of stress to the whole farming system.”

Marc says a lot of his anxiety stemmed from concern for the wellbeing of his animals. “If they’re not happy, I’m not happy. Of course it’s always going to rain in winter and spring but when it’s constant rain, it makes it nearly impossible to properly feed them. That really added to my stress levels.”

Marc says things reached the point where the pressure felt ‘totally overwhelming’. “I couldn’t think straight. I remember going to get the cows one morning, and despite

nothing being wrong, I had a huge panic attack. I felt like the whole world was closing in on me. I felt absolutely shit-scared, but didn’t know what I was shit-scared of.”

“My body shut off the part of my brain that helps you make decisions. The phone would go, it would be one of my staff, but I just couldn’t answer it because I couldn’t make decisions. It was pretty crippling.”

Marc says he’d experienced those feelings for a while but never acknowledged them. “I’d always wanted to be the rock for my family. The strong one. I wouldn’t admit there was anything wrong.”

“The biggest part of getting better for me was admitting I had a problem and not trying to shut it away. The turning point was telling my family. Just admitting to people that I was suffering from anxiety and depression was a weight off my shoulders and huge relief.”

Now Marc’s made it his mission to share his story so other farmers seek help before they burn out. Two and half years on, his working life looks a lot different. Exercise – running and cycling – have played a major role in his recovery.

“When you’re getting stressed and anxious on the farm and dwelling on everything, the world closes in. I discovered the best thing I can do is pull on the running shoes and go for a run. It clears my head and gives me a sense of escape, I guess. It also burns off stress.”

Getting more time off the farm was another priority.

He hired help and learned to delegate. “I think having a relief milker is as important an investment as fertilizer or putting detergent through your milking plant. When I was younger I used to think, ‘I don’t want to spend that, I’ll do it myself.’ But that’s the wrong way to look at it. Yes, it’s a cost, but it’s your whole wellbeing at stake. Everyone needs time off.”

Marc also made greater efforts to stay connected with other farmers. “Getting off the farm and going to a DairyNZ discussion group is a great way to see how others are tackling the problem and helps you see your own farm with fresh eyes.”

Marc’s been farming for 24 years and his love for the industry hasn’t diminished. But nowadays when things get busy, Marc’s a lot easier on himself and uses a range of strategies to keep well. “I don’t get hung up with doing everything 100 percent during busy times. These days I use the 80/20 rule because it’s usually the last 20 percent of jobs that take the most time, getting things perfect.”

“A good example is how I used to go around after the contractors had put fertilizer on the paddocks and covered the bits the truck couldn’t reach on my four-wheeler and spreader. It was a huge amount of work at a really busy time. Now I leave those bits because it’s not going to make a big difference. My own energy levels and wellbeing are far more important.”

“The main thing I’ve learnt about staying well on the farm is before you can look after your family, your farm

and your animals, you’ve got to look after yourself. If you’re feeling tired, fatigued and not in the right head space, you won’t be able to look after what’s really important.”



“ ... before you can look after your family, your farm and your animals, **you’ve got to look after yourself.**”

Marc’s top wellbeing tips

Managing busy times

“Planning is the key. It’s important to have good systems and routines in place at busy times like calving so everyone knows what’s happening. Delegating and trusting stuff is a big one too. Make use of people like farm advisers. A lot of people are only too happy to share their experience.”

Sleep

“At calving time I used to get stressed and not sleep very well. My mind would be churning. Now I keep a piece of paper and a pen by the bed, write down the jobs I need to do and tell my brain to deal with it in the morning. That helps me get to sleep.”

Giving back

“I’m President of the Te Awamutu cycle club which ticks a lot of boxes in the Five Ways to Wellbeing – giving back, exercise, staying connected. We’ve got 350 members and run 40-plus races every year. When you’re helping people like that it energises you and makes a real difference to your own wellness.

Enjoying the simple things

“We run a bed and breakfast and have people from all round the world coming to stay. When I take them for a

tour of the farm in the ute and go to the top of the farm the view absolutely blows them away. That makes me realise how lucky I am to live in such an awesome part of the world. It’s easy to take that stuff for granted.”

Nutrition

“I’ve found exercising gives you appetite. It makes food taste so much better. I never skip a meal. When I was milking, I’d always grab a plate of cereal and banana before milking. I have fruit and snacks for during the day and try and eat a balanced diet.” 🍌





Cheyenne Wilson, dairy farm manager

Get a strong **support network** around you



Moving away from friends and family can be challenging for people starting a career in farming. Dairy farm manager Cheyenne Wilson passes on her tips for dealing with isolation.

“... I leave the farm when I’m not working. I need to be around people and I need to be around noise because it’s quiet on a farm.”

Cheyenne Wilson’s making great strides in the dairy industry – after just five seasons the 25-year-old is managing a 550-cow dairy conversion in Culverden. She was also recently a finalist in the Ahuwhenua Trophy Young Māori farmer of the year competition and is keen to encourage more Māori into the industry.

Cheyenne (Ngai Tuhoe, Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Tuwharetoa and Te Arawa descent) was raised on farms in Southland, trying her hand at different jobs including painting and working in the shearing sheds before finding her feet in dairying.

“Farming’s an awesome job. I like working outside and being around stock and no two days are the same. You learn something new every day. I’m passionate about what I do and I like to feel proud of how I farm.”

Life as a farm manager carries a lot of responsibility, but Cheyenne is aware of the need to manage that pressure and find a good balance between work and life outside farming. “This is my first season as manager, so it’s been a big learning curve. I’m pretty driven about what I do and work as many hours as anyone else in the industry. But I’ve learnt to recognise the signs of when I need to get off-farm and have a break – the sense that things are getting to me.”

She says one of the biggest challenges for young farmers is moving to a new area for work and leaving behind friends and family. “Managing the isolation is the

toughest thing. Moving to places where you know no one. That’s why I went along to a Young Farmers meeting the first week I moved to Canterbury.”

“That’s why I leave the farm when I’m not working. I need to be around people and I need to be around noise because it’s quiet on a farm. On my days off, I always get off-farm, whether it’s to catch up with friends or go hunting.”

It’s about giving back too, she says. In her previous assistant manager role in Ashburton, Cheyenne regularly whipped up Sunday dinners for fellow workers who hailed from all parts of the globe. “Those Sunday dinners were a great opportunity to catch up about life, not work. Traditional Māori values like manaakitanga – making everyone feel like family and feel welcome – are really important to me.”

Seeking out new connections and local farm networks is something Cheyenne’s got good at. It’s no accident she’s been a leading light in the local Young Farmers Club and Dairy Women’s Network wherever she has worked.

“It’s good to meet women in dairying in your region. Developing supportive relationships and being able to talk things through with others in the industry is a big help when you need advice.”

“It’s so easy to become isolated in farming and withdraw. I’ve noticed that happening to myself a couple



of times. It's about recognising that and putting in place strategies to cope. I've got a good network of people around me, dairy managers, rural professionals, Dairy Women, the Rural Support Trust."

"I've made sure I've established a network of people I can reach out to when I need to. People who are dealing with the same issues I am. People are willing to share knowledge and provide feedback if they can but first you've got to talk."

Cheyenne has kept learning (Level 5 production management with the Primary ITO) and also headed outside her comfort zone to grow her leadership skills. For example, signing up to be a regional leader for Dairy Women's Network and accepting opportunities to speak publicly at industry gatherings.

"I recently spoke to around 40 women at a combined Dairy Women's Network and Rural Women's network in Culverden. Things like that are a huge boost to your confidence and how you see yourself." 🌟



FUNDAMENTALS

Putting the right fuel in the tank



To farm well you need lots of energy. Nutritionist and registered dietician **Sarah Percy** from TEA Health and Wellness, talks about the importance of a healthy diet to farm well and enjoy life.

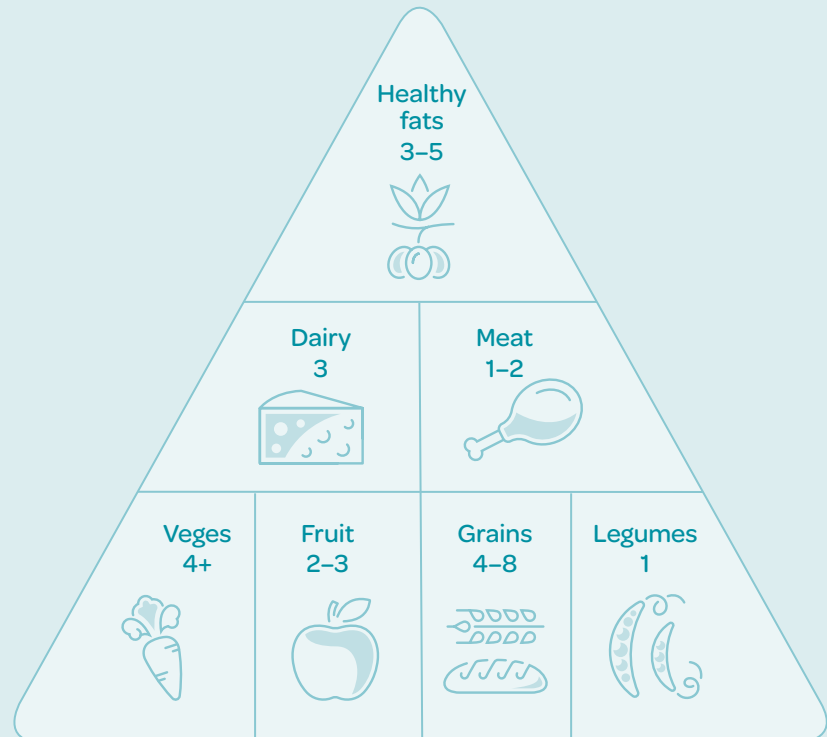
Eating well gives your body the energy and nutrients it needs to perform at its best. That's why a nutritious diet and regular meals are a must for a demanding job like farming.

The essentials

- Choose fresh, nutrient-rich food instead of processed foods.
- Stay hydrated. Keep water bottles handy where you are working.
- Eat something before you begin work in the morning. Starting work on an empty tank is not a great idea.
- It's best not to skip meals. Try and eat three meals a day.
- When snacking between meals to keep energy levels high, choose snacks low in fat, sugar and salt.
- Keep your fridge and pantry well stocked. If you keep good food in your fridge, you will eat good food.

Get to know the food pyramid

Eating well means choosing a balance of foods from the following food groups each day – healthy fats, meat and meat alternatives (fish, chicken, eggs) dairy, fruit, veges, grains and legumes. This food pyramid shows the numbers for recommended daily servings for the different groups.





Time-saving tips for busy farmers

Pre-breakfast snack options for early-morning milkers

Try smoothies, eggs, fruit, cereal, porridge, grainy toast with peanut butter. Prepare the night before if time is short.

Quick alternatives to a meat and three-veg meal

Try poached egg on toast; muesli/porridge with milk, yoghurt, nuts and chopped fruit; a smoothie; toasted sandwiches with cheese, onion, tomato, cold meat and chutney.

Create your own food bank

When you cook a casserole, bolognaise, curry or soup, cook a double or triple batch and freeze half. You'll soon have a freezer 'food bank' to use when work is flat out.

Cook once, eat twice

Cook a double batch of mince. Have a shepherd pie one night, the next use the leftover mince, mix in chilli beans and serve as Mexican wraps with salad and avocado.

Keep the pantry stocked

Have plenty of quick options handy in the store cupboard, such as tinned fish, tinned tomatoes, frozen veggies, rice and potatoes so that a balanced meal can be whipped up from pantry items. 🍌



“During calving, life is really busy. You have to look after those calves every day, and I also have three kids six and under. So being organised is the key, having that slow-cooker on, having the lunches made the night before.”

Siobhan O'Malley, Sharemilker of the Year, 2017

“One change we've made recently is around meal planning. If you know what you are going to eat for dinner each day and are well prepared in advance, that just takes the stress out of eating healthily.”

