

Resilient Farmers' Conference: Farmers' Health and Well-being- Building a Community of Support.

March 2019 - Antrim, Northern Ireland

April 2019 - Portlaoise, Republic of Ireland

May 2019 - Stratford-upon-Avon, England, UK



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Table of Contents

The Charities.....	1
Conference Organisers	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Part 1: Rationale for establishing the conference partnership	8
PART 2: Northern Ireland	10
<i>Conference Delegate Representation in Northern Ireland</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Conference Schedule.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Dialogue and Debate: Proceedings from the Rural Support Resilient Farmers’ Conference.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Northern Ireland Learning Outcomes</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Key Themes and Issues that emerged on the day</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Conference Feedback Analysis.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Key Thematic Areas for Consideration.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Conclusions from the Northern Ireland Conference</i>	<i>37</i>
PART 3: Republic of Ireland	38
<i>Conference Delegate Representation in Ireland.....</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Conference Schedule.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>Dialogue and Debate: Proceedings from the Embrace FARM Resilient Farmers’ Conference</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Republic of Ireland Learning Outcomes.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Conference Feedback Analysis.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Key Thematic Areas for Consideration.....</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Conclusions from the Republic of Ireland Conference</i>	<i>70</i>
PART 4: England, United Kingdom.....	72
<i>Conference Schedule.....</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>Dialogue and Debate: Proceedings from the Farm Safety Conference</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Conference Feedback Analysis.....</i>	<i>80</i>
Conclusion	81

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About the author

Dr. Maria Feeney is employed at the Institute of Education, Dublin City University and was invited by Jude McCann to collaborate with the charities and write the report of the conference. Her background is in sociology and education and she is a qualified post-primary school teacher. Maria had a particular interest in rural life and undertook her doctoral studies in this area having become aware of the issue of male suicide in rural areas. Her thesis, *Pain and Distress in Rural Ireland: The Narratives of Men Who Engaged in Suicidal Behaviour (2012)* used a sociological perspective to understand if rural life and society were implicated in men’s decisions to engage in suicidal behaviour. She operationalised a highly complex methodology and interviewed 26 men, aged 19-75 years, after admission to hospital for serious suicidal behaviour. The findings, launched by Kathleen Lynch, the Minister for State at the Department of Health, demonstrated that rural life and society were implicated in men’s decisions to engage in suicidal behaviour in highly complex economic, social and emotional/personal ways. She was awarded a Teagasc Walsh Fellowship to undertake her studies. Maria teaches and supervises across undergraduate and teacher education programmes in the Institute of Education and the Church of Ireland Centre. She also works across numerous funded research projects at the Institute. Previously Maria was employed at Maynooth University’s sociology and education departments in a teaching and research capacity. She has also taught on programmes in other teacher education institutions such as the Froebel College of Education and the National College of Art and Design. Dr. Peter Murray (Maynooth University) and Maria have co-authored *Church, State and Social Science in Ireland – Knowledge Institutions and the Rebalancing of Power, 1937-73 (2016)*. She and Dr. David Tuohy (SJ) have co-authored *Growing in the Image and Likeness of God A Review of the Discipleship Project and the Five Marks of Mission in the United Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough (2019)*.

The Resilient Farmers' Conferences were kindly supported by



The Charities



Rural Support, Northern Ireland

CN: 102591

Rural Support was established in the autumn of 2001. The aim was to help farmers and other rural residents impacted by the severe foot and mouth crisis which was plaguing the agricultural industry. In 2002, Rural Support was registered as a charitable company. The severe impact foot and mouth disease was having on farming and on the rural community as a whole was soon realised. It was this awareness, and the urgent need to address this distress, that led to the establishment of Rural Support and its telephone helpline. Rural Support remains unique in that it is specifically designed to support the wider farming community, and that its volunteers who assist its helpline service all have rural backgrounds.

Initially set up to alleviate the stress, worries and concerns experienced in the face of foot and mouth, Rural Support has subsequently broadened its focus to include concerns related to financial problems, inheritance issues/succession planning, disease outbreak, and the burden imposed by farm paper work and related matters. These increasing pressures are a result of changing circumstances. While retaining its core focus on issues such as stress and emotional distress, physical and mental health and the often-related risk of suicide, Rural Support now has extensive experience in handling problems associated with major incidents including animal diseases and major weather events, such as that experienced in the spring of 2013 and more recently in the North West in 2017. Such incidents have highlighted the ongoing needs of the rural community and the valuable service that Rural Support provides.



Embrace FARM, Republic of Ireland

CHY: 21837

After the loss of his father, Liam Rohan, in a farm accident, Brian Rohan and his wife Norma established Embrace FARM in 2014 with a view to supporting other families who had lost loved ones to a farm accident. They also support those who have survived a farm accident. Embrace FARM obtained its charity status in 2017. Each year since 2014 they hold an Ecumenical Remembrance Service to remember those who have been lost to farm accidents. The charity has actively participated in agricultural shows, events and had embarked on numerous campaigns including farm safety ones to raise awareness about their work. To support those who are bereaved, Embrace FARM hosts meetings for those affected by the loss of a loved one and caters to the unique needs of different groups such as spouses' support weekends, and meetings that cater to the needs of children who have lost a parent/sibling. They support those who have survived a farm accident through their survivors' gatherings which are facilitated by a psychotherapist. Furthermore, they also advocate and lobby to raise awareness, primarily through engagement with other organisations, and most recently, hosting their own national conference in April 2019 in partnership with Rural Support, Northern Ireland and the Farm Safety Foundation, UK.



Farm Safety Foundation, UK. CN 1159000

The Farm Safety Foundation is a small charity, established to raise awareness of farm safety among the next generation of farmers, challenge and change their attitudes to risk-taking and reduce the number of life-changing and life-ending accidents that continue to give farming the poorest safety record of any occupation in the UK.

The Farm Safety Foundation works closely with the industry to engage, educate and communicate strong and relatable farm safety messages. Through ambitious education programmes, training over 8,500 young farmers in 41 different land based colleges/universities across the UK and national campaigns such as Farm Safety Week and Mind Your Head, the Farm Safety Foundation is tackling the stigma around risk-taking and poor mental health, ensuring that that next generation of farmers is resilient and equipped with smart strategies and specific skills to live well and farm well.

Conference Organisers

Jude McCann – CEO, Rural Support Northern Ireland

Jude is Chief Executive for Rural Support in Northern Ireland since 2012. He grew up on the family farm in Mid-Ulster and later chose to study Geography at the University of Ulster Coleraine followed by a Masters in Communication at Loughry College Cookstown. He lived and worked in New Zealand for seven years where he completed his PhD through Queen's University Belfast examining 'Rural Restructuring and Information Systems'. After completing this research, he worked in international aid and development and then returned to Northern Ireland to work on a social justice programme with the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland. He was awarded a Nuffield Scholarship to embark on an international study tour (2017-2018) to conduct an extensive investigation of farmers and farm families in the face of rapid change. The project aimed to identify ways of increasing resilience and effective knowledge exchange. Having built a house on the family farm four years ago, much of his spare time now involves helping his father on the farm and spending time with his family.

Brian and Norma Rohan – Founders, Embrace FARM (ROI)

Brian and Norma Rohan are dairy farmers in Co. Laois. Brian lost his own father Liam in a farming accident on their family farm at Shanahoe, Mountrath, County Laois in 2013. Norma originally from West Limerick was home from hospital with their 6-day old daughter Julie when the accident occurred. Their own grief and wish to support others following the tragic loss of a loved one on the family farm prompted the establishment of Embrace FARM. Balancing a full family life with their three children and a busy dairy farm, Brian and Norma are always available to anyone that contacts the charity in need of support. The charity is a farm accident support network however, Brian and Norma have also made key partnerships with industry with a view to reaching out to industry and public and private sectors to raise awareness about the impact of farm accidents and the need for specific supports to support those who have lost a loved one and also support those who have survived.

Stephanie Berkeley - Manager, Farm Safety Foundation UK

Hailing from Co. Donegal, Stephanie's friends were either farmers or fishermen; equally dangerous industries. After studying European Business Studies and spending time living and studying in Asturias and Barcelona, Stephanie began a career in journalism at Belfast's Newsletter, working in the business section of the newspaper before joining publishing house Greer Publications with Ulster Business magazine as North West Correspondent.

After various roles in the Greer Publications group with Specify magazine and Ulster Business, Stephanie was appointed Editor of the award-winning Northern Woman magazine as well as editing the lifestyle section of Ulster Business.

From 2006-2014 she was Marketing Manager for W5, Ireland's only science centre and a charity with educational aims before her move, in 2014, to Stratford-upon-Avon where she has developed and grown the Farm Safety Foundation and its award-winning educational programmes and campaigns.

Stephanie is the UK Member Country (MC) representative on the Safety Culture and Risk Management in Agriculture (**SACURIMA**) – EU Cost Action CA16123. She is also a qualified Mental Health First Aider and has recently developed a new Mental Health in Farming session to further support the industry and those living and working in agriculture.

Executive Summary

The simple and powerful message that *Farmers' Resilience is Everyone's Business* emerged from international research undertaken by Jude McCann (2017-2018) as part of his Nuffield Farming Scholarship - an investigation of farmers and farm families as they experience rapid change across thirteen countries. He interviewed farmers in developing and developed countries and his findings revealed many common themes: solutions outside of business would be required to address the issues farmers were facing; a willingness to change and adapt was key to farmers' resilience; farmers' health and well-being are key for ensuring financial well-being and viable production on the farm; and a holistic approach structured around mental and social well-being is required to address farmers' needs in the short and long term. Key recommendations arising from the work warranted (1) greater coordination among agencies and organisations serving the farming community and (2) the need to broaden support with the aim of creating a more holistic 'aid package' (McCann, 2018).

Taking his message to a wider audience was facilitated by partnering with Embrace FARM in the Republic of Ireland and with the Farm Safety Foundation in the UK. Like Jude, and his colleagues in Rural Support, these two organisations were acutely aware of the vicissitudes and vulnerabilities affecting farming communities. Their commitment to raising awareness about the issue of farmers' resilience was realised when they launched a series of three conferences, across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and the UK in the Spring and Summer of 2019.

The theme of the conference *Resilient Farmers' Conference - Building a Community of Support* aimed to engage with all Stakeholders and highlight the fact that farmers' resilience is in fact everyone's business – across the public and private sectors, Government, industry and indeed amongst the farming community itself.

One key finding that emerged from all three conferences was that concept of farmers' resilience was a complex and multi-faceted one. Farmers' resilience could not be considered a standalone issue given the personal, social, financial and economic factors that underpin it. It was interesting that these three conferences were taking place in early-mid 2019 when the farming community, and indeed wider society in Ireland and the UK, were finding themselves in unprecedented circumstances. The 'endless machinations' of Brexit were to the fore during the Northern Ireland and UK conference discussions, while in the Republic, the reality of the life-changing and life-limiting trauma that follows a farm accident presented delegates with an opportunity to reflect on the profound, yet seldom heard, stories of survivors of farm accidents. The survivors' stories demonstrated their enormous capacity for resilience in the face of overwhelming adversity not to mention the nuanced realities of the tragedies and traumas that affect rural communities. While these issues relating to trade and personal trauma may seem, at first, to be unrelated, they do in fact highlight the breadth of issues that are implicated in the overall conversation about farmers' resilience – a conversation that these conferences intended to start.

Immediate concern about the future of the agriculture sector was raised once the Brexit vote was returned in June 2016. Issues related to international and local trade, compliance and the free movement of people within the European Union required a reigniting of debates and reengagement with issues that many believed safely remained in the past. Such issues have caused widespread discontent, confusion, stress and frustration for all, particularly those in the farming sector. These

concerns were further compounded by relatively recent international trade agreements (Mercosur) and other international trade-tariff 'wars' that have seen farmers being 'bailed out' by Governments following financial fall-out on their farms. And yet, in other parts of the world, the greatest threat to farmers' and farm families has been weather conditions as a result of climate change and global warming that has compromised survival on the farm. While some success stories detailed at the conferences report farmers' resilience in such challenging times – New Zealand's Doug Avery being a good case in point – many farmers may struggle to adapt and cope with this type of uncertainty. Moreover, some farmers have been directly impacted in other ways as a result of being targeted by climate change activists. These are only some of the global level issues affecting the agriculture sector and farmers' well-being, but they merit consideration in the context of understanding farmer resilience and how we as a society can support them and the sector.