Donna Hintz, sheep and beef farmer

“If you're not eating well or getting enough sleep things can go downhill pretty quickly.”

Luke Tweed, sheep and beef farmer



“Whether you’re farming or playing sport, you need the right ‘fuel in the tank’ to perform at your best. Eat more unprocessed, natural foods – they’ll give you heaps more nutrients and energy. Avoid skipping meals and carry snacks during the day for when you need energy boosts. And have water handy. Poor hydration can really affect your decision-making and ability to perform.”

Sam Whitelock, Farmstrong Ambassador

“So if I’m out for two or three hours mustering, I always take a water bottle with me and carry snacks like fruit and snack bars. That way I manage my energy levels each day to get through to lunch or tea time.”

Joe Hintz, sheep and beef farmer

“I’m no athlete but I think having the right ‘fuel in the tank’ is a key thing with dairy farming. We all know you have to feed yourself, but when you get so time poor, it’s hard to achieve and easy to get run down. The worse you eat, the worse you’re going to feel.”

Stu Davison, dairy farmer

**“Farmers, growers
and workers are
the most important
asset on the farm.”**

*Sam Whitelock,
Farmstrong Ambassador*







Allan Fong, CEO of The Fresh Grower in Pukekohe

Older and **wiser**

If 65-year-old market gardener Allan Fong could dish out one piece of advice to his younger self, it would be to slow down and spend more time with his family.

Allan Fong, CEO of The Fresh Grower in Pukekohe, has recently stepped back from the job that has consumed his life since he was a youngster.

“My parents were from China and they started their own vegetable-growing business in Pukekohe in 1950 and us kids would help out before school and after school every day,” Allan says.

Allan and his younger brother Colin eventually took over the farm and recently Colin's three sons have taken up the reins.

"In the last 18 months I've stepped down a bit and am letting the young ones coming through take over a lot of the operational activities."

Being a business owner is very high pressure and takes a toll on your health if you're not careful, says New Zealand-born Allan.

"It's not a 9am-5pm job and there is constant pressure. When I was younger, I used to work crazy hours. I was working 100 hours a week, seven days a week and then about 20 years ago I had a stroke. I had to learn to quieten down a bit and take it easy," he says.

"I make sure I tell the young ones starting out to take breaks and have time off for holidays, take Sunday off, so they have more balance in their lives."

Allan says vegetable growing doesn't have a high profile in New Zealand like pastoral farming or the kiwifruit industry does, but it provides healthy, affordable food all year round.

"Our industry doesn't receive government subsidies or grants and we aren't part of a co-operative, so we very much have to stand on our own two feet."

He says the vegetable growing sector is very competitive and as a result many growers have left the industry.

"For example, 30 or so years ago there were approximately 33 Chinese families vegetable farming in the

area, now there are less than a handful. High compliance costs also contribute to the reduction of farms."

And COVID-19 has been particularly challenging.

"One third of our staff are usually backpackers and with the borders closed it's very challenging to find people who like working in this industry, which in turn has a negative effect on our productivity," Allan says.


"Hospitality businesses, such as restaurants, hotels and tourist resorts, represent 30 percent of our revenue. When lockdown happens and they close, it results in crops being unharvested and therefore a loss of income and jobs."

Allan, who won a prestigious Australasian agribusiness award in 2016 acknowledging him as an outstanding innovator and leader, says he's learnt that having breaks and delegating are important.

"I've cut back on the 3-4am starts and I can now delegate work to other people, which helps. I'm an old dog and my life was unbalanced with the amount of work I did," he says.

Allan, who has two children, says there's a big generational difference in the amount of hours people are expected to work.

"It's okay to not work ridiculous hours. We know now that people need time off and to take a break to look after their wellbeing," he says.

"Time goes so fast, and before you know it, your kids are grown up, so it's important to slow down and enjoy the moment." 



Dairy farmer, Tangaroa Walker

Lasting the distance



Tangaroa Walker was the inaugural winner of the Ahuwhenua Young Māori Farmer Award in 2012 and has gone on to a successful career as a contract milker. To last the distance in farming, he says, you have to have some laughs and excitement every day.

“I don’t rate the person that I was ten years ago as an employer, but I definitely rate the person I am now.”

Tangaroa still remembers the moment he decided to go farming. “I was 11 years old and this guy drove up the driveway of our school in this mean-as car with a beautiful girl and hopped out. He was there to help set up a cross country course. I said, ‘Hey man, what do you do?’. He said, ‘I’m a farmer.’ That was it. I ended up helping him out on his dairy farm when I was 13 and just cracked into it from there.”

Nowadays, Tangaroa manages a dairy operation on a 180 hectare, 500-cow dairy farm in Mabel Bush, on the outskirts of Invercargill. As much as he loves the job, he admits being a contract milker has its challenges. There are targets to meet, staff to manage – he’s on call 24/7.

“When you go contract milking, you leave the farm you’re currently on and take over running another one on the first of June. And there’s nobody there to tell you which way the power runs or where the water taps are or anything. So you could have a leak in a trough down the back of the farm and it’s really stressful because the cows are thirsty and you don’t know where anything is. You have to start again from scratch.”

Tangaroa says sometimes the pressure of running it all gets to him. So he’s put in place strategies to relieve stress and achieve a decent work-life balance no matter what the farm or the weather sends his way. He owns and runs a fitness gym in town with his partner,

plays competitive rugby during winter, goes free diving at every opportunity and makes videos for his own Facebook page, Farm 4 Life, which aims ‘to educate the public about life on dairy farms and how awesome it is.’ The page has 12,000 followers!

He says the best cure for stress is hanging out with mates and helping others. “I really enjoy free-diving and being able to drop off some crays or kinas to families and friends I know. I come back to the farm thinking, ‘Hey, I helped someone today’. It feels rewarding and you start work again feeling great.”

“Because I’m on call 24 hours here, we always plan a proper three-week break every year but I make sure I have a good lifestyle on the farm too. I like to start my day really early in the morning and get all my work done by ten o’clock. That frees me up to go to my gym or message one of the boys to see if they want to go out diving.”

Tangaroa’s also learnt to recognise the warning signs of burnout. “Once or twice a year, when things are really hard on farm, I’ll realise I’m struggling and go to my wife and cry. It just happens naturally. I try not to have it happen, but sometimes things just get on top of you.”

He’s got a plan for that too. “If I’m feeling down, I’ll ring my mates straight away and have a yarn. That’ll always lead to us going diving that week or playing rugby. Then all of a sudden the little dramas I had on farm that



Tangaroa Walker: "I make sure every single day I do something exciting."

were really getting to me feel like bugger all and I'm good to go again."

Tangaroa says he's also got better at trusting staff and delegating. And he makes sure his team spends time together that isn't based around work so they can have a laugh and enjoy a good work environment. "I've learnt to work with my staff at their level and not just sit on the carriage above and give orders. I don't rate the person that I was ten years ago as an employer, but I definitely rate the person I am now."

He says staying on top of the game physically and mentally is essential for keeping people safe too. "We're operating five tonne machinery and working around livestock. There are hazards everywhere. You've got to be on the ball every minute of every day on a dairy farm and make sure that you're rested, fit, your nutrition's up there and you're not stressed out and losing focus."

Sleep is something he's had to work at. "I used to really struggle to sleep if it was pouring down outside. I'd be worried about my cows getting hammered by the

weather. Being organised is the answer. If we're going to get a southerly now, I put the cows in the best paddock to protect them and then I can go home and sleep because I've literally done the best I can do for them and it's out of my control from then on."

Tangaroa says looking after himself has definitely paid dividends for the business but it's something that people often lose sight of.

"It's funny, isn't it? We go to school and do farming courses and learn about all these things, but nowhere do you learn about how to look after yourself by eating properly or making sure you call a friend when you're stressed. No-one teaches you that. That's why I think Farmstrong's the best thing since sliced bacon."

"I know I'm in an awesome industry and I'm passionate about it, but in order to do it for the rest of my life, I need to make sure every single day I do something that's exciting, that's fun, that I'm gonna get a laugh out of, otherwise why do it?" 🍀



Author Harriet Bremner

Helping kids through tough times

Author Harriet Bremner turned to writing to cope with her own grief when she lost her partner to a farming accident in 2017. Her new book, designed to generate discussion about mental health in rural communities, is proving a hit with schools and parents.

“Author Harriet Bremner wrote the book to ‘normalise conversations’ about mental health issues and help schools and parents pass on important self-care strategies to kids.”

‘Use Your Voice’ tells the story of two dogs. Huntaway Jess loves chasing sheep round the high country but the pressures of life get to her and she loses her ability to bark. No longer much use on farm, she finds herself confined to her kennel. As her mood changes, the colour slowly drains from the illustrations. A powerful metaphor for kids.

But help is at hand in the form of sausage dog Poppy who teaches Jess to share her feelings rather than bottling them up. The more Jess follows Poppy’s advice, the more the colour returns, until Jess is back to her old self, yapping and rounding up sheep once more.

Author Harriet Bremner wrote the book to ‘normalise conversations’ about mental health issues and help schools and parents pass on important self-care strategies to kids.

The book succeeds on both counts says Kathy Mehrtens, a teacher at Windwhistle school in Canterbury. Harriet recently visited there with the real-life dachshund Pops.

“Our children are taught strategies to strengthen their mental wellness, just as they are taught the importance of keeping physically safe and well. So it was loads of fun to have Harriet and Pops actually visit to help us deliver key messages about this,” says Kathy.

Harriet, a former primary school teacher herself, says the challenge now is to get the book into the hands of as many rural schools as possible.

“We know storytelling is one of the best forms of learning because kids really engage in role play and put themselves in the characters’ shoes. ‘Use Your Voice’ shows them that if you don’t talk about how you’re feeling, it’s as if you’ve lost your voice. It also teaches them what to do if one of your friends is feeling sad, or where to go if you’re feeling sad.”

“I wanted to show children what it can feel like when you’re battling with your mental health, you can feel caged-in just like Jess. So Poppy teaches Jess some self-help strategies. If one of your friends is crying, don’t just tell them to ‘suck it up’, check they’re okay and have a conversation with them.

“This is a story about hope and how to move through difficult times. All it takes to make a positive difference to Jess’ life is one dog/friend who believes in her and gives her strategies to work through her hardship.”

Harriet has a farming background. She grew up on an isolated sheep and beef farm in the Banks peninsula. Later she moved to the Hakataramea Valley to live with partner James, working as a specialist teacher at Kurow School and helping out on the farm when not at work.

This is her third children’s book in a rural setting.



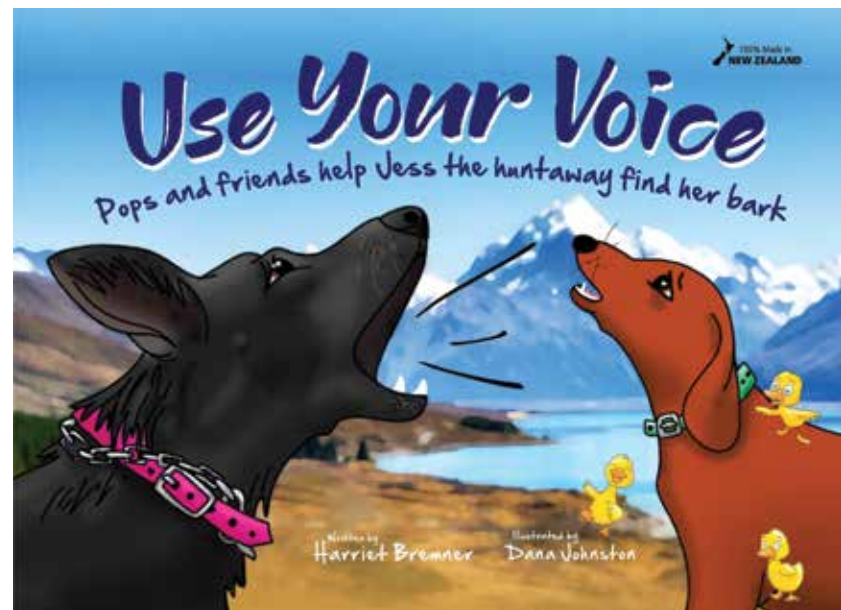
Author Harriet Bremner with her dog Pops and the children at Windwhistle School, Canterbury.

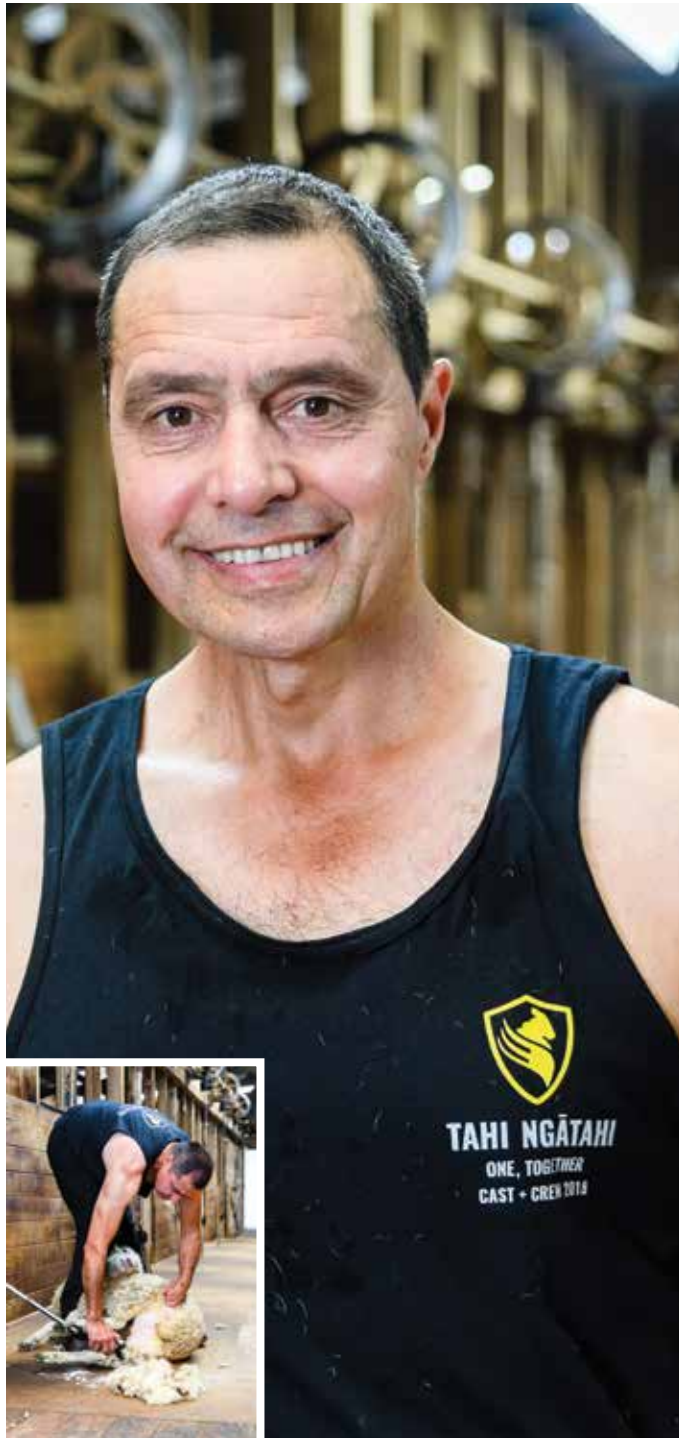
The first, 'Bob'n'Pops', a memorial book for James, her partner introduced her dog character Poppy. The second 'Be Safe, Be Seen' aimed at keeping children safe on farms from the practical perspective of having conversations with them.

'Use Your Voice' is already earning plaudits and was the winner of a 'Like Minds, Like Mine' Creative Grant supported by the Mental Health Foundation.

Harriet now lives beside the Fiordland National Park with her partner Ed on a sheep and beef farm, running her business and farming. In 2021 Harriet won the rural champion category for Rural Women NZ.

Copies of 'Use Your Voice' can be ordered online at www.harrietbremner.com 🌍





Looking after the shearers

Looking after mind and body is critical to the future of the shearing industry, says industry veteran Dion Morrell.

Dion Morrell runs a busy, Alexandra-based contracting business employing up to 50 shearers at peak time. He's worked in the industry for over 40 years, starting as a shearer straight out of school, working his way up to elite-level competition representing New Zealand and setting four world records along the way.

He still loves the industry, but believes the industry needs to present itself in a much more positive light.

"Shearing used to be a default career path for many school-leavers, especially young Māori. But those days are gone and we are struggling to attract young people."

Champion shearer Dion Morrell now runs a shearing contracting business.

“Over the course of a day, a shearer will burn through the same amount of kilojoules as a guy would running back-to-back marathons.”

“Everything has changed since I started shearing. Even the sheep have changed. These days they’re bred for meat as much as wool and they’re a much bigger and more powerful animal. When I was young, we were dealing with a 50 to 60 kilo ewe, now they’re 70 kilos and they are vigorous animals. You need to be physically and psychologically fitter to cope. You need better technique, you need to watch your diet, you need to stay in condition and look after your body.”

Back when he began his career, Dion says people worked with little regard for their own wellbeing. “For shearers and farmers of my generation there was often an unhealthy link between our ego and the amount of work we did. That’s why people physically or mentally broke down.”

He compares the physical demands of modern shearing to competitive sport. “Over the course of a day, a shearer will burn through the same amount of kilojoules as a guy would running back-to-back marathons. For a person to cope with that, it’s all about how well you prepare and repair your body and mind.”

“If people aren’t sleeping well, eating well, recovering properly, they get tired, they get ‘toey’ with each other, they get run down and that’s when the injuries come.”

So keeping staff fit and well has become central to the way Dion runs his business. “I’ve learnt that if you don’t focus on wellbeing you are just breaking people

down. Our business needs these people to come back and work for us. If they’ve had a good season, made money and can see we’re genuinely trying to look after them, they’ll be back.”

All of Dion’s staff enjoy free access to a local gym where they work on their strength, flexibility and fitness. They receive free passes to the local pool and use the spas there as part of their recovery. They get a free annual check-up by a GP and ongoing access to a chiropractor or physios to treat niggling strains or injuries. Work is also scheduled so that rest and recovery time is possible after a hard week in the shed.

“A lot of what we’re doing is consistent with what Farmstrong is promoting. That focus on treating people as your business’s main asset. That’s absolutely true.”

“I think some of the ‘old school’ shearers, contractors and farmers really need to think about how we look after these kids coming through. There’s no point just saying ‘harden up’. It’s a different time now. It’s not a matter of whether people can do something, it’s a matter of whether they should be doing it.”

“We need to create the sort of working environment where young people know we value them and they can see value working for us.” ●



Dairy farmer Harjinder Singh Chander

The Gumboot Express



When dairy farmer Harjinder Singh Chander isn't looking after cows, he's busy running to raise awareness about rural mental health.

“I’ve found that the best solutions to stress on farm are often right there in your own community.”

Otago dairy farmer Harjinder Singh Chander recently spent 28 hours running 139 laps of one of Dunedin’s steepest places – Baldwin Street. He ran 104k achieving a total elevation of 9,665 metres (Mt Everest is only 8,848m high). Cheered on by local residents and supporters, he even completed the last stretch in his trusty gumboots.

Harjinder says this feat of endurance was designed to get more farmers discussing their wellbeing and highlight the benefits of getting off-farm regularly to do other things.

Harjinder is from Northern India and initially came here to work in IT. When that didn’t work out, he turned his hand to dairy farming. His family grew seasonal crops back home, so farming was already in the blood. Harjinder enjoyed dairying and has been in the industry now for eight years. He’s currently managing 400 cows for owner Mark Adam on the Taieri plains.

“I like dairy farming because there are new challenges every year. Winter here can be quite tough with snow. It’s also pretty flat so you might get flooding so you have to really keep on top of feed for stock. I enjoy working with animals a lot and also being part of a small team. Mark and I work together a lot. It’s just like a family we’ve got here.”

Harjinder says his love of running marathons, half marathons and endurance fundraisers came from his boss. “When I first started in dairy, I’ll be honest, I felt really lonely. But watching Mark do all his activities off-

farm changed my life. I took a leaf out of his book.”

He certainly did. And once Harjinder started running, there was literally no stopping him. “I started with short distances, running only 5 or 10k but one day Mark said, ‘Go as far as you want. If you get stuck, ring me and I’ll pick you up.’ So I ran 25k, but he didn’t need to pick me up, I made it home,” he laughs.

“Then Mark entered me in a marathon he was supposed to be running but couldn’t make. He just put my name in and booked me accommodation which was really funny. After I’d finished milking, he’d give me time off to train.”

Harjinder’s running soon reached the next level. Then he had another brainwave – using his running as a way to help others.

“I realised how much I really enjoyed living in my community. The people here are so nice. So I thought, New Zealand has given me so much, what can I give back? I decided to do a fundraiser and I knew to catch people’s attention I needed to do something a bit different, so I started running in gumboots. I did a gumboot marathon, then a few more races. Now I’ve decided to do one big fundraising event a year.”

Which led in next to no time to Dunedin’s notorious Baldwin Street, recently reinstated as the world’s steepest street with a gradient of 34.8 percent.

“As I was running up and down it, I just kept thinking of all the farmers who go through so much every year –



floods and droughts and the other things that keep them on their toes. I know dairy farmers always look at the end of the season a bit like a finish line. So I thought if they can make it to the end, why can't I make it?"

Harjinder says his running isn't about endurance or setting records. It has a social side and brings plenty of positives into his own life.

"On Wednesdays I catch up with other runners for a jog and a pint at the local and we talk about everything apart from our jobs. Then when summer rolls round, I get into cricket."

"What I've learnt most about farming is that humans are meant to be social. You can't stay alone or you'll get depressed. It helps to meet others and see that everyone faces the same challenges. I've found that the best solutions to stress on farm are often right

there in your own community. There are so many people willing to help in the dairy industry if you speak up."

"But a big part of staying well is also doing good things for yourself. If I'm running I never have any trouble with my job. It's made me better at my job."

"I love doing big runs especially when I'm feeling a bit stressed. For example, I've been worried about my family back in India since the pandemic because Covid is quite bad there. But when I'm running these worries disappear and all I'm thinking about is how lucky I am to be here." 🌍

 FUNDAMENTALS

Your wellbeing bank account



Wellbeing simply means that you feel pretty happy about how life is going, that life is good! **Hugh Norriss**, Farmstrong's content adviser, shares some tips on how to look after your wellbeing.

There are lots of things we can do, or that happen to us, that boost this feeling of wellbeing. There are other things that make life feel relentlessly hard and difficult. There are still other situations that do a bit of both.

The ups and downs of farming mean that you can't take your wellbeing for granted. One way of thinking about your wellbeing is like investments in a bank account. If you invest wisely and often, even with little amounts, you get big dividends over time.

As we experience stressful situations and knock-backs in life, our natural supply of wellbeing can get depleted. Think of these like withdrawals from your wellbeing account. If this continues for too long, we start to head towards an 'overdraft' situation that could be burnout and depression along with feelings of guilt, shame, despair and hopelessness.

It can be very hard to climb out of this pit once we slide into it. We will need help from others, friends and family, recovery time to get back to normal and professional

help such as therapy and counselling. So it's best to do everything we can to avoid this situation by learning and locking in our wellbeing habits when we are doing well, feeling positive and energetic.

If we wait until we are burnt out or depressed before we think about our wellbeing, we will barely be able to get out of bed at that point, let alone learn new skills. To go back to the bank account analogy, the best time to invest is when you have some spare cash.

Common withdrawals on your wellbeing

Farmers have told us that the following situations make a dent in their wellbeing, that is a withdrawal from their wellbeing bank account:

- having too much to do, all of the time
- lack of sleep
- relentless compliance obligations
- not getting time off the farm
- staffing problems
- succession worries
- financial uncertainty.