A second key finding that emerged from the conferences, emerged as more 'local' issue and it was the particularly punitive *modus operandi* of Government Departments in their dealings with the farming communities. Delegates were presented with compelling evidence of the realities of the stresses associated with unannounced inspections, threats to suspend payments and the overwhelming difficulty of trying to maintain reasonable working relationships with department officials. Several calls were issued for the Departments to infuse their approach with a degree of compassion and realise that a farmer lies behind the herd number. These types of disconnected working relationships were also identified as being problematic in industry.

Farmers' ill-health and vulnerability emerged as an important issue that requires attention and meaningful 'farmer-proofed' solutions. Well and healthy farmers are active and productive ones and the entire sector, and society, benefits from their well-being. However, the realities of contemporary farming have the potential to compromise farmers' health and well-being. Working alone and under pressure, managing heavy and complex machinery, general malaise, undetected health conditions particularly cardio-vascular and muscular-skeletal issues that remain undetected due to farmers' poor engagement with health services, isolation, undiagnosed anxiety and distress and the stigma associated with rural men's mental health, are factors implicated in the poor status of some farmers across all regions. Moreover, such factors are linked to their vulnerability and risk in terms of death by farm accidents and suicide. Farmers' vulnerability to the latter is a well-known international trend and this point of discussion at the conferences served as a sobering reality of the fate of some farmers and the need to build resilience and communities of support, not only in and among the farming community themselves but also in wider, rural society. It also demonstrated the need for campaigns to raise awareness around promoting positive mental health and help-seeking for those traditionally constrained from reaching out due to adherence to the traditional, 'men must be tough' socio-cultural script. Ultimately, the ability to respond in meaningful ways can be facilitated with accurate data pertaining to particular groups who have particular needs. To obtain that data, health care services require people to engage with their services. Simple measures that target farm families and farmers will prove a valuable first step towards developing a 'road map' of wider, available, and more coordinated services.

Continued Government support and investment in the broader rural community was a widely agreed upon issue. There are many dynamic, innovative and progressive farmers currently practising and the current generation moving through the agricultural colleges are versed in modern, technological and evidence-based methods. Therefore, commitment to IT infrastructure, specifically rural broadband in

the Republic, are absolute requirements for the sustainability and future viability of an innovative and productive farming sector. It was noted that the 'hollowing out' of rural society, in terms of health and other services (banks, post offices) undermine the ability of communities to be resilient and sustain and support themselves. The dearth of rural health professionals was discussed. One potential solution to this problem was to promote rural healthcare among professionals as a meaningful, dynamic and viable career option. The persistent under-investment in rural communities also has implications for broader rural development in other sectors such as business. Moreover, it has implications for quality of life issues (e.g. loneliness) for those that live in rural areas and may serve as disincentives for those who would perhaps otherwise invest in such places.

Industry offered their support and commitment to partner with the charities', to build communities of support. There was open acknowledgement for the way in which industry benefit from the farming community and there was honest acknowledgment of ways in which they could serve the farming community in more meaningful ways. Their willingness to support the farming sector lies not simply in supporting events, but rather their commitment needs to be constructively aligned to their long-term growth and corporate responsibility strategies. Only then will whole-sector and more equitable success be achieved for all partners in the sector, particularly farmers.

The series of conferences were a resounding success. They served as a valuable and powerful platform on which to highlight the issue of farmer resilience but also to raise awareness around the fact that farmers' resilience is in fact everyone's business. Of particular importance is how timely they were given the unprecedented uncertainty the sector is currently experiencing. Now, more than ever, society needs to appreciate, understand and support its farmers.

Calls for more frequent conferences like these are testament to how beneficial they were. There is a demonstrable need to have greater and more frequent multi-sector engagement amongst all partners. Despite the issues and tensions that were identified during the conference discussions, significant common ground exists on which to work and collaborate for the overall good of the sector for all.

Finally, the work of Rural Support in Northern Ireland, Embrace FARM in the Republic of Ireland and the Farm Safety Foundation in the UK deserves much commendation. It was noted at one conference that farmers serve to ensure the well-being of society by virtue of their role as food producers. There is much evidence to support the fact that as a society we have become increasingly concerned about the food we eat and where it comes from but there is also ample evidence to suggest that we have never been more disconnected from the reality of farming and food production systems with many having no sense of the role or the work that a farmer undertakes or the complex challenges they experience. It is unsurprising then that the charities have taken up the cause of farmers' resilience and recognised and aligned themselves to it in their own relevant ways while simultaneously working collaboratively to advance the cause and play their role in the future sustainability and viability of the sector and the farming community. Their commitment to support farmers in this way by building communities of support is an admirable undertaking that will require significant investment over time. It also serves as an important call to action for us all to support their efforts. Their commitment and efforts now will surely continue into the future and will be something that society will indebted to them for.

Part 1: Rationale for establishing the conference partnership

In 2017 and 2018 Jude McCann undertook a Nuffield Farming Scholarship. His project title was *Securing Farmers' Resilience in a Changing World*. The objectives of his study tour were as follows:

- Identify issues and pressures affecting farmers' and farm households' health and well-being
- Examine the importance of farmers' resilience
- Identify ways of increasing resilience so that farmers' and farm families' can protect themselves and their farm businesses in challenging times
- Make recommendations on how to build and secure the farmers' resilience by governments, business, NGOs and farm support organisations.¹

The study's international tour meant Jude met with farmers in thirteen countries from March 2017-September 2018. He conducted more than eighty interviews with farmers and farm families. The research centred *on an extensive, investigation of farmers and farm families in the face of rapid change*²

Four key 'messages' emerged from the research findings

1. Challenges facing farmers can no longer be addressed by solely focusing on current business issues.
2. Willingness and ability to adapt to change together with connecting with others are key components to farmers' resilience.
3. Assuring the health and wellbeing of farmers and farm households are priorities and are prerequisites to address financial or production concerns.
4. A holistic approach that incorporates long-term social and mental health as well as environmental and financial issues is integral to resolving any immediate, short-term needs.³

However, the report concluded with a simple, yet powerful message, that

Farmers' Resilience Is Everyone's Business

Jude's work highlighted two key recommendations: (1) the need to increase coordination between farm support and other agencies and (2) a need to better broaden support to provide a more holistic aid package⁴. These recommendations serve as the impetus for the partnership between Rural Support in Northern Ireland, Embrace FARM in Ireland and the Yellow Wellies – Farm Safety Foundation in the UK. Their shared appreciation for the ongoing and recent challenges facing farming communities provides a platform for working together to highlight the issue of farmers' health and well-being and providing meaningful supports to address these issues. As a first step in their campaign to raise awareness, the idea for a conference emerged with a view to inviting all partners to the table.

The theme *Resilient Farmers' Conference - Building a Community of Support* would provide a platform for commencing this conversation between multiple stakeholders concerned with the issue of

¹ McCann, 2018.

² Ibid, 4

³ Ibid, 5

⁴ Ibid, 27

farmers' health and wellbeing – the Farming Community, Industry, Public Sector, Voluntary Sector, and Healthcare Professionals.

The key objectives underlying the conference theme were:

- Highlight the issue of farmers' health and resilience and the responsibility of everyone including the Government and Industry
- Ensure stakeholders and policy makers understand and act on the fact that farmers' health and resilience is everyone's business
- Identify opportunities and actions which can be taken forward across sectors to safeguard farmers' well-being.

PART 2: Northern Ireland

Conference Delegate Representation in Northern Ireland

On the 25th March 2019, Rural Support hosted their conference in the Greenmount Campus of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE), Co. Antrim. The event was kindly sponsored by the Public Health Agency (PHA) and NFU Mutual. The event was attended by 125 delegates from across multiple organisations and sectors, listed in the table below.

<p>Farm Support Sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural Support • Ulster Farmers' Union • Irish Farmers' Association • Farm Safety Foundation • Vet Support NI
<p>Public Sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid & East Antrim Council • NI Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) • Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI) • Farm Families Health Checks Programme • Harper Adams University • College of Agriculture, Food & Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) • Northern Health and Social Care Trust; Western Health and Social Care Trust • Local Government Representatives⁵ • Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) Northern Ireland • Political Party Members • LANTRA⁶
<p>Private Sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northern Ireland Veterinary Association/Association of Veterinary Surgeons Practising in Northern Ireland (AVSPNI) • NFU Mutual • Barclays
<p>Voluntary & Community Sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Community Resilience Group (RCRG) • Red Cross • Samaritans • Advice NI – Independent Advice Network • Methodist Church in Ireland • Presbyterian Church in Ireland
<p>Individuals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers • Consultants

⁵ Ards and North Down Borough Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

⁶ Award body for land-based industries

Conference Schedule

A diverse group of speakers were invited to speak and contribute to the discussion. The conference schedule is provided here.

Compere: Richard Wright

10am - Opening remarks - *DAERA NI Director of Rural Affairs*, Paul Donnelly. Followed by: *Welcome UFU President* - Ivor Ferguson

10.15 - Securing Farmers' Resilience: Its everyone's Business! Jude McCann, Rural Support

10.30 - Fireside Chat – (Chair Martin Malone NFU) - *Medical Perspective:* Dr Rebecca Orr (trainee GP - YFCU & Rural Support Board Member) *and Farm Families Health Checks* – Christine Faulkner. Followed by Q&A.

11.15 - BREAK

11.30 - Farm Safety Partnership - *HSENI* Brian Monson or Representative

11.45 - Fireside Chat – (Chair Claire Saunders PCF) *Farmers' Experience* - Brian Rohan, *Embrace FARM*, David Kerr, *Nuffield Scholar & ROI Farmer* and Jonathan Glen, *Farm Safety Foundation*. Followed by Q&A.

12.30 - LUNCH

1.15 - Fireside Chat (Chair Justin McCarthy IFJ)- *Farmers' Experience* – Donal McAtamney - NI Farmer, Sharon Smyth – Rural Support Mentor and Derek Robinson – NI. Followed by Q&A.

2pm - Key Note Speaker - Ian Marshall (*Former UFU President / Irish Senator*). Followed by Q&A.

2.30 - Round Table Discussions

2.45 - Call to Action: Make a Pledge! – Stephanie Berkeley, *Farm Safety Foundation*

3pm – Final Comments – Teresa McGarvey *PHA Representative*

3.10 – Closing Remarks – Richard Wright followed by Farmers' Choir

Dialogue and Debate: Proceedings from the Rural Support Resilient Farmers' Conference

Part 2 has three sections, each dealing separately with the day's three sessions. 2.1 covers the morning session and the first Fireside Chat that had a medical perspective. The following section, 2.2 provides an account of the second Fireside Chat of the day and examined the Farmer's Experience with an emphasis on farm safety. Finally, section 2.3 covers the final Fireside Chat that dealt primarily with the realities of farming and also a discussion with Senator Ian Marshall. During this final afternoon session, delegates engaged in a Roundtable Discussion, the learning outcomes for this are presented in Part 3 of this report.

Morning Session 1

Proceedings commenced with a welcome from the compere, Mr. Richard Wright. He commended the conference organisers for their efforts in highlighting such an important issue as farmers' resilience and expressed his delight at being invited to facilitate the day's proceedings. In his opening words, he could not neglect referring to the "endless machinations" of Brexit – the prolonged uncertainty of which has played havoc on the agricultural sector and rural communities in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and in the UK and Europe since the 'Leave' vote was delivered in June 2016. The date of the conference was timely, given that it was two days prior to the scheduled departure of the UK from the EU. In the context of this and other issues, he briefly discussed resilience explaining that it was one of

...the greatest assets that farmers and people in rural areas have.

Rural communities, he argued, are not in the "squeaky door" category and regularly demonstrate resilience in the face of cuts to funding and other resources. It is no surprise, that sometimes these communities feel "ganged up on" when services, supports and provisions are scaled back or removed. Yet, they prevail, adapt and 'move on' on the face of adversity as best they can.

Mr. Paul Donnelly. Director of Rural Affairs. Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Northern Ireland.

In keeping with the theme of farmers' resilience, Paul discussed mental health and well-being. In the context of rural communities, he noted that these issues are not easy, however, there is now a good focus on mental health for both farmers and rural dwellers. The conference was an important time, he believed, to consider "...how we can work better and into the future" to support farmers and rural communities.

He too spoke about farmers' resilience. He highlighted multiple sources of "stress and anxiety" for farmers – running a business, families, succession planning, and an ageing population. Particular challenges they experience relate to other uncontrollable factors such as prices and weather. However, he did note that farming was a "fantastic industry". Consequently, it was important to come together and work together. DAERA, he explained, "do not have the answers" to all problems and challenges, not least Brexit.