These situations lead to negative emotions like frustration, anxiety, anger, guilt and feeling overwhelmed, which after a while put a strain on our wellbeing.

How you can invest in your wellbeing

So, how can we offset these inevitable wellbeing

withdrawals with wellbeing investments? The first step is to do what we can to reduce any unnecessary stress from our business and personal life. We can do this by:

- identifying risks and planning for them
- prioritising work tasks
- not over-committing
- minimising contact with very negative people
- being well organised.

In addition other habits, discussed in this book, are well supported by research as ways to boost your wellbeing. These include healthy thinking, taking time out, good nutrition, quality sleep and the Five Ways to Wellbeing.

The Five Ways to Wellbeing (see pages 12-13) are small things that are easy, low or no cost, and science-based. They are like your 'five a day' fruit and vegetables, but more for the mind. Grand plans like doing an ironman can be good for some but risk being too hard for many. Also, they are often a one-off. To boost your wellbeing bank account, go for small, regular wellbeing habits rather than create grand plans.

Long-term benefits of wellbeing

Last, but not least, there is the wellbeing interest payment. Scientific studies show that people with higher levels of wellbeing are more productive, sociable, physically healthy and successful. So, you get long-term benefits by boosting your wellbeing, regardless.

Having a healthy wellbeing bank account is a definite win-win situation. It reduces risk of mental ill health and gives business and social benefits at the same time. In a busy occupation like farming it's easy to put off your own wellbeing because so much needs to get done. But this is a false economy in the long run, as you are neglecting the most important asset on the farm, you. ●



INVESTMENTS

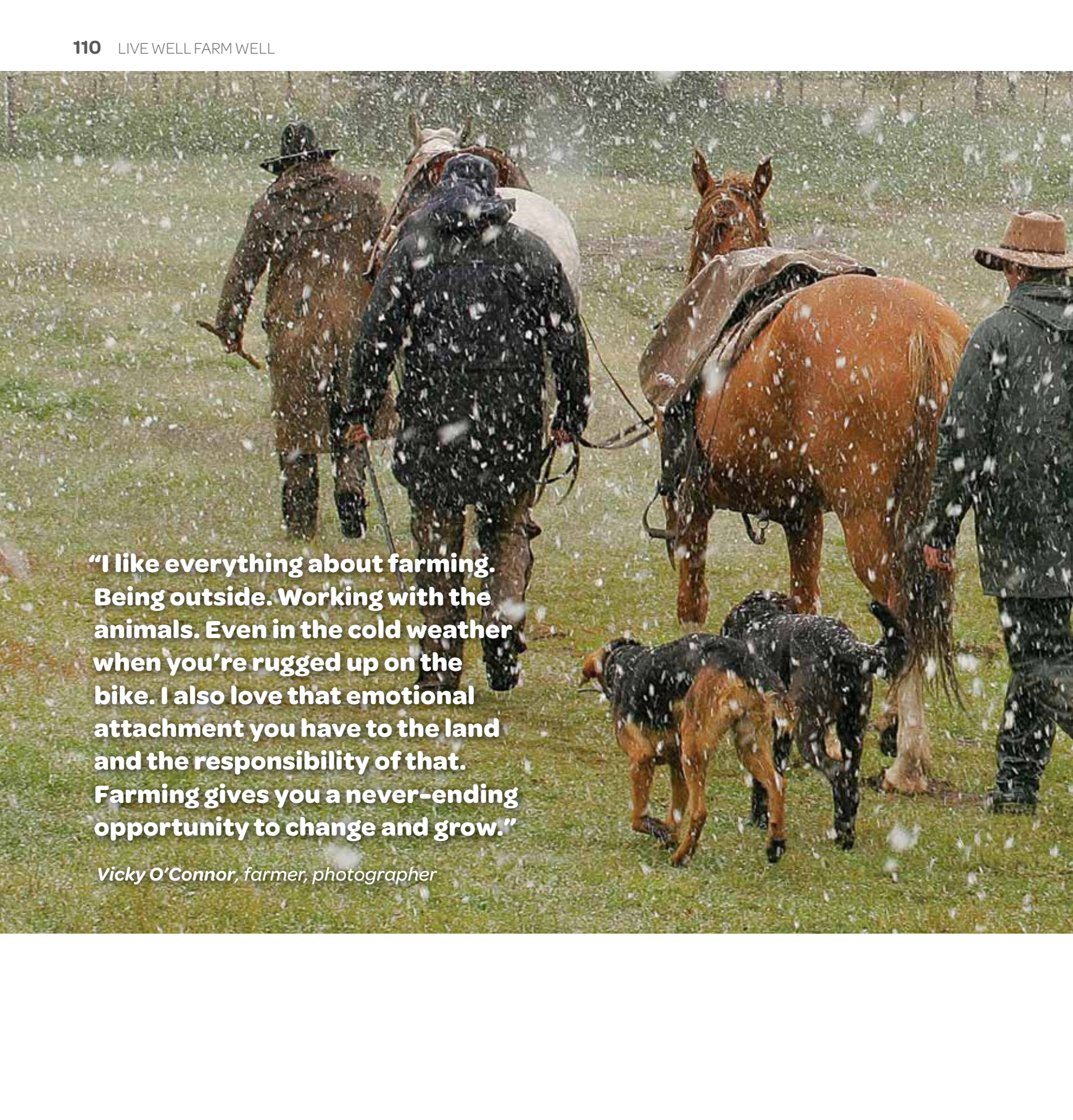
Habits farmers told us that boost their wellbeing account



WITHDRAWALS

Things that farmers told us drained their wellbeing account





“I like everything about farming. Being outside. Working with the animals. Even in the cold weather when you’re rugged up on the bike. I also love that emotional attachment you have to the land and the responsibility of that. Farming gives you a never-ending opportunity to change and grow.”

Vicky O’Connor, farmer, photographer





(PHOTOS: Kristen Mack Saunders Photography)

Dairy farmer Gary Sunshine-Tervit

Head-first

Six years ago a motocross accident left dairy farmer Gary Sunshine-Tervit barely able to work and badly depressed. Now he's Otago-Southland's dairy farm manager of the year.

“Yes, it was one of the worst things that ever happened to our family, but it has changed us all for the better.”

Gary and his wife are contract milkers on a farm in Centre Bush in Southland milking 780 cows on 270 ha. He loves dairy farming and doesn't really think of it as a job. “To me dairy farming is a lifestyle. I've really enjoyed it as I've moved up into management roles, but there are definitely pressures too – targets to meet and budgets to adhere to.”

It's a lifestyle Gary no longer takes for granted. Six years ago he had a serious motocross accident. He'd been riding motorbikes since he was two, but one day during a trail ride with mates a suspension malfunction sent him head-first over a large cliff.

“When I got back on the bike and caught up with my mates, they asked ‘where've you been?’. It turned out I'd been missing for 40 minutes! I took my helmet off and my head was black from temple to temple.”

A hospital scan revealed a mild bleed to the brain but Gary passed initial concussion tests and seemed in recovery. However, two or three weeks later he developed severe, delayed concussion.

“One morning, my wife Daniella asked me if I was ready to go to town. I said yes, but then she pointed out, ‘Hey, you're not wearing any pants.’ Everything went absolutely downhill from that moment. Soon I was just babbling nonsense.”

Neurological tests confirmed the left frontal lobe of Gary's brain was damaged. “It was the worst thing that

ever happened to me – hugely straining on my marriage. I went through some really dark times. If you break a bone you can see it getting better week by week, but when it's your brain, something as simple as forgetting to shut the fridge door makes you want to beat yourself up inside. I'd kept forgetting stuff and repeating things to people. My memory was shocking. I'd think to myself, ‘oh man, you are such a dumb arse.’”

The turning point came when Gary decided to open up about his struggles and seek help.

“To be honest, I just knew I had to do something to control the injury, instead of letting it control me. When I first got told to see a therapist I said ‘absolutely not’. I was your typical Kiwi guy. Now I see a therapist whenever I need to and look forward to it.”

“Discussing mental health is still hugely taboo in New Zealand society, especially among guys. It's seen as weakness. I used to think like that myself. But speaking up, seeking help and being in touch with your emotions is actually a strength, not a weakness.”

Gary was off work for two months. When he returned to the shed, he was a different farmer.

“I used to be like my Dad. If I had ten things to do in a day, I'd be out there til every last one was done. But when I went back, my injury really put the brakes on what I could physically achieve. Maybe I'd only get through five things a day. Also, if I got stressed about work, I'd get



Gary Sunshine-Tervit and family

the worst migraine you've ever had times ten. Absolutely excruciating pain. So I learnt pretty quickly not to get wound up about the small stuff."

Gary developed a much more inclusive management style. "In an operation our size there was no way I could cope alone. I had to create a team environment where everyone was happy and people loved their jobs because at the end of the day, if you love your job, you do a good job. These days I make sure we always have a good laugh and a bit of banter while we're working."

Unsurprisingly, he also took the lead in championing wellbeing in his workplace. "I told my staff, my phone's on 24/7, I'm only a phone call or a text away.

If you've got anything going on in your life that's an issue for you – personal, professional – feel free to come and talk about it. And that's happened a couple of times now which is really great."

His injury made him acutely aware of the impact of workload and long hours. "For me fatigue was one of the biggest things to deal with after my injury. I still deal with it. So I'm very conscious of rosters and hours worked and having good meal breaks."

Gary says his management philosophy these days is 'work hard, play hard.' He's about to take up a mate's idea and sign up his farm for an inter-farm paintball competition and also plans to head off-farm regularly with staff for activities such as ten pin bowling.



Gary has taken up clay-shooting for relaxation.

“We’ve also decided we’ll have a big cooked breakfast once a month here at our place with the team and their families. We won’t be talking farming, we’ll talk about everything else.”

Connecting with the local community and achieving a decent work-life balance are constant themes when Gary describes his life today. He’s a regular at dairy discussion groups and the couple are heavily involved in local school and pre-school activities.

“It’s possible in this industry to just flog yourself and miss out on these things,” reflects Gary. “My wife and I both come from backgrounds where work always came first. I had a goal to own my own farm by 40. I was hell-bent on that. I’m now 31, but my injury has made me sit back and realise what’s important in life – raising our two kids, having a happy family. We still want farm ownership too, but if it takes us ten more years to get there, then so be it.”

He’s also found a replacement for his much-loved motocross. “Now I do clay target shooting and I’m not

too bad. We practice at Oreti beach most Tuesday nights and compete in club days in Southland. It’s a good stress release and a great way to meet other people.”

To gauge how far he’d recovered, Gary recently entered the Otago-Southland dairy farm manager of the year awards. After the prelims, he got a call to say he’d made the finals. “They said ‘congratulations you’ve made the top five’. I was in total shock. My wife and I are both fairly competitive, so I’ll do my best to try and win.”

And that’s exactly what he did. As well as taking out the 2021 Southland/Otago Dairy Manager of the Year category, Gary also scooped \$8,700 in prizes plus three merit awards!

“I reckon what happened to me turned out to be a blessing. That one unfortunate incident has really changed the way we behave as a family. We are all very open and honest about how we are feeling now. Yes, it was one of the worst things that ever happened to our family, but it has changed us all for the better.” 🟡



Ride organisers Mike and Kate Gee-Taylor

Getting the downtime you deserve

Time off-farm is the number one wellbeing priority for farmers, but many are still reluctant to take breaks. Kate and Mike Gee-Taylor of Rangiwahia are on a mission to change that.

“I’d never got the link between activity and your mental health but the doctors are right, exercise really does make you feel better.”

Mike and Kate own a typical family farm – a 1,400 acre sheep and beef operation in hill country in Rangiwahia, in the Manawatu. Mike grew up there and met Kate 28 years later. They still both love the area and the lifestyle.

But life’s thrown up a few challenges too. Three years ago Kate fell ill and nearly died on the operating table. It took 30 units of blood to save her.

“Mike was grey with worry and I was green and sick,” Kate laughs. But what she remembers most is the way the community rallied round them. “Our neighbours were absolutely amazing. They organised two men a day to help Mike during weaning. Our pantry was full of food. They mowed the lawns. They did housework.”

The magnitude of such a scare took a toll on Kate’s confidence too. She felt pretty down afterwards.

“I ended up going to a shrink. It was the best thing I ever did in my life. It made me realise the true value of friends and the importance of getting off-farm and catching up with them regularly.”

The whole experience made her determined to give something back to the rural community that had supported her. First up, she organised a ‘pest destruction day’ for local dads. When that proved a hit, she contemplated something more ambitious. By this time, Kate and Mike had made their own health much more a priority and taken up bike-riding for a change of scene from farming.

“I’d never got the link between activity and your mental health but the doctors are right, exercise really does make you feel better,” says Kate. “It’s a great way to de-stress.”

On one excursion, the couple noticed a store in Ohakune where you could rent e-bikes. Kate decided to organise a group ride for local farmers.

“It was about being brave enough to just invite people. I went ‘old school’, got some nice invitations made up with the info and sent them out to everyone by mail.”

The personalised approach worked – she ended up with 23 riders, including some who hadn’t been on a push bike since primary school. The group overnighted in Ohakune, rode to the Bridge to Nowhere in Whanganui national park, swam in the river and returned by jet boat.

“It was one of those magic days – beautiful weather. The 30k we did back in the jetboat was like being in Jurassic Park, that river is so beautiful. We went mid-week and people had been given plenty of warning so they could work their schedule around the date.”

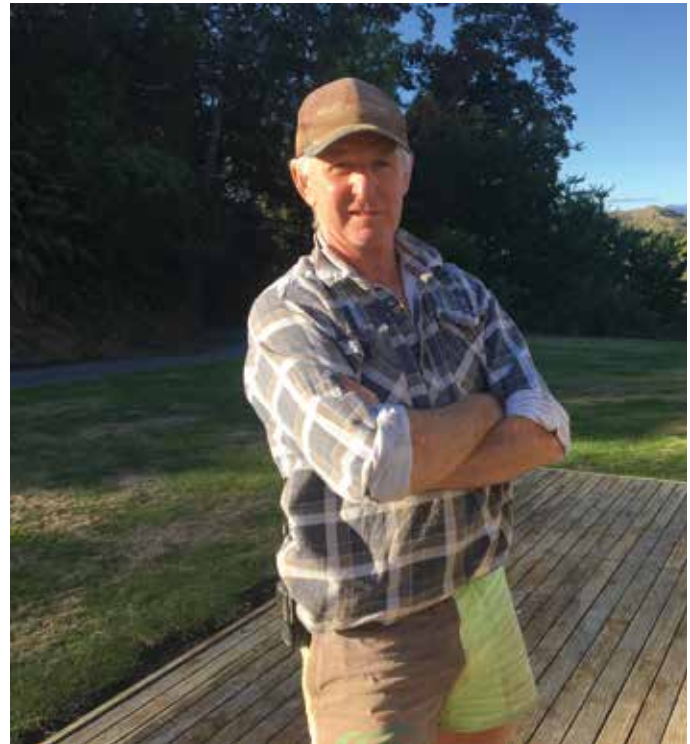
The impact was transformational. “This was about getting farmers off-farm, meeting new people and talking about other things apart from farming. For a lot of them it was the first time in a while they’d had a day off, of just doing their own thing. In the van they were all saying things like, ‘hey, we should do this more

often', 'gosh, it's nice to be off-farm'. And they all asked afterwards, 'what are you going to organise next?'"

"These men all realised they needed to take a break, but it actually took someone else to organise it for that to happen."

Kate says maintaining connections with neighbours is the key to handling the ups and downs of not just farming, but life in general. "You don't need to organise an event. It can be as simple as ringing a neighbour and turning up in your farm clothes for a coffee or seeing if they're up for a game of cards after dinner during the winter."

"Sometimes in farming it's easy to just muddle along and get in a real funk. I've been there. Every so often, you just need to stop and smell the roses." 🍷





Kevin Mitchell: "hard as it was leaving the job he loved, it was the right decision."

Life after farming

Retirement and succession planning can be a great source of stress for farming families. Timing, planning and communication are essential for a smooth transition, says retired Hawkes Bay farmer Kevin Mitchell.

“If you’re farming and want to retire, early planning is crucial. Get all your ducks in a row, whether it’s family or finance or your next moves or what the market’s doing.”

Kevin Mitchell enjoyed a 40-year career as a sheep and beef farmer in the Te Pōhue district in the Hawkes Bay. Born and raised on a steep hill country farm, he fondly remembers being ‘brought up in a rural bubble’.

After completing boarding school and his Ag. Diploma at Massey, Kevin took over the family farm with his brother. “The 1970s were great years. Prices were good and the climate was reliable. We continued the development of the farm that my father and his brothers had started.”

But the 80s weren’t so kind. “1982 was our first serious drought and that was a doozy. We’d been brought up on reliable summer rainfall and it didn’t rain until mid-April. We all had to change our farming methods through the 80s because we had a succession of droughts. Cyclone Bola made an absolute mess of us in 1988. We got 30 inches of rain in three days. It destroyed our infrastructure and we lost 400 acres of land that either slipped away or was slipped onto. That woke us up to what Mother Nature was trying to tell us about breaking into marginal land. New Zealand lost 20 percent of its farmers in the 80s. The times were that tough.”

Kevin adds, “The commitment of my wife Rae during our tough farming times was amazing because without her, and thousands of other farming wives, a lot of us wouldn’t have stayed on our farms and our

children wouldn’t have had the opportunities they got. Her work gave us some financial certainty in very uncertain times.”

Back on the farm, Kevin and his brother adapted too, planting blocks of pines and by the 1990s had over 500 acres in forestry. That combination of farming and forestry proved a winner and saw them through until 2012 when Kevin decided it was time to retire.

“We decided to put the farm on the market because we didn’t want to be old, crippled farmers – we wanted to have a life after farming. My brother and I were married to sisters, and we’d had five sons and a daughter between us, but none of them wanted the farm, so we put it on the market and sold it to a forestry company in the end.”

Kevin says as hard as it was leaving the job he loved, it was the right decision. “Our deal meant we were able to stay there. So we kept the houses and a few paddocks, which lessened the shock of having to sell the farm.”

The key to making a smooth transition to life after farming is preparation, says Kevin. “If you’re farming and want to retire, early planning is crucial. Get all your ducks in a row, whether it’s family or finance or your next moves or what the market’s doing.”

“Communication with your family is where it all starts. The earlier you have those conversations, the

better. Sometimes farmers are not so good at this. I'd recommend that you get an independent person involved because often they've got information and knowledge about other options that they can put on the table."

"It also de-personalises the whole thing, because often there might be a family member sitting back there who is working in a different industry, but always had a hankering to have a go farming. They might be the quiet one who never speaks up. But they will come forward to an outside person."

The other essential ingredient is to have a plan on what comes next. "Selling the farm is one thing, but where are you going to go and what are you going to do? You need to plan your next move."

Kevin says an important thing to remember is that "you're still pretty valuable in a rural community even if you don't want to work full-time. The first year that I sold the farm, our neighbour's head man had a bad accident so we spent the best part of a year working for him. It was a drought year so we jumped on our bikes and took our dogs and helped out."

Kevin says it is also important for older farmers to 'let go' when younger family members take over. "Micro-managing can be a real issue, that reluctance to let the young ones have a go. Because if you kill their enthusiasm they will soon start looking elsewhere."



"Farming's hard yakka even when times are good. There's big hours and big commitments. So, yes, you've got to get stuck in, but make sure you make time for a bit of play too. We're only here once, enjoy the ride." 🌟

 FUNDAMENTALS

Give yourself a break

Taking breaks and getting time off the farm makes a huge difference to how you feel and how well you farm. Yet it's often the thing that slips down the priority list.

Aim for some downtime every day, at least one day off a week, and one decent holiday break a year.

Don't fool yourself that long hours equal best results. Research on workplace fatigue shows that when people are tired:

- their brain doesn't function as well
- they have trouble thinking through issues
- they find it harder to make decisions
- their coordination is impaired and they are at a higher risk of an accident.

Being productive is about working smarter, not longer hours. It's about managing workload and scheduling downtime for other activities. That's what gives you the energy to think clearly and perform at your best.

Your checklist

How do you get beyond good intentions and make sure you get the breaks you need? Here are some ideas from other farmers.

Make time off a business goal

You are your farm's most valuable asset. A serious commitment to you and your family's wellbeing needs to be part of your business plan.

Plan your break and just do it

Act on your good intentions. Schedule your holiday for non-peak times of the year. Plan it ahead – don't wait until you need the break.

During busy periods

Schedule micro breaks during the day. Even 10 minutes of downtime to yourself helps you reset mentally and physically.

Trust your staff, learn to delegate

Learning to delegate and trust others is a game-changer. Trust others to get things done, even if they do it a little differently to how you do it. Train others to take your place.

Do swaps with neighbours

An obvious solution to getting some time off is for neighbours to support one another to take some time off. Get your neighbour to look after your farm for a week and you look after theirs in return. Or maybe see if some retired farmers can help out.

Take short breaks as well as a good holiday

It doesn't need to be a long holiday – a short break can make a huge difference. Plan mini-breaks – even a few days can be enough to free the mind and come back feeling refreshed.

Try something different

The mind needs refreshing. Try a new sport, read a book, see a show, anything that gives you energy and helps you see the world a little differently. ●



“You’ve definitely got to get off the place, whether it’s going to the local footy match on a Saturday or booking a trip away. When you come back, you are just more refreshed.”

James Pharazyn, farmer, 2016

“You can’t just be head down, bottom up and chasing your tail all the time in farming or you’ll burn out. Your wellbeing has to come first.”

Richard Tosswill, sheep and beef farmer

“I think the biggest change in managing my workload these days is that I have to trust other people to do a job that I used to do. It’s hard at the start but it’s something that you have to do and you’re better for it once you’ve learned.”

Dan Nicholson, sheep and beef farmer

“Our shed’s pretty easy to run when everything’s going well, so we just booked a relief milker and made the most of the little break you get between calving and mating.”

Daniel Hathaway, dairy farmer

“Time away from the farm allows us to do some brainstorming. What actually happens is that your mind has got a lot of space in it because you are not looking around at what needs to be done like hanging a gate or fixing a fence. That’s what fills your mind up. You go away and relax and suddenly all these ideas just start to flow.”

Dylan Ditchfield, dairy farmer



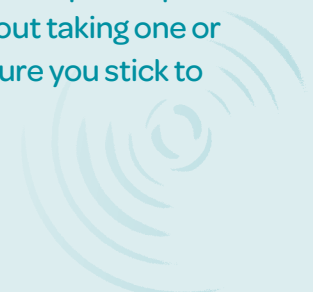
“In the last three months I’ve had three weeks away doing other things. How do I do that? By having good rosters, having good staff, and booking it in and sticking to it.”