Definite efforts abound that reach out to rural communities to combat isolation and poor/limited access to services particularly in terms of physical and mental health, such as – the Farm Family Health Checks.

Brexit, he argued, would present challenges *and* opportunities. The impact on the agri-food sector will be high and it will have the greatest impact on those who have “compromised resilience”. Rural Development policy has been driven by EU policy in the past forty years and that, he explained, “brought lots of funding”. Now, there is a need to develop a Northern Ireland Rural Development Policy and he believes that the conference “is opportune” for influencing policy development and the Rural Needs Act (2016) “places that responsibility on the Department to do that”. From the Department’s perspective, this is crucial, otherwise “rural areas will suffer disproportionately”.

Mr. Ivor Ferguson. UFU President

In his welcoming address, Ivor noted that most farmers “will suffer pressure and stress” at some point in their career. He acknowledged that farmers are “very proud people” but they will “not put their hand up and ask for help”. He described mental health as being a “major issue” and noted the fact that a number of farmers are under considerable stress. He too, like other speakers, referred to Brexit and was emphatic when describing the reality of it being “really an issue at farm level”. He also noted some of the current challenges facing farmers at the moment (e.g. drop in prices). The issue of the viability of the family farm was also discussed, and also in the context of the current challenges, he explained that farmers are

Very proud of our family farm structure ... how are we going to keep the farm viable for our son or daughter.

This would not be the first time that the future viability of the family farm would be discussed.

Dr. Jude McCann. CEO Rural Support

Jude discussed the work and the various types of support that Rural Support provide (e.g. in the context of disease breakdowns, succession issues and assisting those with mental health problems) and that it serves as a delivery agent for some CAFRE programmes. Delegates were presented with an account of the international work Jude undertook as part of his Nuffield Farming Scholarship *Securing Farmers’ Resilience in a Changing World*. Details were presented to highlight some of the challenges affecting farmers: twenty-three per cent drop in total farm income in 2018, and the fact that such factors are not insignificant in the context of the distressing statistic that one farmer every week dies by suicide in the UK. Resilience was a key theme throughout Jude’s presentation. Described as an ability to “cope with what life throws at us” and being “able to bounce forward, not bounce back”, resilience was key to the survival of many farmers in the Irish and international context that Jude discussed. Resilience, as it applies to farmers, he argued, is multi-faceted: business resilience, environmental resilience, social/emotional Resilience.

Similar stressors and challenges affected farmers across the globe and evidence demonstrated that many diverse supports exist to assist farmers building and safeguarding their resilience and wellbeing.

The importance of a Life-Farm balance was key. Evidence from Switzerland showed that having an apprentice on the farm facilitated the farmer taking time off. Diversification of the farm business and “thinking differently about how you get produce to market” provided new and innovative ways for the farmer to generate a new income stream thus ensuring the sustainability of the overall farm business into the future.

The need for farmers to keep socially connected was another important issue. Evidence from Cambodia suggested that drawing on the support of the local community in the small farm village means that farmers there are not isolated practitioners. Rather they draw on their well-developed social network which acts as a powerful ‘buffer’ against isolation and the demands of work. A farmer there noted, “We simply couldn’t stay alive on our own. We are one tribe”.

“...farm with nature, rather than against it” was a key message from a New Zealand farmer who sought help when experiencing some difficulties. Seeking help was an important step for him that facilitated thinking about his life and farming in a different way which ultimately led to his success. Consequently, this journey helped him become emotionally resilient.

Jude then told the conference about the “most developed and robust support service for farmers in the USA” which is based at The Farm Centre, Wisconsin. Their mission is simply to “help farmers”.

...we are interested in farmers’ quality of life and sustainability of their farm businesses. Services offered include a helpline, financial consultation, succession facilitation, vouchers for counselling and additional services to minority farmers i.e. Mong farming families (who came as refugees from South East Asia). All staff are certified first aid mental health responders. The Farm Centre is a model integrating social, psychological help with business advice and support.

The value of a working partnership between the farming community and industry, specifically the rural insurance industry, was presented with evidence from New Zealand. FMG Advice and Insurance are New Zealand’s “leading rural insurer”⁷. FMG have partnered with the Mental Health Foundation (MHF) and are funded and supported by the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC). Together, they have developed *FarmStrong*

an initiative designed to give the farmers the skills and resources to live well, farm well and get the most out of life⁸

Moreover, it is also a “nationwide well-being programme for the rural community”⁹

Findings from Jude’s research shed light on the value of this initiative because it was designed to specifically meet the nuanced needs of farmers. A participant in Jude’s research explained

To engage with farmers and with men in particular, the language we use is crucial. We choose carefully how we address issues like depression, suicide, stress or mental health problems without using any terminology that people may feel uncomfortable or be unwilling to engage with. (Gerard Vaughan).

The two core principles that emerge from the study were (1) the need to increase co-ordination between farm support and other agencies and (2) a need to better broaden support to provide a more holistic aid package.

Recommendations for NGOs and Farm Support Organisations arising from Jude’s research were then provided:

- Increase collaboration with one another as well as with all other stakeholders in agriculture to support and facilitate farmers’ resilience through holistic advice system.

⁷ <https://www.fmg.co.nz/about-fmg/giving-back/farmstrong/>

⁸ ibid

⁹ <https://farmstrong.co.nz/>

- Strive to identify the multiple drivers of stress and to incorporate existing social and emotional support for farmers to all members of the farm household and to ensure that such support also incorporates (or provides access to) business advice, technical expertise and marketing information as required.

Four key take homes messages from Jude’s research were then presented:

1. Ensure a positive Life-Farm balance
2. Be part of a Tribe Maintain and develop relationships and social connections with others (family/community/scientists/advisors) as an inherent strategy for resilience
3. Farm with nature, rather than against it
4. Look after the top paddock Seek help and become emotionally and socially resilient. ‘Man up’ to mental health.

Finally, Jude offered the following points that serve as a rationale for the conference theme *Farmers’ resilience is everyone’s business*

1. Farmers and farm support organisations, private sector and governments all have a responsibility to help farmers manage change/secure resilience.
2. Farmers’ resilience is not just about personal resilience – but also the farm household/community.
3. Challenges facing farmers can no longer be addressed by solely focusing on current business issues.
4. Need for a more integrated approach involving all stakeholders. We need increased cooperation and an integration of support provided.

He also noted that with “significant rural restructuring” support for farmers and farming families was needed now more than ever.

Fireside Chat 1: Medical Perspective

Chair: Mr. Martin Malone, NFU; Dr Rebecca Orr, Trainee GP - YFCU & Rural Support Board Member and Ms. Christine Faulkner, Senior Nurse Farm Families Health Checks.

This session was introduced by Mr. Wright who provided some context by noting that there is an ongoing problem with farmers and mental health. He also noted that the GP was a very important 'interface' in the rural community.

Martin Malone explained that NFU have sixty representatives operating across Northern Ireland, who conduct approximately 15,000 farm visits every year. Their representatives are in a "unique position to pick up on (a farmer's) mood and feeling". It would not be unusual for a fifteen-minute meeting to turn into a two-hour meeting "if the customer wants to talk". Like previous speakers, he too noted that mood and stress levels in the Agri sector are affected by other factors. He noted some general stresses and pressures and also ones around farm safety. In terms of addressing some of those stresses he acknowledged that as an insurance company "we don't have the answers for that". However, he was keen to offer his organisation's commitment to helping "farmers become more resilient for themselves".

Dr. Rebecca Orr offered some very powerful insights based on her experience as a rural GP along three key areas:

- 1) Farmers Medical Issues: there is an under-presentation of farmers to the GP/health service because they simply "don't come through the door". Often family members (e.g. wife/mother) will express her concern. Consequently, health problems are identified e.g. cardiac risk, poor diet/nutrition due to prolonged and pressurised work patterns. A need to provide health benefits/assessment to the 29,000 farmers in Northern Ireland was identified, for example "to allow farmers to have an annual health check as part of GP care". It would go towards "developing a vibrant rural economy" in the future. Christine noted that a challenge would lie in "encouraging them to uptake the service" and perhaps "a more relaxed service" would meet their needs more effectively.
- 2) Data pertaining to farmers' health is lacking. While it is known that issues such as depression, anxiety, and muscular-skeletal problems are prevalent, we don't know how prevalent they are, who are the most at risk etc. because "the stats aren't there and we need to uncover that".
- 3) Issues relating to being a rural GP. Rural communities are "struggling for GPs, pharmacists and nurses". The rural GP career need to be made "more attractive". Pressures on farmers are "immense" yet there is a "centralisation of services in Belfast". Queens University Belfast offer a Rural Health module as part of the doctor training programme. Efforts should involve encouraging more trainees into rural health to a qualified group with "home grown, local knowledge" readily equipped to serve the diverse needs of farming and rural communities. Given the small population of Northern Ireland, this idea could be easily piloted and rolled-out. Important realities of life in rural communities need to be realised such as loneliness among the elderly and the ageing population.

Ms. Christine Faulkner offered a very valuable contribution based on her experiences of working with the Farm Families' Health Checks. She provided insight as to some of the reasons why farmers experience ill-health and why they may not report it.

- Generally, she argued, “farmers are quite proud. They’ve inherited a farm, [they] don’t want to fail and want to be able to pass that down to the next generation.”
- She also noted changes to family farm structures such as many women and farmers’ wives are working off-farm.
- She spoke about her own experience of witnessing people not eating properly and eating on the go and how this impacts on one’s well-being.

Further engagement and discussion followed for the ‘Questions and Answer’ session. Delegates could anonymously post questions to the screen on stage by using an app on their phones and have them addressed by the panel.

Questions asked were as follows:

- Why do farmers not attend their GP practice when they should?
- Do you feel that rural loneliness is a contributing factor to poor mental health?
- If it’s a real struggle to get older farmers to talk – what emphasis is being applied to deliver some preventative measures to the next generation?
- What support is there for farm families?

Christine explained that a “lack of knowledge” is risk factor for ill-health. So too is being stoic as this raises the risk of ignoring signs and symptoms. Martin summed this up when he pointed out that “It’s lack of awareness rather than I don’t want to go (to the doctor)”. Dr. Orr explained

Farmers don’t want to be sick. It costs them so much and there’s no fall back. ... they don’t have the safety net of the welfare system. ... that’s a big factor getting people through the door. Farms are asset rich not (cash rich). ... Everything is health. We need to give mental and physical health equal air time. We don’t educate them through the curriculum in CAFRE. ... In Scandinavia, younger farmers take up occupational services.

Discussion about the ageing population in rural areas highlighted some risks. Christine noted that we should not underestimate the problem of “rural loneliness”, often experienced most by those who have lost a lifelong partner. Dr. Orr noted that they are a vulnerable group and that “we’re not reaching them”. While modern initiatives such as using social media to connect with and reach out to people are rolled out, for this particular group, such offerings go “over their heads” and this results them in a “disengagement from services”. She explained that this can also happen when inappropriate solutions are issued – for example, “take some time off work”. She noted that such ‘solutions’ are in fact a barrier for her as a GP - “How do you say that to a farmer?”. She then drew attention to the National Relief Worker Scheme in New Zealand that is funded through a public-private partnership and works very well to support farmers who do need a break. Neighbours will help. Christine did note, from her own experience, that younger farmers “have better social networks” and this reduces their risk for loneliness and isolation.

Dr. Orr also noted that all the statistics that they use are rural and that lots of rural dwellers are not farmers.

In keeping with the theme of the Resilient Farmers’ Conference: *Farmers’ Health and Wellbeing*, Dr. Orr answered the question ‘Why is it everyone’s business?’. She explained that sick or unwell farmers will not be taking up opportunities, will not be applying for grants and overall “will be less productive”. Consequently, she argued that we need to “invest in health for the future”. We also need to become

aware of impact of stressful events and how that will manifest itself – “Anxiety is hugely underreported among farmers”.

In terms of what we can do going forward –

- Strong public message to encourage uptake of the family farm health checks and GPs
- Collaborate with public sector and departments to understand what they can do

Morning Session 2 Farmers’ Experience – Farm Safety and Personal Stories

Mr. Bryan Monson, CEO Health and Safety Executive of Northern Ireland (HSENI) on the subject of Farm Safety Partnership.