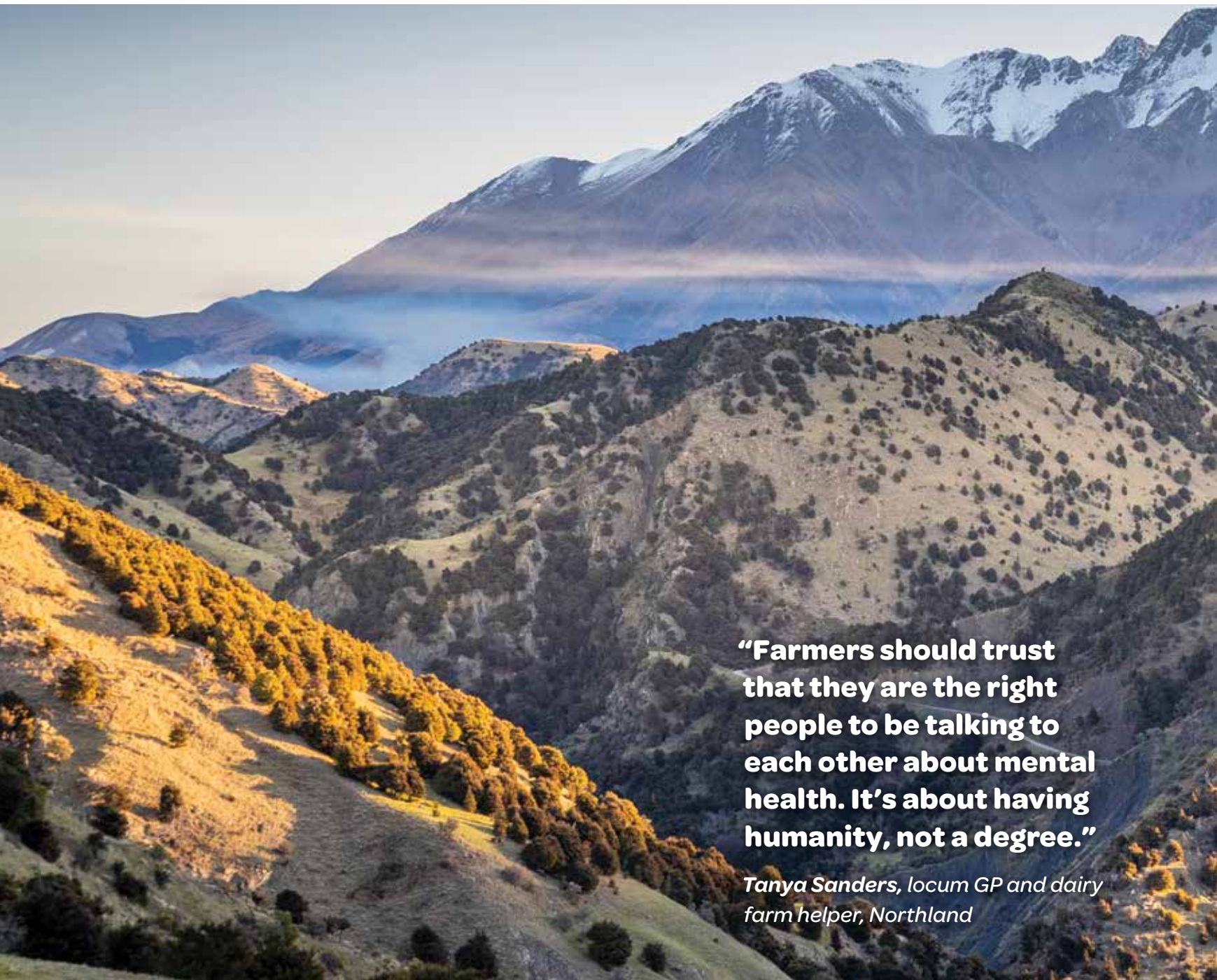
Tony Coltman, dairy farmer



“Taking time off is a fundamental to keep on top of things. As a bare minimum, it’s about taking one or two days off a week, and making sure you stick to that as much as possible.”

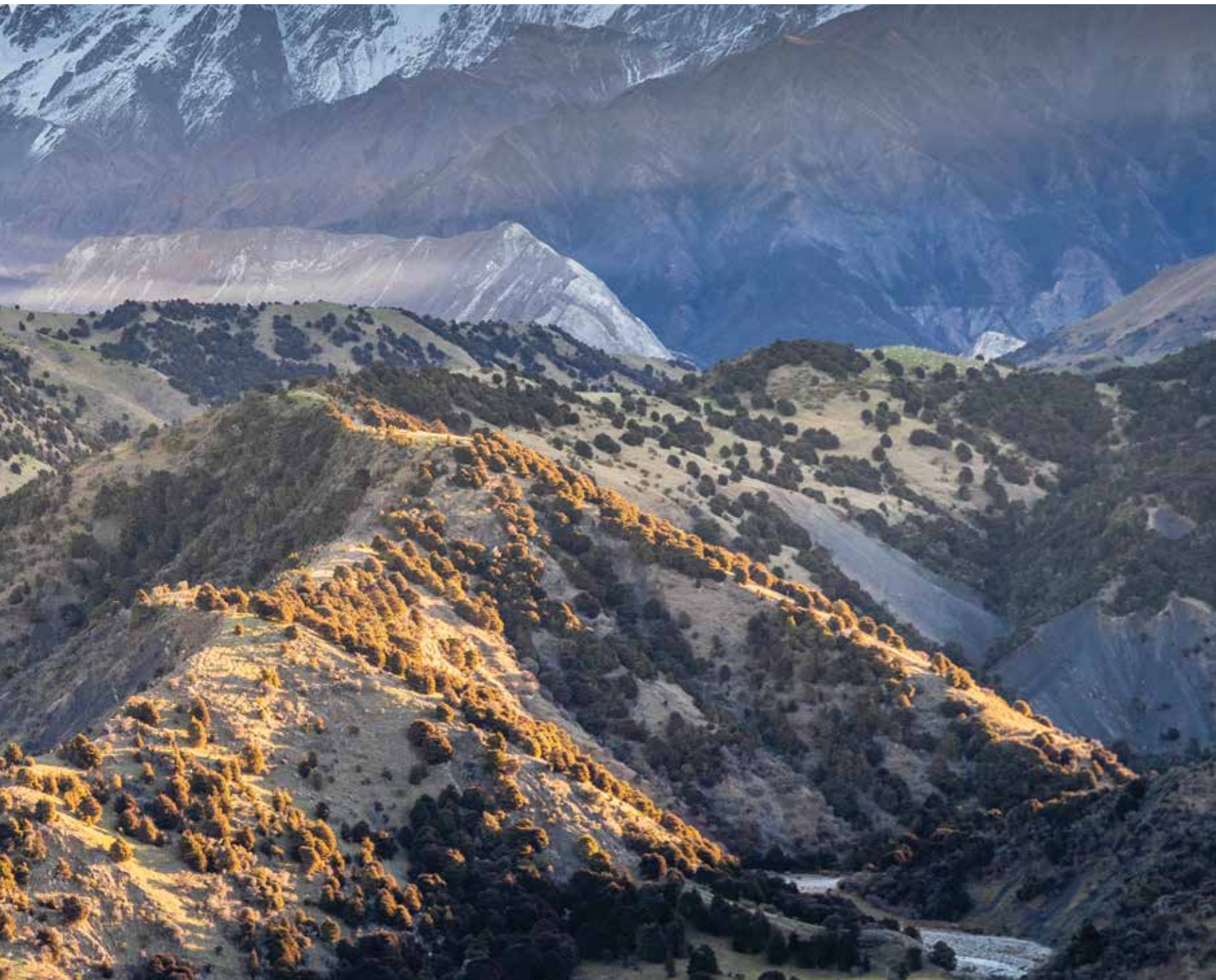
Richard Ash, dairy farm manager





“Farmers should trust that they are the right people to be talking to each other about mental health. It’s about having humanity, not a degree.”

Tanya Sanders, locum GP and dairy farm helper, Northland





Ian Greaves: "There was a real prospect the kiwifruit industry might not survive."

Lessons from the front-line

Ian Greaves was at the forefront of efforts to help growers when the PSA crisis crippled the kiwifruit industry a decade ago. He says lessons learned back then are still relevant now for the industry.

“I was spending hours with people every day so they weren’t left alone, setting up monitoring systems for them. We know that saved lives.”

Ian has worked in the kiwifruit industry since he left university, running packhouses and cool stores before heading into industry-wide organisations and orchard ownership. For the past 16 years he’s been a director of Kiwifruit New Zealand.

He’d just hit 50 and was about to ‘semi-retire’ when PSA disease attacked kiwifruit vines in 2010. Growers were suddenly under immense financial pressure. Incomes were slashed and land values plummeted. There was a real prospect the kiwifruit industry might not survive.

“When the first meetings were called by the industry, everyone came. You had 600 local orchardists there.”

“Everything was in lockdown. Rural posties weren’t allowed up the drive because you spread the PSA on your clothing. People were even too scared to go and visit their neighbour.”

Ian realised he had to help. “I wandered into the new PSA office they’d set up and said, ‘I’ll give you a hand for a while’. I thought it might be six weeks’ voluntary work. I ended up doing that for five years!”

He says there was a “huge hole in the pastoral care side in the industry”. Nothing was in place to support growers during tough times.

“Kiwifruit orchardists are different to dairy farmers. They aren’t all on their orchards, for a start, so there

wasn’t one fix for everyone. We tried different things and all of them had a degree of success – breathing courses, sleep experts, clinical psychologists talking about stress. Some people needed financial help, others operational help, others psychological.”

More packed meetings followed as the virus spread. “We ran about 20 seminars and I’d start them by asking, ‘who’s feeling stressed?’ and, in Opotiki, one of the main guys from the packhouse puts up both hands and says ‘Can I put up both feet too?’. A hundred people in the hall started laughing. It broke the ice, just having someone prepared to admit that they were feeling stressed gave everyone permission to ask for help.”

Ian and his team designed a triage system to direct growers towards the assistance that was available. “The flow-chart was simple to use, but comprehensive. We had 20 financial advisers ready to go, Kiwi Vine Health offered operational support and I stepped into the psychological area and had doctors, hospitals and clinical psychologists ready to go.”

One of the immediate needs for growers was an emergency contact point. Ian’s profile in the industry made him an ideal candidate and for the next few years he was on call 24/7 responding to people whose lives and livelihoods had reached crisis point. It was grueling work.

“If people rang the emergency contact number I’d be at their place within 15 to 30 minutes. I was spending

hours with people every day so they weren't left alone, setting up monitoring systems for them. We know that saved lives."

So what has the industry learnt from those traumatic times? Things are buoyant again – prices have rebounded, exports are booming and land and Kiwifruit gold licences command a premium. But boom times never last forever and factors like Covid-19, exchange rates, tariffs and export trends are hard to predict.

So the challenge, Ian says, is to get growers and their workers to think about their wellbeing in good times as well as bad. "The lessons of PSA are that your first responsibility is to look after yourself, your second is your family, and your third's your neighbour. If you're no good, you can't look after anyone. But people need to remember that for 20 years, not just a few moments."

Ian's other main insight is that pastoral care can't be left to a few individuals, the whole industry needs to own it. "During the crisis we had 200 scientists working on how to get the vines through, but the vines by themselves aren't the industry. You need the growers in good shape too, you need their intellectual knowledge and passion. Industries really need to look after their people during times of adversity."

"People never used to talk about mental health. It was just not a topic. If you talked about it to some of the old growers, they thought you were a crank. I had



"You need to think about your wellbeing in good times as well as bad."

one old guy in the smoko room one day and he says, 'Is anyone actually talking to you about this stuff?' and I said 'yeah, quite a few.' And I knew he was at the point of breakdown, and he said 'yep, well I've been to the doctors and had a jab', but he couldn't look me in the eye and talk normally about it. He just kept looking into the distance."

"I'd like to think New Zealand's a lot different place now. We've got younger orchardists coming through who talk about these issues far more naturally. After all, it's normal to feel stressed during tough times, we all do! It's what you do about it that counts." 🌟



Darcy Bishop: "You've got to reward yourself in farming because if you don't do it, nobody else will."

'Tools Down' text does the trick

Getting time off-farm is a big issue for many farmers. But a group of Canterbury farmers have found a solution – texting each other to arrange short breaks.

“There are going to be fluctuations in the market. You’ve got to learn to live with that and still be able to enjoy the ride as much as you can.”

Oxford dairy farmer Darcy Bishop’s never forgotten the advice his father gave him. “Dad always taught me in farming ‘you should always take time to smell the roses’.”