Bryan opened his presentation by discussing the concepts of resilience and crisis. A crisis, he argued,

... may relate to many things, financial difficulties, relationship issues, physical health, mental health, mental wellbeing, potential for an accident, natural event.

Coping with a crisis involves prevention, mitigation and recovery. Every day pressures and risks such as: time to get things done, expectations of others, exposure to chemicals, hazards inherent in a job, finances and legislation. For the most part, he argued, one survives such risks because these pressures or risks are controlled by barriers. Barriers may be physical, can be “based on how we behave, think or act, and “are sometimes under our control of others”. An example of a financial barrier may be an overdraft or a loan; in terms of time, a protective barrier may be “planning and prioritization”. In terms of prevention and mitigation, Bryan explained that

- (1) barriers can prevent an event happening
e.g. PTO shaft guard, dust mask, “a close friend who someone can confide in”
- (2) can reduce impact when things go wrong
e.g. a fall arrest harness, physiotherapy and training, a counsellor

In terms of mental health, Bryan explained that risk emerges when a farmer has no escape from the pressures of farming. Farmers are at risk because they have no ability to see the situation from another perspective. ‘Defence in Depth’ is a risk prevention strategy that he advocated for. It requires that “multiple barriers are in place preventing risk/harm”.

He posed the question who creates the pressures? The answer, he argues for some pressures, is “no one”. Some pressures for farmers come in the form of uncontrollable realities such as the weather or animal disease. Other pressures come from

Ourselves, family, community, government, financial institutions, other businesses, society

In this way “farmers are only one of many layers of the pressures created”. Yet, these same groups are the barriers that can protect us from risk and harm. He offered a simple example to illustrate his point by making reference to the issuance of a prohibition notice given to a farmer by an inspector for not having a PTO shaft guard. “The farmer may not welcome it, but that risk has been mitigated by having a shaft guard.”.

Fireside Chat 2: Farmers' Experience

Chair: Ms. Claire Saunders, Director of The Prince's Trust Countryside Fund. Mr. Brian Rohan, Founder of Embrace FARM. Mr. David Kerr, Nuffield Scholar & Farmer. Mr. Jonathan Glen, Farm Safety Foundation ambassador & student at Harper Adams University.

Claire opened this session by noting that "80% of young farmers see mental health as being the number one issue" concerning them. She then described the working remit of the Prince's Countryside Fund (PCF)¹⁰, established in 2010, which has broadened its range as a charity. As a result of the distress caused to so many during the 2001 Foot and Mouth crisis, a gap in service provision was identified it being that rural communities needed help after a crisis. The PCF have three strands of support: Grants that "aim to sustain rural communities, improve the prospects of viability for farm and rural business, and support aid delivery in an emergency and build resilience"¹¹; Emergency Response and The Prince's Farm Resilience Programme. The Farming Health Partnership was also established which "keeps a close eye" on the number of late payments and other potential risk factors for farming communities. Claire described how they brought banks together some years ago regarding debt issues.

Members from the panel were then invited to share their stories.

Jonathan Glen, a young farmer and student at Harper Adams University who also had made a trip to study and farm in New Zealand, told delegates about his previous depression and described that he felt "isolated, left behind" and that the "pressure just built up". In terms of how this was manifesting itself for him in his daily life on the farm he explained that "standing there milking the cows thinking about your own thoughts". He also noted that depression was hereditary in his family.

David Kerr discussed his own circumstances that "eventually" led to him seek help and advice. He noted that he "came through it" by talking to people. He explained that eventually "problems come out, but they mightn't come out straight away" and advocated for meaningful engagement between the farmer and the professional.

Brian Rohan talked about the loss of his father on the family farm six years previously. Brian's personal story shed light on the progressive and mutual working relationship he had with his father on the farm. No problems existed in relating to succession/ownership. Father and son shared the same vision for their farm. The death of his father was a devastating loss for him and his family which happened only a few days after the birth of his first child. He noted that there was lots of support and visitors initially – he was "blessed" to have good friends and neighbours who assisted with working the farm as the family were dealing with his father's funeral. However, Brian felt that "weeks and months later, all that was gone". He believes that friends and neighbours did not want to "over step the mark". On a personal level, he described how he beat himself up over what happened and how coping with the loss of his Dad was difficult. He also described the complications that can arise for families like his when no wills may be in place or if a bank account is frozen.

Discussion commenced among the panel members. Claire wondered if there was a generational issue was of concern. Jonathan noted that young farmers are now better educated. He cautioned however about "looking at a distorted view of reality" and how this can affect younger generations who are invested in social media. He explained that "Only the best parts of life are on social media". Other aspects that are not publicised through social media to not get the meaningful attention that they

¹⁰ <https://www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk/>

¹¹ <https://www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk/grant-giving-programme/grant-programme>

should. Consequently, the support structure that may be available on social media when positive elements of life are highlighted are not used as a supportive mechanism in the presence of something negative/distressing for the simple reason it's not publicised in the first place. Circumstances like these can leave a person feeling alone and without support.

David then explained that as farmers "we're tough people. We don't like to talk about things." such as financial issues or relationship issues. There was general agreement throughout the day that this type of stoic *modus operandi* is problematic and explains farmer's unwillingness to talk about their problems and seek help. David noted that resolving relationship issues could be "very stressful and expensive". He also felt that, even in the face of adversity, "the confident people do well in life, sports and work. If you lack confidence, it's more difficult.". He believes education is key for overcoming such problems and building confidence and resilience. Furthermore, he also believed that farmers need to be "a little bit more financially savvy".

Some questions from delegates were posted to the screen and were as follows:

- Jonathan – what do you think should be done to support ag. students like yourself more proactively?
- A huge thanks and encouraging to hear farmers talk about mental health. How do we encourage more farmers to do the same?
- David, how do you feel we as a rural community can reach out and inform farmers of the signs of depression and encourage them – it's ok not to be ok?
- What role did the local community (family and rural) play to deal with overcoming accidents & tragedies and what role can they play?

Jonathan suggested that life skills should be taught in education institutes so that students can cope with and deal with life's adversities - to realise that it's not "just about being reactive but (to) be proactive".

David explained that it is important to talk about mental health. He also spoke about noticing a change in a person's behaviour that might not necessarily be "picked up by their partner". He advocated for speaking out noting that "It's better to regret saying something than not saying things at all".

Claire then asked Brian about the role the local community can have in helping a farm family during a crisis. Brian explained that his family were "blessed" in the aftermath of his father's death. He noted that he had two friends who were a source of significant support but that they too did not want to "over-step the mark". He acknowledged that "that support and help isn't always there for family farms". He explained that farm families need to be practical with their planning, for example to take out life cover to protect the family – "when a man gets taken out like that, you've to find an extra wage".

Brian offered advice to delegates and stakeholders before the session closed. He appealed to Sales Representatives "if they see something. Say it to the farmer.". He reiterated the need to have life cover and borrowings cover when dealing with banks. He explained that helping is about the practical things and keeping our eyes open. And he also noted the important role that Stakeholders have in supporting farmer's health and well-being.

Afternoon Session

Fireside Chat 3: Farmers' Experience – Realities of Farming in Northern Ireland

Chair: Mr. Justin McCarthy. Chief Executive of the Irish Farmer's Journal. Mr. Donal McAtamney, Northern Ireland Farmer; Ms. Sharon Smyth. Rural Support Mentor; Mr. Derek Robinson. Northern Ireland Farmer.

Justin opened the session and invited Sharon to describe the work Rural Support can offer. She explained that Rural Support will initially speak with the farmer to identify issues and following this will appoint a mentor. Often, she noted that for farmers, lifting the phone to seek help is a "last resort" but it is an important first step for Rural Support as it helps them "identify what their key issues are" so they can provide the most appropriate and meaningful support. She explained that it is very important for farmers and the rural community in general to realise that

...farming is a very lonely environment and that there are other people out there that care.

Derek agreed with Sharon's assessment of the difficulties farmers experience when seeking help because he acknowledged "farmers are a very proud and private breed". He noted the problems that some farmers experience when it comes to bench-marking on farms. While it can provide "an accurate analysis of what's happening on a farm", some farmers will "bury their heads in the sand". Donal commented that farming is a "drudgery – especially when the milk price is 17 pence". He then compared work conditions for farmers and the private industry echoing the realities noted earlier by Dr. Orr

Getting sick in the private industry (you) take a week off. We don't have that option

While Justin suggested that when it comes to bench-marking some farmers may just not want to know, Sharon noted that it was important because "knowledge is power".

Justin then raised the issue of family farm restructuring and the consequent "disconnect" arising from this and wondered if the "disintegration was too severe" and if there has been a "knowledge disconnect in the family farm". Sharon offered a broad perspective

That's society. The family unit is disintegrating. We're on our I-pads ... We all have to accept responsibility for that. ... Majority of family farms are family businesses. (You) get to share the highs and you get to share the lows.

The important role of women in the family farm, specifically in terms of how wives can be a support to their husbands was also noted. Yet, Donal noted that the reality of being an unmarried farmer is different. He referred to the idea of being an "invisible man" and explained that when an uncle of his passed away it was "a very big miss" in his life. Donal's story offered an insight into the lived experience of being a middle-aged, single farmer. Their nuanced realities of farm-related pressures in addition to loneliness and isolation have been identified as at-risk group for suicide in Ireland (O'Donnell and Richardson, 2018). Furthermore, as a single farmer he explained that, retirement is not a viable option, not only because his farming operation is only a "one-man show" but also because of his deeply felt connection to the land. The issues that emerge for single farmers from Donal's story reaffirm two important points: the diversity of the farming population and also the vulnerability of some groups within that population.

Questions from delegates were then posted to the screen and were as follows

- What does the panel think we can do to encourage farmers to seek help early?
- How could mental health charities better connect with farming families and encourage the use of existing services?
- Sharon, do many female farmers or farmers' wives' avail of services on their own behalf?
- Do you think a retirement scheme for farmers would bring more structure to the farm business and something to look forward to?
- Great to see IFJ taking this topic seriously. What can private sector do to help farmers' health and well-being?

Sharon explained that it is “mostly males” who call and she then “brings the spouse into the equation”.

In terms of the idea of a retirement scheme for farmers, neither farmer recognised this as an appropriate solution. Derek noted that retirement is “a holiday in the distance ... we don't have that”. Similarly, Donal noted that retirement is “not on the radar at all”. However, despite the very strong “connection to the land” in Northern Ireland as acknowledged by both Derek and Donal, Derek did explain that you “have to open your mind to” retirement and other possibilities. He explained that there is a possibility that none of his children will farm and they may decide to sell it and he will have to accept that. Justin then noted that often, the farmer is “not the signature on the cheque” and may have a son or daughter who “could be running a business for over one million euro”.

In response to encouraging the use of existing services, Sharon emphasized the need for farmers to have their affairs in order –

financial structures are one thing, but is there a will? It's so important to communicate about succession planning and financial planning. It's so important for the person who will succeed. Do they have life insurance? ... Government agencies need to take that on board

Donal noted that the issue of farmers' mental health features in the Farmers' Journal and on social media. While he applauded social media, he also cautioned about its use and explained that it can be “disruptive ... deeply upsetting ... (and) the opposite of conducting yourself with humility”. This was the second time that speakers issued caution about social media and its relevance for rural communities and securing farmers' resilience.

Justin offered the speakers the opportunity to advise farmers' who may be experiencing stress/distress. Derek suggested “try and talk to somebody”. Drawing on her experience, Sharon said “life the phone to Rural Support”. Donal reflected on an “old saying 'measure twice, cut once' - assess the situation and figure it out”.

Senator Ian Marshall. Irish Senator and former Ulster Farmer Union President.

Ian commenced his key note speech by referring to the harsh daily reality of life for a farmer – “sick animals, under-performing animals ... a backdrop of (a) never-ending stream” of issues for farmers (paperwork, negative media). Often, he explained farmers will “take it as a personal criticism”. He also noted

how important land ownership is, the attachment to the land across this island.

When pressures mount for farmers it can be a “lethal cocktail” of everything and he cautioned that “you never know what goes on behind closed doors”. He also referred to the diversity of the farmer population when he said that “no two farmers are the same”, thus highlighting the complexity of meeting their needs in meaningful ways.

He believes that farmers need a “continuing reminder that they are not alone”. He also expressed criticism of traditional and persistent social and public attitudes towards men and mental health. He was also critical of the general public’s attitude towards farmers, that they “are self-employed, in charge of your own destiny, have your own farm”. But noted the “classic conundrum that farmers are asset-rich but cash and cash flow” are very different. He suggested that farmers are sometimes “prisoners of hope ... (who) can’t depend on things getting better of their own accord.”.