Easier said than done, however, when you’re as busy as Darcy is. This third-generation dairy farmer milks 945 cows on 285 ha near Oxford in Canterbury. Darcy’s overseen substantial growth in the family business but it hasn’t been achieved without some big challenges.

“We’d just scaled up our operation to progress as a family. So we took the plunge and came down south. It was a \$7 payout when we decided to make the move and by the time we arrived suddenly it was only \$3.90 so that was real tough. If someone had told me it was going to be like that, I probably wouldn’t have carried on farming. It was stressful.”

That’s when Darcy realised he needed to start taking care of himself, as well as the farm.

“That experience really taught me that that no industry is always ‘up’. There are going to be fluctuations in the market. You’ve got to learn to live with that and still be able to enjoy the ride as much as you can.”

“Scaling up like that also made me realise there’s no limit to the amount of hours you could put into an operation like this. To avoid burnout, you need to be proactive and do other things and get off-farm. You’re only young once. You’ve got to make the most of that.”

Luckily, Darcy’s mate Ben Peake, another dairy farmer, was on the same wavelength and came up with a

simple but effective solution. Every once in a while, he’d randomly text his local farmer mates a short message – ‘tools down’ – and then suggest a time and place to meet off-farm. It worked.

“It was a bit of a shock at first,” laughs Darcy. “But getting that text definitely made my ears prick up. I guess it just took off from there.”

Now when things are a bit quieter on farm, Darcy and half a dozen mates flick each other a text and head out for an afternoon lunch or a run or a bike ride. Sometimes farming’s in the mix too.

“Quite often we’ll go to the pub for lunch and then do a tour of someone’s farm. We did it here last week. All the guys that farm round here are like-minded. If they know something that could be helpful to your farm, they don’t mind sharing it.”

The overall impact has been profound. Darcy manages his operation differently these days.

He’s found time in his schedule to take up kayaking and compete in iconic events like the Coast-to-Coast race.

“I’ve really enjoyed it. What you see on the river, you don’t see anywhere else. And going down rapids, it’s a feeling like no other. It’s something I never thought I’d do and it’s really energising.”

How does he do it and still run a busy farm? Teamwork. “I have great staff who’ve been with me for many years now. It’s all about respect – paying



people what they're worth and then organising decent rosters so that everyone gets the time off they need."

He says he also times his breaks carefully. "There are definitely times on-farm when you're flat out and can't go anywhere. But when things quieten down, that's when you need to take a break."

"So once I get through calving and mating and I've been on the farm for three or four months without leaving much, it feels bliss going for a kayak. It's my reward and you've got to reward yourself in farming because if you don't do it, nobody else will."

"It's easy in farming to go into your little cocoon and not socialise with people. These days I make sure I get off-farm regularly whenever I can. Christchurch is only 40-minutes' drive and the Waimakariri River is handy for my kayaking."

He says there are wider benefits to achieving better work/life balance too. "For me nowadays farming's all about family. I get great support from my wife. I've got three awesome children, a great Mum and Dad. If I'm in a good space, the farm goes better and everyone benefits." ●



Wendy Coup: "easy for our wellbeing to get pushed to the side."

Getting the balance right

King Country farmer Wendy Coup learned the hard way that giving everything to the family farm can make you very vulnerable.

“When I delved deep in my heart and head I discovered I was just so out of balance. I had to take a step back and make my life what I wanted it to be.”

When King Country sheep and beef farmer Wendy Coup woke up with back spasms five years ago, it was the start of a journey to rediscover what she enjoyed about life and farming.

Wendy’s ‘bad back’ turned out to be burnout. “I was so wound up in the job and what I did here. I was farming and helping to manage the business. There were other factors too. My father had died, my eldest child had grown up and left home. It was a bit of a perfect storm. Even though I loved the farm I was having feelings all the time like, ‘this farm is going to kill me.’”

Walking away wasn’t an option for Wendy. “I loved being on the farm most of the time, I had a great husband and we had a great business. [A 700-hectare hill country sheep and beef farm with 7,000 stock units two hours’ drive from Hamilton.] But when I delved deep in my heart and head I discovered I was just so out of balance. I had to take a step back and make my life what I wanted it to be.”

Wendy describes taking small steps to rebuild her life each week, including attending an Agri-Women’s Development Trust (AWDT) course to ‘re-frame’ her skills. This made her realise that although she loved her job, there was a whole creative side to her personality she was neglecting.

Wendy had always held a passion for classical singing but assumed that living in remote Aria in the King Country ruled that out. A chance encounter in town changed all that. It turned out there was a singing teacher just an hour’s drive away in Otorohanga.

“I’m now, five years down the track, singing classically. It’s something that I had always wanted to do. It made me get off the farm every week and it was non-negotiable.”

“I don’t know if I’m getting any better at singing,” she laughs, “but it brings me a lot of joy. What it gave back to my family and business was the woman and the mother that they love.”

Nowadays, Wendy is very proactive about her health. She devotes Wednesdays to singing lessons, maintains a daily journal to record insights and joyful moments on the farm and is regularly on her mountain bike training for an upcoming adventure race.

Wendy’s keen to share what she has learnt with other rural women, particularly those who feel emotionally isolated or are supporting a stressed partner.

“Rural women are a bit of a breed I think. Juggling lots of responsibilities is one of our strengths. What I’ve learnt over the years is that as women we have to be careful not to dial that up too much.”

“I guess when you’re a Mum, a wife and community

“When you completely identify with your job or business, it’s a very vulnerable place.”



member you often think ‘my time will come’, but often as women we’re just letting time go past. We get so wound up in our businesses, families and looking after our animals that our own wellbeing gets pushed to the side.”

“What I learnt is that when you completely identify with your job or business, it’s a very vulnerable place. You need to step back and nurture yourself at the same time as running a business. That’s what I did.” 🟡



Contract milker Owen Gullery with his son Ryan

Near miss

A near-fatal farm accident completely changed Owen Gullery's approach to life and farming.

“I could’ve easily not gone home that night and I never want anything like that to happen again.”

Owen contract milks 480 cows on a dairy farm near Cambridge. He’s been in the industry 20 years and loves “the daily challenges of farming – good and bad.” But there’s a vivid memory from his younger days that stays with him.

“I still think about that night all the time. I’d only been contract milking a couple of years in the Manawatu. I was your typical ‘I’m gonna take on the world’ guy, working full-on hours. I wanted to make as much money as I could, bank every cent so I could buy a farm. That drove me to work 200 to 300 days in a row without a break.”

“I only had one staff member when I actually needed two, but I was trying to save money. We had young kids too. I was busy on all fronts. But I thought, ‘It’s my time. I’m in my prime. I’ll go as hard as I can’. I was working from four in the morning til eight at night most days.”

That combination almost proved fatal.

“The night it happened, I had a cow I knew would have problems calving so I was waiting to calve her. I went out to check her late at night. We had a three-pond effluent system and I knew she was in the paddock by the dry pond, but it was a ‘pea soupy’ kind of night with fog everywhere. By the time I got to her it was 11 o’clock at night in October and I hadn’t had a day off all year. I drove the tractor up the side of the pond where I

thought she was, went over the bank and before I knew it, the cab was filling up with effluent. I’d driven into the wrong pond because I was so tired.”

“I couldn’t get anything to open. I ended up gasping for breath in the last couple of hundred mls of cab space, managed to kick the back window open, grabbed the blade on the back of the tractor and hauled myself out. It was pretty scary. I ended up sitting on the bank balling my eyes out.”

“I got home in shock and rang the boss to tell him his tractor was in the effluent pond, which was a strange conversation to have,” he laughs. “And after that? Well, after that ...” he pauses, “A lot of things changed.”

Owen immediately employed part-time help. He took his first break of the year and scheduled two afternoons off a week from then on. The family also reset their life goals and direction.

“We changed from being prepared to go anywhere and do anything just to own a farm to concentrating on being a stable, secure, happy family, no matter what it meant in terms of farm ownership. I don’t want to sound dramatic, but that’s what happens when you see your life flash before your eyes.”

“I could’ve easily not gone home that night and I never want anything like that to happen again. While farm ownership and herd ownership are great goals to have, they were no longer my priority. My priority was



being there for my family and staying fit and healthy and in a good head space.”

Owen spent time reflecting on what he liked about farming life and adjusted his work/life balance accordingly. “Farming can be hard yakka. You’ve simply got to have downtime to stay healthy and safe. You need staff to enable that so instead of stretching it with part-timers, we now have three full-timers and that keeps everyone happy. Sure, it might cost me an extra 20 grand a year, but that’s insignificant in the scheme of your life and relationships.”

These days, Owen, a former front-rower who loves his sport, plays tennis and cycles to keep fit and coaches kids’ rugby. He also meets up with a group of other rural guys once a week to “solve the world’s problems over a beer”.

“Farming can be a great lifestyle, but not the way I was working. Prior to my accident I probably had no more than a week off over three years! Looking back, I realise there were near misses and close shaves all the time. It took an accident to change my thinking.” 🌟

FUNDAMENTALS

Keeping Farmfit

Working on your overall fitness makes a huge difference to your ability to farm well. It means you can deal with the many physical demands of farming. And it greatly improves your mood. Whether it's sport, or the gym or any kind of fitness routine, it results in a much more positive outlook.

Injuries are often a fact of life for farmers. Doctors and physiotherapists know only too well the injuries that farmers are vulnerable to. However, there's lots of things you can do to prevent injuries on the farm and it doesn't take a lot of time. Little and often is the key. A few minutes of well-targeted body conditioning each day will prevent a lot of injuries and downtime.



Mark Tree is a teacher in Winton, Southland and an expert on body conditioning.

"I was born and raised on a farm in Southland. Speak to any farmer and they will have some type of injury because of farming. Farming is very

physically active. There are a lot of positions you are in that are not normal and you are in these positions for a long time, whether it's picking up lambs at shearing, milking cows or lifting up heavy calves at calving time so there's a massive impact on the body. A lot of farmers tell me they do not have time to exercise. But realistically, if you make a little bit of time for body conditioning during

the day you can prevent a lot of injuries. And that's the key for me – it's about prevention. It's about not getting an injury, going to the physio and doing rehab because that's all downtime. Farmers are time-poor so if you can add a little bit of movement in each day, you can prevent a lot of injuries from happening."



Dennis Kelly is a physiotherapist and has worked in Winton for more than 20 years, servicing the rural community.

"I see a lot of farmers who come back with recurrent back pain every year

because their core isn't strong and their back isn't ready for heavy lifting or prolonged bending in ditches or calving. Four or five minutes a day would probably be enough to start strengthening those muscles."

"You need to make body conditioning a habit. If you are building up a muscle or a structure of muscles it takes a good 12 weeks to do that. Sometimes people get started and stop doing it and they haven't got the muscle strength and next year they will come back with the same problem. So you have to commit to the 6 or 12 weeks to get the muscles up to speed again and after that it's a maintenance thing. You need to get a routine time of the day that is not interfering with your life. You might be able to do it when you are out in the field. The routines are not very difficult but the hard part is remembering to do them."



Body conditioning videos

Farmstrong teamed up with VetSouth to produce a video series on prevention and recovery from common on-farm injuries. In a series of short videos, which are on the Farmstrong website, Mark Tree and Dennis Kelly go through some simple routines which you can do in the course of your day to prevent wrist, back, shoulder, and achilles injuries – common problem areas for farmers.

Fit for Calving

A great series of videos has been produced to help women prepare for calving season. It's a six-week programme with stretches and warm-ups which strengthen muscle groups commonly used during the calving season. It takes just five to ten minutes a day to begin with, building up to 20 minutes a day. This small investment of time will make all the difference to how you feel during calving season and help keep you injury free. You can access the videos on the Farmstrong website www.farmstrong.co.nz

Turn on Your Core

Farmstrong is also promoting a four-week 'Turn on Your Core' challenge to build your strength, help you be more flexible and have better balance. No specialist equipment is required. Once you establish your routine and repeat it at least four days a week, you will quickly notice the improvements. For guidance on how to do the challenge and each of the routines, you can view the videos on the Farmstrong website.