He challenged the current “punitive system and punitive attitude” of Government departments against farmers and called on them to “move away” from that type of *modus operandi*. The severity of which he highlighted, when he asked what other worker would be punished by having three-quarters of their income withheld from them for a year as is currently the reality for some farmers with regard to a negative inspection. He suggested that Government departments offer “praise for good practice”. Ian also noted that opportunity lies in family farming as it can be a “platform for farmers to talk” and acknowledged that “loneliness and isolation are huge factors for the farming community”.

The following was another important message issued by Ian when discussing factors affecting farmers’ resilience.

Don’t underestimate the role of women in this. Women were the glue that held the family and community together. ... Those women are the counsellors and confidantes (of farmers).

Another was to remember that “it’s ok to fail” and acknowledged that “we need to train our young farmers on the importance of making decisions”.

Resilience, Ian believed, is about being able to deal with a crisis and being resilient in rough and smooth times.

His final message to delegates was, that collaboration amongst all stakeholders was key:

Together we can build an industry fit for purpose ... our biggest asset is our people.

Ian was then joined on stage by Richard Wright for a questions and answers session. The questions put forward by delegates were as follows:

- Do you need to be an eternal optimist to be a farmer?
- Do you think our government agencies have become too removed from farmers?
- Ian, when you talk to other farmers about stress, what are the main contributors to this?

Both speakers noted that one needs to be an optimist to be a farmer. Ian explained that, despite the difficulties and challenges regularly facing farmers, there were so many positives to farming, for example he noted that it is “a fantastic place to bring up your family.”.

The issue of failure was discussed. Ian explained that “failure is stigmatised” and that we have created a stigma rather than creating a meaningful culture of failure where “if you get things wrong, you fix them”. Both speakers situated this cultural nuance within broader Irish culture more generally by

acknowledging that “we hate to see people be successful” (Ian) and “getting above your station” (Richard). This type of cultural attitude is unhelpful, they argued, if one is simply trying to understand at what point things did not go right and how things could be fixed. The message should be that situations like this should be interpreted as opportunities for learning and building resilience so we can cope effectively with failure and when things do not go well in our lives.

Roundtable Discussions (See Learning Outcomes)

Ms. Stephanie Berkeley. Farm Safety Foundation, UK. Call to Action: Make a Pledge!

Stephanie briefly discussed the work of the Farm Safety Foundation, UK. To set context about the reality of poor mental health and stress/distress among farmers, she noted that on average, one farm worker per week dies by suicide in the UK. The Farm Safety Foundation works to highlight the importance of farm safety and how this relates to mental wellbeing and how they can encourage farmers to seek help. Delegates were offered the opportunity to watch the new *Mind Your Head* campaign video that aims to encourage young rural men to talk about their mental well-being/ill-being. This campaign also aims to “start a conversation around mental health”. Stephanie also asked everyone to make a commitment to the cause by signing their pledge

Final Remarks.

Ms. Teresa McGarvey. Public Health Agency.

The Public Health Agency funds Rural Support to provide on-farm business support to farmers experiencing significant stress and pressures. The PHA’s suicide strategy was discussed by Teresa. It provides suicide prevention training across Northern Ireland. There is a long history of the work between the PHA, DAERA, and Local Councils. The *Making Life Better 2012-2023*, is the public health strategic framework designed to “create conditions to empower people and communities”. The Farm Family Health Checks is one example of how this applies in rural communities. Teresa did note that some challenges exist that prevent some of the strategy’s goals being realised, such as the persistent stigma associated with mental health. The gravest outcome of which, she argued, is suicide. Consequently, the PHA is committed to building communities of support – something that is “everyone’s responsibility”. Key to their work at the moment is “building mental health and resilience going forward.”

Richard Wright closed the conference and The Farmers’ Choir entertained delegates before they departed.

Northern Ireland Learning Outcomes

Much learning occurred during and after the conference. The wealth and breadth of the contributions made by all speakers was significant. Consequently, it has provided ample opportunity to strategize about going forward, engaging with all stakeholders to build and sustain farmers' resilience across Northern Ireland. For the purposes of this report, Learning Outcomes is divided into three sections. Firstly, the data collected from the Roundtable Discussions is presented¹². Secondly, an overview of key themes that emerged from the discussions on the day presented. Thirdly, analysis from the feedback questionnaire is also presented. Together these sources of information and data should assist with setting key priorities for meeting the needs of farmers and ensuring their resilience, engaging with stakeholders and ensuring their continued commitment to the cause.

Roundtable Discussions

Delegates at each table were invited to work together in the afternoon for a 'brain storming' session. They documented their answers to two important questions. Their responses highlight the breadth of reasons that are currently affecting farmers and farm families from the social and personal, to the geo-political, and the economic. Some issues such as Brexit are current yet other issues serve as a reminder of the fact that certain issues such as youth migration from rural areas continues to be problematic. In terms of suggestions for addressing some of these issues and problems, continued investment in the health and well-being of rural people and their communities was noted – in the form of more education around health and well-being (e.g. for Reps that visit farms), working to reduce the stigma associated with mental ill-being, the development of services and supports for farmers and rural communities.

The following are their responses and suggestions.

What issues do you feel are most prevalent for farmers and farm families currently and in the next five years?

- Brexit - uncertainty around future of subsidies, policy-making gap, future of trading;
- No Executive in Northern Ireland;
- Environmental issues – ammonia, nitrates, emissions & costs involved;
- Globalisation of market;
- Lack of succession planning, fewer of next generation entering farming, next generation questioning viability of business;
- Aging population;
- Health issues such as obesity;
- Rural poverty;
- Transition from being 'a way of life' to a business. This has been a change in culture;
- Relationship with the supermarkets;
- Climate change;
- Decline in rural services – transport, hospitals, banks, ATMs, Post Offices & Schools, etc.
- Bureaucracy – policies;
- Public profile/attitude/perception of farmers isn't great;
- Lack of broadband – services going online;

¹² Compiled by Rural Support.

- Political changes both locally & worldwide;
- Change in consumer preferences, eg.vegan, vegetarian, etc;
- Lack of communication;
- Isolation & Loneliness;
- Rising costs;
- Young people leaving rural areas;
- Lack of employment in rural areas;
- Universal credits – implications on self-employed.
- There will be a growing gap between those businesses who plan ahead & those who don't;
- Relationship breakdown;
- RHI scheme;
- Lack of labour & cost of labour;
- Structure of farm family has changed;
- Animal disease;
- Generational farming – attachment to land, loyalty to previous generations, resistance to seek help.

What actions could be taken across our sectors to support farmers' resilience?

- Infrastructure such as broadband needs improved;
- Availability of farm health checks;
- Better mental health awareness/ training for reps. who visit farms;
- Transparency needed between public & industry – education;
- Need to involve the next generation in the business, pass on knowledge;
- Lobbying 'anti-farming' policies;
- More empathy from government is needed;
- Funding of training;
- Establish social groups – outings & meetings to chat;
- Diversification – farming smarter;
- Early intervention;
- Mental health training in schools & colleges;
- Relief service – a scheme to credit or benefit farmer/ encourage time off farm.
- Need to address the stigma;
- Developing of networks in community & training;
- Target farmers in existing places e.g. Livestock markets;
- Positive social media messages;
- Industry should recognise the changes in consumer preferences as an opportunity;
- Farmers need to plan ahead;
- Training – business management, mental health, coping strategies;
- Collaborative working & thinking;
- Personal stories of farmers & their experiences;
- Awareness raising through various mediums;
- Incentives to attend health checks;
- Improved signposting & referral system;
- New Zealand model around subsidies & social aspects;
- Services more user-friendly, opening hours of health care provision.

Key Themes and Issues that emerged on the day

Several key themes emerged on the day and were supported in the feedback that delegates provided¹³.

1. Recognition that Farmers' Health and Well-being is everyone's business

Delegates from all sectors – industry, public sector, health and the farming community themselves recognised that Farmers' health and well-being is everyone's business. Dr. Orr's simple message was a powerful one that if farmers are unwell, they are disenfranchised because they will not be applying for grants, they will not be efficient producers, and this has implications for us all.

Resilience of farmers essential for wider industry (16)

Help the farmer, when the farmer is well his farm will perform well (23)

Recognise the huge pressures that are already there for farmers and ask yourself what you can to alleviate that pressure, not add to it! (29)

Support your suppliers (42)

To be aware of how policies can affect the rural community or in particular, farmers (48)

The industry can help by providing funding for training in resilience (43)

A need also for proper reporting mechanisms to accurately account for farmer and rural ill-being is required given the level of under-reporting of farmer ill-being.

2. The need to work together across all sectors and across all communities

It was evident on the day, that all delegates were committed to working together to assist with building resilience. From NFU's acknowledgment that they conduct over fifteen thousand farm visits across the region every year to proposing that an annual health check for farmers to be built into regular GP care.

Reps: Be vigilant and refer, where appropriate, concerns about clients' mental health. Be conscious of consequence of applying pressure for payments on farmers' mental health (4)

Need to provide support to farmers – help with the establishing resilience relief network (6)

Picking up on an opportunity if something not right with a farmer (28)

3. Understanding the stresses that affect farmers

Farmers experience stress from multiple sources. While some are within their control (time pressures on the farm) others are not (market price drop, the weather). The unpredictable nature of these stresses is in fact a stress in itself.

¹³ Methodological note: Fifty-one feedback forms were returned on the day and analysed and coded from 1-51. Quotations that are used in the following data analysis have been given the corresponding code number.

Understand all pressures farmers are under not job-specific related to their industry (21)

Furthermore, many issues affecting farmers' work and how they can work are stressful factors also. Ian Marshall highlighted the punitive nature of the Department (DAERA) and the potential for this to cause intense and immense stress should not be underestimated. One particularly critical voice emerged from the feedback exercise, which noted that

DAERA have a lot of learn from the approach of HSENI. It is about education + support, rather than blinkered bureaucrats unaware of wider context in which farmers operate. Financial worries re subsidies are huge in farming community and many farmers are ill-equipped to challenge decisions made by DAERA officials which farmers feel are wrong. Barriers such as online applications, technology used to measure eligible areas etc. create huge difficulties to older farmers, contributing to horrific stresses + mental health consequences. This is the feedback we get through our XX groups i.e. "DAERA are unapproachable, not willing to listen, make mistakes + charge to challenge them!" (1)

Work with farmers as partnership not enforcement (23)

(farming community) under unnecessary stress from Department officials, should be yellow and red card options (25)

Be aware that farmers may have many other personal issues going on when you are dealing with them – and be sensitive to that (29)

I work with farmers. Always recognise that there is a human being and family behind every farm ID number (32)

Engage with Rural Support to make the countryside a living, working active landscape providing value for everyone. Work with & not against the industry. (34)

Consider supporting/involvement in "National Relief Worker Bank"

There was broad recognition of the fact that such stresses have negative implications for health and well-being and the public sector, along with others, needs to do more.

4. Understand that farmers' health and well-being is a complex issue and their mental health is very important

Farmers' health and well-being is complex but the importance of mental health was raised by almost all speakers. It is accepted that they face particular stresses that contribute to mental ill-health such as anxiety. Indeed, delegates heard that anxiety is very much an under-reported problem amongst farmers.

Mental well-being probably the most important issue facing the farming community (17)

The state of farmers' health is further complicated by the fact that they are a "proud" and "stoic" group who, at times, are reluctant to seek help. Moreover, the health and welfare system offers little encouragement for farmers to seek help and take time off when required. The need for more work in this area was noted

More work to get farmers to GP surgeries (3)

Good health messages – normalising mental health – sources help (31)

Need to reach out to farmers through local outreach services. Maybe offer reward to attend health checks and include female incentive (35)

The issue of access to healthcare services was also noted. Not all health services are open at all times and this presents problems. So too does the type of healthcare options available. The actual interaction with healthcare professionals was mentioned. Services must be tailored and accessible to and for farmers. For example, reaching out through social media is not necessarily the most suitable way for communicating with some farmers. A male nurse may be a potential option to reach out to male farmers who may be at risk.

The need to encourage farmers to seek medical help and making this help easily accessible. Need to promote through rural organisations and make health checks easily accessible (7)

Consider out of hours appointments for farmers (8)

More thoughtful + need to take time to be thorough (12)

Better communication across the specialties (20)

Give farmers time to talk, read between the lines, try to tap into the real 'issues' for them (29)

Just how important it is to take time with farmers (48)

More rural GPs required – promotion of this at University level (30)

Support rural GPs. [For health service/public sector to] Provide organisational structure diagram of Who's Who & support available. Pass these [diagrams] to Rural Support and UFU (34)

Farm Families Health Checks - need for male nurse – could do more education and awareness or support if involved (38)

Don't forget to care for the carer (50)

5. Realise that some groups are more vulnerable than others

Farmers are not one singular group. They are a diverse group with many different needs and requirements. So too is the rural population. It was evident during many discussions that the role of the spouse, specifically a wife, was crucial for a farmers' health and well-being. Dr. Orr and Christine from Farm Health Checks both noted that they will involve the spouse in their dealings with the farmer. Ian Marshall noted that women in farm families are the "confidants and counsellors". Derek Robinson also noted the support of his wife. Delegates were told by the HSENI that relationships and family can serve as a barrier to prevent risk/harm. Conversely, it was also noted that some farmers, specifically single farmers, or farmers who have lost their life-long partner, do not have access to such protective relationships. This group is vulnerable and are more likely to experience loneliness and isolation. The vulnerability of older farmers was also discussed particularly in relation to seeking help and discussing their problems. It was recognised that this group grew up in a different era and are stoic in the face of adversity unlike younger farmers who are better educated and appear more willing to air their issues. Once again, meeting the needs of these groups requires specific, multi-sectoral service provision.

Keep trying to break through cultural barriers and reach out to farmers and those less likely to seek help (32)

6. Recognise the need for education and preparation around farmers’ health and well-being

A key take-away message from the day is the need for farmers to talk – about their problems, stresses, anxieties. However, it was also recognised that farmers and older generations may not be “emotionally literate” given the cultural contexts in which they have grown up and worked in. Consequently, the need to encourage them to talk while simultaneously breaking the stigma associated with mental ill-being and emotional distress is crucial. Consequently, education around farmer well-being and mental well-being is important and necessary.

Engage socially with other members of the farming community. Know when to seek help. Talk to someone early. (29)

The importance of talking (28)

Keep talking to each other, plan ahead and don’t ignore issues or bury your heads in the sand (32)

Training needed, education needed. Early intervention (27)

Education is required for recognising the symptoms of stress, depression + anxiety (30)

Hobby/time away from the farm. It’s ok not to be ok (45)

Conference Feedback Analysis

Delegates were provided with a short two-page questionnaire (See Append X). They were asked to complete the questionnaire and submit as they left the conference. The following are some findings that emerged from the contributions delegates offered. 125 delegates attended the conference. 51 completed the questionnaire, a response rate of 40.8%. Analysis is presented by question.

Question 1: Please state what you believe to be the take home message from this conference for each of these sectors.¹⁴

Sector	Take Home Message
Public Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make more counselling sessions available • More training on mental health and wellbeing available • More engagement from groups such as RCRG • Mental health support scheme pilot • More funding needed • More awareness of how to spot the signs • Make farm inspections include a farmer’s health check • Education in schools on mental health • Easier access to GPs • More/better collaboration • More female voices needed
Industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff who visit farms should be trained in mental health first aid • Resilience training needed • Survey NI wide about famers mental health • Pressures need to be reduced not added to • Incorporate staff mental health & wellbeing into staff policies • Partnership/education with YFC • More events to lessen the taboo

¹⁴ Data compiled by Rural Support

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health first aid as part of work policy • Lobby at government for better working relationships • More collaboration
Voluntary Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be more aware of specific needs of farmers • More joined up thinking • Increase communication • More training on mental health • More funding for community services • More social events • Make use of NZ model • Provide mental health first aid training in local areas • Pilot a resilience farmers programme
Healthcare Professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use health van at more community events • Enhance collaborative thinking/working • More care needed for careers • Increase educational opportunities • More frontline services needed in rural communities • Farm business health check • More nurses needed • More counselling opportunities needed • Reward system for farmers attending health checks • Better structure with UFC & Rural Support • More health professionals needed – better promotion at schools • Consider out of hours appointments for farmers
Farming Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better promotion of rural services • Better/joined up partnership with YFC • More signposting to confidential services • Mental health to be added to risk assessments • Re-educate and work with the younger generation • Farmers need to acknowledge the pressures they are under and seek help accordingly

Question 2 invited delegates to respond to a short series of statements about health and well-being and rural areas. Delegates were invited to respond using a Likert Scale in terms of whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree¹⁵).

Q2 (a) There is inequality in health and social care between urban and rural areas of Northern Ireland.

49 people responded to this question and an overwhelming majority of people **87.7% (n= 43) agreed** that inequality exists in terms of health and social care between urban and rural areas. 12.2% (n= 6) disagreed with the statement. No one strongly disagreed with this statement.

Q2 (b) There is sufficient emphasis placed on ensuring rural health and wellbeing needs are met in health and social care policy.

¹⁵ Data was analysed using SPSS

44 people responded. **86.3% (n= 38) of delegates disagreed** with this statement. 6 people agreed with this statement.

Q2 (c) The rural health and wellbeing needs of Northern Ireland are well understood by decision makers

48 people responded to this statement. **75% (n= 36) of respondents disagreed** with the statement that the health and well-being needs of Northern Ireland are well understood by decision makers. Only 12 respondents (25%) agreed.

Q2 (d) There is a greater stigma around mental health in rural areas than in urban

48 delegates responded. Once again, the vast majority **75.1% (n= 35) believe greater levels of stigma surrounding mental health exist in rural areas** compared to urban areas.

Table can go into Appendix if you wish	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q2 (a) There is inequality in health and social care between urban and rural areas of Northern Ireland.	49	30.6 (15)	57.9 (28)	12.2 (6)	-
Q2 (b) There is sufficient emphasis placed on ensuring rural health and wellbeing needs are met in health and social care policy.	44	4.5 (2)	9.1 (4)	56.8 (25)	29.5 (13)
Q2 (c) The rural health and wellbeing needs of Northern Ireland are well understood by decision makers	48	4.2 (2)	20.8 (10)	47.9 (23)	27.1 (13)
Q2 (d) There is greater stigma around mental health in rural areas than in urban	48	31.3 (15)	43.8 (21)	25.0 (12)	-

Question 3: As service providers, how can Rural Support best achieve positive health and well-being outcomes for the farming community.¹⁶

- More joined up approach
- Engage with more groups such as Prince's Trust
- More outreach to rural organisations
- Hold mindfulness/wellbeing courses
- Ensure famers have the income they deserve
- Provide training/support to specifically young farmers
- Counselling sessions
- Use more media resources
- Use Farm Family Health Checks to identify mental health issues
- Stronger links with mental health organisations
- A yearly conference like this

¹⁶ Data compiled by Rural Support for Qs 3-5

- Training for those who are in daily contact with farmers
- Take the Claire Saunders as a basis for a roadshow
- More financial back to expand
- Better referral system

Question 4: What can your organisation do to ensure the needs of Northern Ireland farmers are met?

- Development of rural older men's project
- Lobby at government
- Work with RCRG to deliver local infrastructure
- Include YFC to encourage communication about mental health
- Have Rural Support talk at UFU meetings
- Joint up approach with the Samaritans
- Host suicide prevention talks
- HSENI are going to include mental health in their action plans
- Work closer with HSENI like Embrace FARM do in Ireland
- Give Rural Support business cards to farmers
- Deliver more health checks
- Make sure agents who work with farmers are aware of the services available
- Rural Affairs committee to become more actively involved in tackling rural mental health issues

Question 5: What can rural support do to ensure the needs of Northern Ireland farmers are met?

- Collate stats and address areas that are in weak representation
- Educate more people about the services that are available like events like this
- Make direct contact with farmers on the ground
- Provide more training and education opportunities
- Raise your profile more
- Grow in size as an organisation
- Speak to more church group organisations
- Organization social and wellness programmes
- Lobby government to increase funding for early intervention
- Provide training to vets
- Do a NI wide survey on mental health for next event as a talking point
- Have a joint venture with HSENI & DAERA to ease the burden of financial difficulties and educate folk. Having things online is a major issue for older farmers and needs to be addressed

Question 6: This question asked delegates for their feedback in relation to the organisation, logistical and technical aspects of the conference. An overwhelming majority provided high scores. 48 people scored the 'Overall' conference and all 100% awarded a score of 4 or more. Delegates were asked to rate variables on a scale of 1-5, with 5 representing a high, positive score. For the purposes of analysis, scores of 4 and 5 are merged.

Aspect	N	% Scores of 4 or more	Number of scores less than 4
Venue	48	97.9	1
Accessibility	48	100	-
Time	47	89.3	5
Publicity	45	93.4	3
Catering	48	91.6	3
Handling	45	93.3	3
Range of Speakers	48	95.9	2
Content of speakers	47	97.9	1
Opportunities for networking	48	93.8	3
Overall	48	100	-

An excellent day. Well done to the Rural Support Team! (51)

Brilliant initiative & opportunity to turn this into a regional pilot for these islands (e.g. some aspects of the NZ model). Need investors to identify the energy in the room today. (50)

Excellent day. Programme very strong (2)

Enjoyed the day – great range of speakers – fireside chat worked well. (21)

An excellent day. Fireside chat a great format. Use of IT for questions – very good (24)

Very good and informative event (26)

Thank you for the invite. Great day, raising awareness and fantastic networking opportunities (27)

Excellent, very worthwhile event with fantastic format – so relevant and much needed. Great to hear the personal stories and viewpoints – Powerful!! (29)

Well done to all the organisers – great event to raise profile of contribution of farmers to life in N. Ireland + to begin to understand their worries and stressors. What we do next needs to be led and co-ordinated across sectors (31)

Thank you & congratulations on an important & timely event (32)

As mentioned, rural does not equal farmers. Some ‘rural’ dwellers are the cause of much of farmers stresses (33)

Thank you for all you do. An excellent conference (34)

Great conference. Subject matter that is often overlooked in our profession (39)

Thank you for a most useful experience (41)

When will the next one take place (42)

A very well organised event, excellent speakers & the fireside chats were very interesting & current (43)

Thank you for opportunity. Last speaker, Ian Marshall excellent talk – enjoyed it. (47)

Suggestions:

As usual with any of these events I worry not enough farmers hear it. Would be great to pitch the same event at farmers and professionals. Keep same content. Places often remove the commerciality & honesty & dumb down when talking to farmers and I feel this is wrong. They are great business people & need to hear the honesty. (15)

Could have used the Roundtable format to complete a “table” survey or something useful (8)

So much to be done in a limited time farmers stretched to the limit trying to do 2 days’ work in one (25)

There was no daylight! Talking all day about mental health in a room with blocked out windows is contradicting ... all the evidence about health and environment (33)

Maybe a bit more of an explanation of the role of key agencies involved (36)

Some more awareness on self-care – what is self-care, explanation of same/demonstration (39)

Beware of playing lip service for your own agenda. Cross organisation work is key. Know the facts. (49)

Key Thematic Areas for Consideration

Recommendations arising from the conference will be constructively aligned to key thematic issues that emerged throughout the day. Key thematic issues that emerged on the day relate to farmer health and well-being and also their vulnerability; the broader rural environment; the challenging reality of farming, specifically it’s highly punitive nature; the need for industry to become more involved in the critical issue of farmers’ health and well-being; and the role of supportive families and communities was also important.

- Farmer Health and Well-being and their vulnerability

Across all sessions the vulnerability of farmers was to the fore. The medical perspective shed light on their health vulnerabilities: their under-presentation to GPs has multiple knock-on effects such as loss of opportunity to identify serious and acute risks/conditions (e.g. cardiac risk). This results in a dearth of health data pertaining to farmers. Little is known of the true prevalence of other pathologies among the profession that are more difficult to treat such as depression and anxiety that are widely known to affect farmers. This dearth of health data concerning a distinct, yet highly diverse, group inhibits appropriate education, prevention and treatment initiatives. Farmers’ diversity in terms of their age and marital status means multiple and nuanced strategies are required to meet their complex needs and offset the negative effects these realities may bring such as increased risk of injury on the farm due to failing physical health during old-age and loneliness and isolation as a result of their single status or loss of a spouse in later life.