Know your numbers

As an emergency department specialist and rural GP, Dr Tom Mulholland is well aware of the importance of 'knowing your numbers' when it comes to your own health.

"After spending a couple of decades working as a doctor in rural communities I have noticed a few important things. Farmers are great at knowing the stats and health of their pasture, machinery and stock but not so good at their own vital statistics. Many don't know their blood pressure, cholesterol levels and diabetes numbers. As a rural GP, I've certainly seen the consequences of neglecting your numbers."

"Once farmers are connected into their GPs and know their numbers, they are pretty good at responding. But it's like anything, you don't know what you don't know. The bottom line is if you can't look after yourself, it's hard to look after your family or your farm. You get a warrant for your car or your tractor, right? What I've noticed in rural New Zealand is there are a lot of unwarranted and unregistered cars but there are even more unregistered and unwarranted males."

"So every birthday go and get a health check-up – get your blood pressure checked, prostate, cholesterol, your diabetes risk and if all those numbers are fine, you are good for another few hundred thousand kilometres yourself!"

"Once you have your numbers, discuss with your GP what the ideal targets are for you to maintain. The important thing is to take control of your own health and manage it." ●

“Some of the cross-breeds can be up to 90 kilos. They’re getting bigger. You’re averaging 400 sheep a day and at peak season I can work 40 to 50 days in a row, eight hours a day. You really need to stay in shape to hit those targets each day.”

Sam Brooks, shearer



“I play netball on a Saturday and I make sure I get my social squash on a Thursday. Our Young Farmers Club has an indoor netball team on a Monday. Connecting with my netball girls and my Young Farmers Club and having a run around at the same time – that all works for me.”

Kate Stewart, dairy farm assistant



“We’re lifting heavy things all the time in dairy farming, buckets that weigh over 20 kilos, carrying posts. You look at any dairy farmer. When they take off their overalls they bloody disappear don’t they? A lot of them only use their forearms and need to strengthen other areas. That’s why I like going to a gym.”

Tangaroa Walker, contract milker

“Keeping in better shape can be as easy as doing some simple warm-up stretches and exercises each day before you hit the woolshed, the milking cups, drench the lambs or drive the tractor. Doing warm-ups keeps the body flexible and prevents you picking up unnecessary strains, niggles and injuries that can wear you down. Whether you’re a farmer or a lock, warming up before you work will extend your career.”

Sam Whitelock, Farmstrong Ambassador

“Farmers are classic for jumping out of the tractor cab and just running off and doing something, but if it’s a big job that’s how you’re going to get injured. Taking the time to be conscious about your movements and boosting your overall fitness is going to make it easier to do those things.”

Siobhan O’Malley, Sharemilker of the Year, 2017



“I try not to sit on the bike too much. If I have an opportunity to jog and do something, or to walk and do something instead, then I do. If I’m setting up an electric fence, I’ll leave the bike at one end, brisk walk or jog rolling the reel out and I’ll put the standards in. If I do that three or four times a day, that’s an extra few ks of exercise.”

Tony Coltman, dairy farmer

“It’s taken a long time for me to be a bit selfish and say ‘I’m going out for a run’. But now my family know that it’s my time and that I come back a happier person.”

Trish Rankin, sharemilker



“Looking after yourself is hugely important when it comes to being able to handle the physicality of the job. Going out hunting or walking in the hills and getting some Ks under your belt definitely helps to keep your body fit.”

Cheyenne Wilson, dairy farm manager

“I’m lucky on the farm to be able to get plenty of exercise and fresh air. We’re a pretty active family too so we’re out and about a lot. We do the odd bike ride and I also have a rowing machine in the workshop which is pretty good on a wet day. Getting a sweat up and getting stuck into that helps blow out some cobwebs.”

Luke Tweed, sheep and beef farmer



“It’s funny isn’t it? We do farming courses, but nowhere do we learn about how to look after ourselves, how to eat properly, how to call a friend if you’re in a stressful situation. That’s why I think Farmstrong is the best thing since sliced bacon.”

Tangaroa Walker, dairy farmer



FUNDAMENTALS

You Matter, Let's Natter



Just listening to someone who is 'under the pump' can make a huge difference to how they feel. Sharing the ups and downs of farming helps manage pressure. You Matter, Let's Natter is a Farmstrong initiative designed to pass on the listening skills that help people support each other through tough times.



“I keep myself well-connected to people and have friends that I can talk to. That’s really helpful. There’s a difference between a mate and a friend, you know?”

Eliot Cooper, dairy farmer



“My advice to young shearers is that if you’re feeling under pressure, talk about it. Talk to your ganger, talk to your boss. We’re ready to talk about anything happening in your life, and in confidence.”

Marty Smith, shearing contractor

“Top of my list are sport clubs. They’re a key source of connection for the farming community in this region.”

Tanya Sanders, locum GP and dairy farm helper

“The days of turning up thinking you have to act like a hard person just because you’re a shearer are long gone. The new generation are all using social media. They’re used to expressing their feelings, not just locking everything up, which is a good thing.”

Sam Brooks, shearer

“Mixing with others is a huge part of making sure you’re farming with the right mindset when you work by yourself.”

James Bruce, sheep and beef farmer

“Communication is the big thing. I really believe that a problem shared on a farm is a problem halved. Don’t bottle things up.”

Tash O’Neill, dairy farmer

“Farming doesn’t have to be like ‘groundhog day’ – wake up, let the dogs off and do the same thing every day. If you’re not happy, chat with your wife, yak with a mate. Make doing something about it a priority.”

Leyton King, sheep and beef farmer

Farmstrong goes where farmers are

Farmstrong has its roots firmly planted in rural New Zealand. We get our message across through events, workshops and activities that extend the reach of the programme.

Increasingly local communities are responding with events of their own, carrying the same message of what Farmstrong is all about.



The Fit4farming
Cycle Tour



Workshops
and Talks



Fit for
Calving



Field
Days



'Turn on
your core'





Competitions




Woolshed Music
& Comedy Tour




 **Workshops and Talks** Farmstrong runs workshops and gives talks around the country to help farmers and growers increase their skills to deal with the ups and downs of farming.


 **Fit for Calving** Farmstrong promotes each year a six-week, video-based programme to help farmers prepare for calving season. The videos were filmed near Ashburton with a group of enthusiastic sharemilking women and friends.

 **Field Days** Farmstrong takes its message to where farmers go. Every year we attend the National Agricultural Fielddays at Mystery Creek, which attracts 130,000 people. We are also a regular presence at other agriculture field days.





 **Woolshed Music and Comedy Tours** Farmstrong has Woolshed Music and Comedy Tours delivering a simple message that connecting, getting off-farm and having a laugh is great for your wellbeing.

 **The Fit4farming Cycle Tour** The 2016 Farmstrong Cycle Challenge stretched the length of New Zealand and gave farmers the chance to get off the farm, get on their bike and get their heart rate up.

 **'Turn on your core'** This four-week challenge is designed to help farmers and growers feel stronger, be more flexible and improve their balance. Ten minutes a day, four days a week using simple techniques that make a huge difference. Video guidance is provided on the Farmstrong website.





Competitions The town of Wairoa won Farmstrong Ambassador, Sam Whitelock, for a day thanks to local farmer Andrew Powdrell. His video entry won the Farmstrong competition and he decided to put his win to use for the local community. After a pōwhiri at St Joseph's school, Sam ran a rugby training session for kids, visited Andrew's farm and spoke at a charity luncheon for 100 local farmers to raise funds for local community sport.

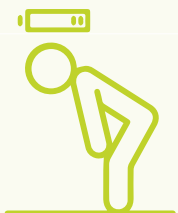
What you have been telling us

Back in 2014, when Farmstrong was just an idea, we asked more than 400 farmers what the biggest challenges and barriers were to their wellbeing. What emerged very clearly was that farmers have systems in place to look after their land, stock, produce and equipment but are not nearly as good at putting in place things to look after themselves.



47% of farmers said the biggest challenge was getting time off the farm to achieve a work-life balance.

We also asked what topics they were most interested in to improve their wellbeing:



35%

35% how to manage tiredness and fatigue



29%

29% how to stop worrying about work all the time



31%

31% how to manage stress



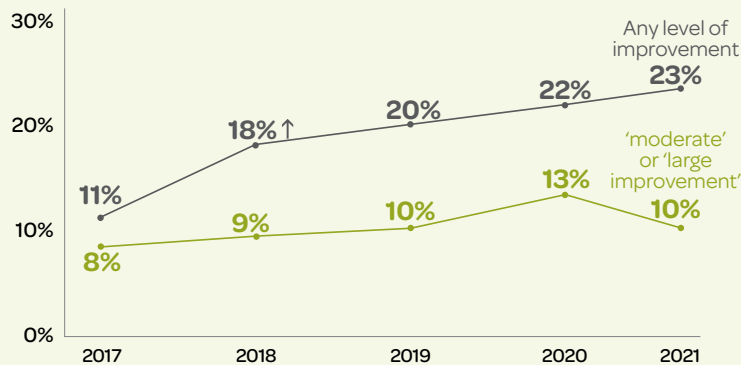
34%

34% how to get the best out of employees

More than 15,000 farmers attribute wellbeing improvements to their engagement with Farmstrong.

We are making progress

Improvement attributed to Farmstrong



In 2021:

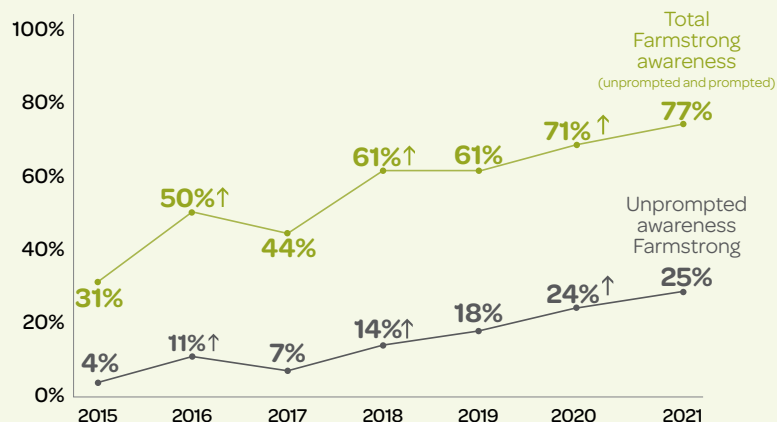
- **23%** of all surveyed attributed improvement in their wellbeing to engagement with Farmstrong
- **10%** attributed a 'moderate' or 'large' improvement to Farmstrong.

Farmstrong annually monitors impact, awareness and engagement levels with the programme. Our 2021 survey results show that 77% of farmers were aware of the Farmstrong brand and 36% of farmers and growers (approx. 24,000) had engaged with the programme.

Most encouragingly 23% of farmers (approx. 15,200) attributed improvements in their wellbeing to their engagement with Farmstrong.

Farmers who engaged with Farmstrong in four or more ways showed a marked level of improvement. ●

Farmer Awareness of Farmstrong



In 2021:

- **25%** of all surveyed were able to name Farmstrong without prompting
- **77%** were aware of Farmstrong (prompted and unprompted).

“The best part of the day is very early morning. You can’t replace that. It’s just a wonderful feeling. You’re isolated, you’re totally unaware of what’s going on in the world, and you just get on with it. I love the challenges that nature puts in front of you.”
Eliot Cooper, dairy farmer



“I make sure I enjoy the little moments in farming. Snapshots I call them. The things you get to see in farming that other people never see. You’re waiting for a cow to calve at midnight and you’ve got a sky full of stars. I take that all in and it gives me a lot of satisfaction.” *Paul Walker, dairy farmer*

29 farmers and growers talk about how they have dealt with tough times – lessons learned and the changes they have made to look after themselves and their families. The stories that unfold in this book are very Kiwi – insightful, inspiring and always down-to-earth.



Founding Partners



Strategic Partner