- The Rural Environment

Challenges to service provision and uptake were noted throughout the day. There is a critical shortage of healthcare professionals in rural areas. A multi-sectoral approach (e.g. health and education) is required to attract and retain professionals in rural areas. Queens University Belfast were cited as the obvious partner/stakeholder to assist, particularly in the case of encouraging trainee doctors onto the rural GP modules. There may also be opportunities to engage with more University medical schools and medical professional representative bodies. Another area of concern here is the centralisation of services in Belfast - similar trends are widely reported in Ireland and elsewhere. With a skills shortage comes a lack of expertise and an overall lack of (professional) ‘critical mass’ hinders overall investment

in service provision and development. The withdrawal and closure of other services in rural areas such as post offices, banks, public transport present challenging realities for some farming and rural communities. Such service withdrawal often contributes to isolation and loneliness reported among those living in rural areas.

- The Challenging Reality of Farming

The challenging reality of farming, specifically the punitive nature of how farmers are treated by various branches of government (e.g. negative inspections) was carefully considered throughout the day's proceedings. It is a significant cause of stress, pressure and anxiety for farmers. The severity of punitive actions/sanctions against farmers was heavily criticised. So too was the punitive attitude of government towards farmers. No other profession is subjected to such punitive measures that have the potential to cripple the family farm business. The government's modus operandi ought to be reversed so that it is based on positive affirmation/encouragement for good practice. Inspection models based on punitive sanctions register negatively in farmers' imaginations. Consequently, their efficacy has the potential to be questionable for two reasons: (1) they cause significant stress therefore their importance as a 'quality/safety check' is diminished in the eyes of a farmer and (2) they have the potential to actually increase further risk on the farm and to farmers as they try to continue operating a business when their income has been significantly cut. For example, with limited income, general farm upkeep and upgrades, may not be prioritised thus presenting more dangers than ever on the farm – a vicious cycle emerges and ultimately the farmer's health and well-being in this instance is most at risk.

- The Need for Industry to be Involved

A welcome take home message was industry's realisation that farmers' health and well-being is everyone's business. Their willingness and commitment to engage was heard from many delegates on the day. Sales and insurance representatives and bankers alike became aware of their critical role in a farmer's life, particularly during times of economic pressure and uncertainty. These professionals are in a unique position to support farmers' building financial and economic resilience and future-proofing their farm business. Gaps in this type of expertise among farmers was noted on a number of occasions throughout the day. Significant opportunity exists here to build meaningful working relationships between industry and the farming community.

- Supportive Families and Communities

The supportive nature of farm family relationships and supportive communities was also evident on the day. These already support farmers' health and well-being and provide a fertile platform on which to build business, environmental, social and emotional resilience. A key success story in this regard is the farm family health check. Involving the family unit in a health check rather than just simply the farmer has the potential to increase uptake and thus identify and treat existing issues and also prevent future health risk. Capitalising on the positive aspects of supportive families and communities may also assist with reaching-out to those deemed at-risk by virtue of their 'vulnerable group' status such as the elderly and single farmers.

Conclusions from the Northern Ireland Conference

1. Farmers' and family farm vulnerability presents serious cause for concern, not least because of its impact on their health and wellbeing. This relates to numerous factors such as the current age profile of farmers, complex yet fragile family farm structures, and the myriad of pressures associated with the current, and unprecedented, economic and financial uncertainty within the sector. In order to ensure the future viability and wellbeing of the farming community, additional targeted supports are required to address this vulnerability.
2. Mounting economic pressures are being compounded by changing government requirements and this requires immediate consideration. The *modus operandi* of some Government departments has been heavily criticised; particularly their attitude towards/treatment of farmers in addition to their apparent lack of appreciation of the stressful nature multiple legislative changes can have on the farmer. Moreover, their punitive approach to the farming sector is deemed most problematic and is identified as a key factor implicated in the stress and ill-health that farmers and farm families experience which ultimately has the potential to compromise their economic and financial performance and output.
3. Farmers and farm families' contribution to society, as ethical and compliant food producers, requires broader, societal-level, appreciation, support and encouragement. From the farmers' perspective, the general public has little understanding of the realities of farming and this is part of a broader disconnection between society in general and the reality of contemporary food production systems where cost is key, yet the farmer, and their farm operation, appear to be peripheral parts rather than central elements appreciated for their valuable contribution to society's well-being. Government has an important, and leading, role to play here in educating and developing the socio-cultural mindset in this regard.
4. A collective community responsibility should be fostered to provide networks of support in local communities. Rural isolation is adversely affecting health and wellbeing in significant ways across multiple groups in rural society, but particularly among the farming community.
5. Decision makers and health professionals need to understand and appreciate the complexities of addressing health and wellbeing issues in rural / farming communities. Consequently, resources, policies and initiatives designed to address the current gaps in service provision ought to be 'rural proofed' to ensure their efficacy. Farm families themselves are key stakeholders in this regard and their active participation and inclusion in such policy/service design merits consideration.
6. Industry leaders must play their part in supporting farmers health and wellbeing. This is integral to the success of the whole sector and must be regarded as an investment that is constructively aligned to their long-term growth and sustainability strategies, and also corporate responsibility ones, rather than be misinterpreted as simply another cost.

PART 3: Republic of Ireland

Conference Delegate Representation in Ireland

On the 25th April 2019, Embrace FARM hosted their conference in the Killeshin Hotel, Portlaoise, Co. Laois. The event was kindly sponsored by Trouw Nutrition and ABP. 97 delegates attended on that day and represented the following organisations.

<p>Farm Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IFA • Macre na Feirme • Rural Support • Ulster Farmers’ Union 	<p>Public Sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) • DCU • An Garda Síochána • National Rehabilitation Hospital, Dublin • HSE – Suicide Prevention • Teagasc
<p>Private/Industry Sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABP • AIB • Alltech • AgriKids • APOS Ltd. • Bank of Ireland • FBD • K2 Group • Trouw Nutrition 	<p>Voluntary/Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health Ireland • Samaritans <p>Individual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers (inc. survivor) • Counsellor

Conference Schedule

Comperre: James Healy – President Macra na Feirme

10am - Opening remarks – Mairead McGuinness – Vice President of the European Parliament

10.15 – Welcome Note - Brian Rohan – Chairperson/Co-Founder Embrace FARM

Followed by Candle Lighting

10.25 – Sponsors Welcome Address - Jim Uprichards Trouw Nutrition

10.30 – Issues Currently Affecting Rural Life – Chairperson: Helen Carroll, Presenter *Ear To The Ground, RTE1*. Discussion Panel: Maria Feeney, DCU. Farmers’ Experiences Surviving A Farming Accident – William Sayer and Kevin McGarry. Followed by Q&A.

11.30 – Break

12.00 – Keynote Speaker: Farmers’ Health: Jude McCann (CEO, Rural Support & Nuffield Scholar) – Increasing Resilience & Knowledge Transfer

12.15 – Fireside Chat – Health & Well-being Issues. Chairperson: Helen Carroll, Presenter *Ear To The Ground, RTE1*. Discussion Panel – Gina Dowd (Counsellor/Psychotherapist of Counselling West) Understanding Health and Well-being for Farmers – Women in Agriculture: Alison Duck – Women Overcoming Adversity in Farming; Ann Doherty – Living with Pain. Followed by Q&A.

13.15 - Lunch

14.00 – Keynote Speaker – Harold Kingston (Former IFA Environment Committee Chairperson) – Personal Story

14.15 – Fireside Chat – What Can We Do To Build a Community of Support? Chairperson: Amii McKeever, Editor *Irish Country Living*. Discussion Panel – Aisling Meehan, Agriculture Solicitors; Dr. Rebecca Orr, General Practitioner (NI); Shane Whelan, AIB.

15.15 Call to Action: Make a Pledge! Stephanie Berkeley, Farm Safety Foundation UK. Yellow Wellies Campaign

15.15 Final Acknowledgements – Norma Rohan, Co-Founder Embrace FARM

Dialogue and Debate: Proceedings from the Embrace FARM Resilient Farmers' Conference

Morning Session 1

The conference was opened by Mr. James Healy, President of Macra na Feirme. He highlighted the theme for the conference, *farmers' resilience*, and noted its importance in the context of the farming and agriculture sector. He expressed his thanks for being invited to Chair the day's proceedings and commended the work of Embrace FARM.

Opening Remarks: Ms. Mairead McGuinness, MEP Vice-President of the EU Parliament

Mairead McGuinness opened her remarks by speaking about the "human reality" of farming and the need for human contact in our lives. Resilience is important to us all and she appealed to delegates when she noted that people need to be aware of their limits and realise that "it's ok not to be ok".

Resilience, she explained, was about being able to bounce back under difficulty. Little things "added together" can make the ability to bounce back more difficult. She specifically noted numerous factors that are affecting the farming community such as media reports of climate shaming and a "lack of respect... for those that produce food that is fundamental to all our lives". These can lead to feelings among the farming community that "they are not valued". Issues such as these are not addressed in rural areas despite the fact that they exist and "are real". The need to acknowledge the good work of farmers was important.

She noted that it may be worthwhile to "drop the macho" image and recognise that it is "ok to be human". She also cautioned delegates to be aware of every "knock" they experience, and she related this to her own experience in her political life. Mairead acknowledged that there are days where "I hit the wall" but again appealed to delegates that such an experience be recognised as a reality in their lives that one can overcome. Looking after oneself is key, primarily through eating, sleeping and exercise and these are things that we sometimes neglect if we are under pressure in other spheres of our lives, such as work. However, she also noted that many people are not caring for themselves properly and this has the potential to have negative implications for the well-being of our families and communities.

She then commended Norma and Brian for the work they do with Embrace FARM for their "courage, conviction and foresight".

She made one final appeal to all delegates to sign the pledge and "live up to it".

Brian Rohan, Chairman, Embrace FARM

Brian expressed his delight that Embrace FARM had partnered with Rural Support in NI and with the Farm Safety Foundation in the UK. After welcoming delegates to the conference, Brian offered his sympathies to "all the families that suffered loss for farm accidents this year" and specifically to the Nagle family to were about to bury their thirteen-year old son, Ryan, the following day. Brian reminded delegates that Ryan's brother, Jack, has won awards for his design of a safety device for hand brakes on tractors. He acknowledged that despite being a safety-conscious family, they were experiencing "terrible trauma and loss".

Brian noted the powerful line-up of speakers, including professionals and also

Farming men and women with years of personal trauma, pain and loss from their farms and fields.

To explain his understanding of what a resilient farmer is, Brian shared his own personal story of loss. Six days after the birth of Norma and Brian's first child, Brian's father received a blow to his head that caused bleed on his brain. His family had to make the decision to turn off the life-support machine some days later, on 22nd June 2012. Brian was in the family home with his wife, new baby and the public health nurse when his Dad was hurt. He acknowledged that his feelings of "guilt and responsibility" over what happened to his father were immense.

In the days after, he explained that looking after his wife, new baby, organising a funeral and farming through a very wet summer "really tested my mental health and resilience". He noted that the good relationships he had established with these bank officials, co-ops and with his agriculture industry representative were helpful during this time. However, this was not the case with the Department of Agriculture due to persistent staff changes that ultimately limit opportunities to build good working relationships – specifically in relation to meeting "someone new every time you're in".

Brian told delegates that it took about five years post-accident to regain love of farming and even now noted that there are multiple stress factors associated with the dairy sector.

The Dairy bubble, as we now know, has the potential to test or break farmers resilience too. All the advisory services and co-ops are encouraging farmers to milk more cows, calve down ninety per cent in six weeks, measure grass along with numerous other jobs to become more efficient. But, at what cost?

Labour, he argued, is "a huge issue" and noted a lack of support from the advisory sector in this regard. Financial stress and borrowings "can cripple farmers in a tough year". He also explained the importance of making wills and taking out life cover on "heavy" borrowings in the event of a tragic accident. The advent of social media also has the potential to be stressful for some who see other successful farmers online documenting their efficiencies. Brian also referred to the day-to-day dangers of farming when he explained that mobile phones can serve as a major distraction when operating machinery.

He appealed to the Department for a "joined up approach" and streamlining of services in relation to inspection. Once again, he referred to his own lived experience of what inspection is like. He told delegates that eighteen months previously, he had

a Bord Bia inspection on a Monday, an unannounced health and safety inspection on a Tuesday. And then, when I thought things couldn't get worse, I had a two full days of a cross-compliance inspection on Wednesday and Thursday.

There is a need for regulations to be altered at EU level, Brian argued. Lobby groups, he explained, need to put pressure on at EU level so that pressure can be relieved at farm level. Costs are another issue. While processors can pass costs back to farmers, farmers are unable to pass costs anywhere. Furthermore, he also discussed how heavily regulated the farming sector is and how difficult it has become to navigate these regulations in the context of severe weather events and other such complexities.

Brian also explained that following a fatal farm accident the Health and Safety Authority will visit the farm and recreate the accident. What it will not be able to do, however, is "recreate the state of the

farmer's mental health at the time of the accident". Many farmers he argued are "accidents waiting to happen" due to the stressful conditions under which they are operating and their effect on their mental health.

He appealed to delegates to return to their workplace/sector and reflect on what they can do to help farmers' mental health and resilience.

Brian then informed delegates about the purpose of the candles which were lit to remember those who have died as a result of a farm accident and for their families who journey through grief, for those who have survived a farm accident, for those in the farming community who are struggling with a mental health/physical challenge, industry people and medical responders and for good farming weather. Mairead McGuinness, Norma Rohan, James Healy, Jude McCann, Angela Hogan and Sgt. Edel Burke each lit a candle.

A video was then shown that documented the personal story of Diane Banville, a mother of two small boys, who lost her husband Kevin to a farm accident in 2014.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34gWt_PMd4k

Jim Uprichard, Trouw Nutrition

Trouw Nutrition supported the Farmers' Resilience Conference and Jim was delighted that he and his colleagues were supporting such a worthy cause. He explained that he himself was from a family farm background and recognised that many issues, such as succession, have the potential to affect a farmer's well-being. He referred to the difficulties his own father experienced in relation to his mental health. Work-related anxiety can bring people to the "verge of depression".

Jim believes that industry can play a role in many ways to support farmers' well-being and resilience. He specifically spoke about representatives calling to the farm to sell products. This is a key opportunity for them to ask the farmer how he is doing and potentially recognise when the farmer may be suffering from stress/distress. He acknowledged that there is a need to start to train people to "come together to understand what the problem might be". Once again, he referred to his own father, who he said, "listened to the vet more rather than the doctor".

He acknowledged the valuable work that farmers do and the need to support the farming community. He also commended the work that Norma and Brian do at Embrace FARM.

Fireside Chat 1: Issues Affecting Rural Life.

Chair: Helen Carroll. Dr. Maria Feeney, DCU; and farm accident survivors Mr. Kevin McGarry and Mr. William Sayers.

Helen opened this session. Maria gave a brief presentation about factors affecting rural life, the purpose of which was to set tone and context for day's proceedings. Following this, Helen would facilitate the fireside chat and delegates were invited to engage in a questions and answers session.

Dr. Maria Feeney. School of Human Development, DCU Institute of Education.

The purpose of Maria's presentation was to provide an overview of some of the issues affecting rural life and how sociologists relate them to men's health. At the outset, she acknowledged that farmers health and well-being is everyone's business and requires investment from all stakeholders across

Government, industry and the public and private sectors. Moreover, she noted that farmers ensure society's well-being by virtue of their role as food producers. Consequently, their health and well-being ought to be everyone's business. Key points of consideration from her presentation are as follows:

- While life expectancy and well-being have increased over time, Irish men have shorter life expectancy rates compared to Irish women. Based on large data sets such as the OECD Better Life Index, Irish people score well compared to their European and global counterparts. However, these types of tools often mask the realities for those who live on the margins, particularly those in rural areas.
- Drawing on data from the CSO relating to the 2016 Census, population growth in Dublin and east of the country was evident. However, low and slow population growth exists in the Border, Midlands and Western regions while counties Mayo and Donegal witnessed population decline in the period 2011-2016.
- One interesting age-related fact about the population in rural areas is that it has an older and very young age peak compared to urban areas. The urban population peaks at age 36, however in rural areas it peaks at 45 and also at age 8, thus reflecting what the CSO refer to as a "more family-oriented population structure" evident in rural Ireland. Furthermore, there exists a large cohort of elderly people (aged 65+) living in rural Ireland in counties such as Mayo, Kerry and Leitrim. Thus, illustrating that a significant cohort of people who are often deemed vulnerable and 'at-risk' for a whole host of issues such as poor health, limited mobility, isolation or loss, live in rural Ireland. That is an important reality when considering how to respond to and provide for their needs in their homes and elsewhere in rural society to ensure their health and well-being.
- Delegates heard that the social determinants of health [conditions in which we live, age and work (Forster et al., 2018)] have a significant impact on health outcomes. Health inequality is but one type of social inequality that affects people living in rural areas (e.g. access to health services). While rural life can offer many positive life experiences for many, it can be a challenge for others. Loss of services/'hollowing out' of rural areas has the potential to negatively affect some communities.
- Examining gender and rural masculinities is useful for understanding rural men's vulnerability. Noting the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* – the most culturally esteemed way of being a man, Maria explained that changes in rural society often affect men's ability to be real men (job loss and how it can affect men's ability to provide for their families). Furthermore, in Ireland and elsewhere, we offered little socio-emotional space for men to disclose their emotional problems. The 'boys don't cry' cultural script has caused untold damage because it prohibited men from availing of a necessary platform on which to build emotional resilience.
- Male vulnerability manifests itself in multiple ways in rural society. We see it in farm accidents. Death due to a farm accident is an overwhelming male phenomenon, primarily because most farmers are male. We also see male vulnerability emerge for those who survive such accidents because the aftermath presents significant challenges not only to their immediate and long-term recovery but also to their well-being and resilience. Interestingly, we also learned in Belfast last month from Dr. Rebecca Orr that male vulnerability is also evident in terms of GP services. Farmers' ill-health and anxiety is under-reported because they tend not to come through the door as often as they probably should and consequently, there is an absence of health data relating to farmers that could assist with designing meaningful and appropriate interventions and prevention initiatives.

The Fireside Chat commenced with Helen inviting William to tell his story of his farm accident. William was twelve years old when he lost his arm when working close to the tractor's PTO shaft. He explained that his father had warned him not to touch the PTO shaft. In this way, he noted that what happened to him was no accident in some ways because he felt that he disobeyed his father. He spoke about the profound effect his accident had on his parents. He felt he had let his own father down. His father too had lost a leg in a farm accident many years previously and his uncle was killed by a tractor in a farm accident. William got a job in machinery sales after his accident and continues to work in the agriculture sector.

Kevin was dairy farming, milking approximately eleven hundred cows, in New Zealand when he lost his two legs above the knee in accident on a scrambler bike. While on his way to the farm early one morning during calving season, the bike skidded into an electric fence and caught fire and Kevin was trapped underneath. He noted that he was cared for well in New Zealand. Since the accident, he is very much aware of the "ongoing battle – not just physically but mentally" and related it to what Mairead McGuinness noted when she said "are we stretching the elastic band too tight". He acknowledged that he is pushing the farm to "the absolute max". The ten years since his accident have been "equally trying and testing".

Helen drew attention to the fact that while these were life-changing accidents for the men, they didn't appear to change the plans they had for their lives. Kevin noted that he studied in UCD in case his plan for farming did not work out. He noted that he received valuable advice from a psychologist in New Zealand, who said

don't wait until you're fit to do something continue on with your life all the time.

In the context of Maria's presentation, specifically, the lack of services in rural Ireland, Helen asked Kevin if life was difficult when he had to return to rural Ireland. Kevin acknowledged that being unknown in New Zealand was easier on him when it came to socialising. He found it easy to get out and about. He noted that for a period of time he was at home in Ireland with very little to do as his friends had moved away. He noted that he came to a "dead stop" when he was back in Ireland and explained that there is no socialising in rural Ireland and that there is only a "small handful of young farmers" around who do not get to meet up or socialise with one another because people are so busy.

Helen asked Maria if the lack of social outlets, as described by Kevin, really presented itself as a problem. Drawing on research and referring to Mairead McGuinness' earlier message that we are human and need to connect, Maria explained that people need these social connections because it can assist in maintaining well-being and mental health. The stigma of ill-health was also noted as being problematic. The out-migration of young people in rural areas was always problematic and can result in the marginalisation of those that are left behind and ultimately can compromise their well-being. Additionally, Maria noted that this featured in some of the narratives of the men that she interviewed who engaged in suicidal behaviour.

Helen then asked William what he relied on for his resilience since he had mentioned his faith earlier in the discussion. He also explained that it's about how you "look at the bottle – is it half full or half empty?". He noted that his father always saw the bottle half full. He discussed how he had to adjust to life without his arm and found encouragement from his father. He now finds himself as more a counsellor when he visits farms rather than a sales rep. He also spoke about the importance of listening to people who are "off-loading" to him. Kevin noted that he tried not "to over-think the whole thing" and gave an example of feeling under pressure the previous evening when moving cattle and needing to ask for help in doing so.

Helen then asked all panellists what would they like to change in rural Ireland?

Drawing from the findings from her own Ph.D. study, Maria explained that she would like to see everyone having health literacy so that they are aware of their problems and know about how to go about getting help for them. She also noted that, from a sociological perspective and referring to the work of Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), she would like to see greater equality in society given that equality is better for everyone.

Kevin noted that he would like to see

less of us being pitted against each another. I feel we're always being pitted against each other. We're all in a race for the same ground. We're all in a race for the same national reserve or whatever it is. I feel the dairy man is being pitted against the tillage man is being pitted against the beef man. We're all kind of at each other's throats a bit. Maybe not on the surface but when you get down into it, when you get two of ye going for the same bit of ground it's all hell for leather. I think the brakes maybe need to be applied a small bit. Maybe a bit of perspective put into it and realise that just because you're doing well or I'm doing well doesn't mean that you're doing bad or I'm doing bad – we're not directly in competition all the time.

William believed that there should be twice as many delegates in attendance at the conference than were there. He acknowledged that he's in a job because of farmers and noted that "we take so much from the farmer" but without them the whole sector would be affected - for example, no jobs for sales reps. He appealed to delegates when he said that we need to realise that this is team effort. He believed that the conference could be the

start or the reigniting of something great for this country that we can actually put a bit of resources and value in ... and work as a team effort. Because when the Department comes to your farm, let's work alongside them. Because we need each other and if don't work together, we won't be there in the future.

Helen drew attention to the common theme running through all three accounts, it being the importance of helping one another. The floor was then opened to questions.

Mairead McGuinness commended the panellists and also noted that she herself had noted the issue of farmers being pitted against one another. From a policy-making perspective, you cannot push people or animals as far as we have been pushing them and we need to pull back because the pressures are too great and we need to acknowledge farmers' vulnerability.

Tom Murphy, Professional Agricultural Contractors Association, also commended the panellists and asked if the PTO shaft was covered when William lost his arm. William acknowledged that it was 95% covered and that the accident happened so quickly and explained that it takes in seventeen feet of material per second. But he also mentioned that everybody always thinks "it'll never happen to me" and cautioned against becoming complacent.

Caroline Farrell, IFA Farm Family and Social Affairs Chair, commended both the Northern Ireland and the Portlaoise conferences. She reiterated William's message of the importance of talking to farmers and also how important it is to have nice and compassionate people coming on to farms to meet with farmers.

Finola Colgan, Mental Health Ireland, believes that farmers are the "last group of people to embrace mental health". She acknowledged the importance of recognising and looking after our mental health. Connecting with each other for well-being is crucial to maintaining positive mental health. She too

has noted how farmers in business may not be as considerate to their fellow farmers. For her, the take home message was that we all “listen, support and be kind”, and this she believed applied to everyone such as vets and reps that would visit the farm – “just to listen and pick up the signs”.

Morning Session 2

Fireside Chat 2: Health & Well-being Issues. Chairperson: Helen Carroll, Presenter *Ear To The Ground, RTE1*. Discussion Panel – Gina Dowd (Counsellor/Psychotherapist of Counselling West) Understanding Health and Well-being for Farmers – Women in Agriculture: Alison Duck – Women Overcoming Adversity in Farming; Ann Doherty – Living with Pain.

Originally a social worker, Gina Dowd now works a psychotherapist and counsellor in Co. Galway. Gina has a specific interest in *relationship*. This, she argued, was a good fit for the conference since it is about connecting. Relationships require time, energy and thinking and commence from the day we are born. She noted that children’s self-belief has not been tarnished by the

interjects that we as adults have developed. Children are concerned with their omnipotent self (e.g. I am amazing). This relationship that they have with themselves changes at approximately seven or eight years of age. Consequently, the relationship we have with ourselves changes.

Gina explained that the relationship that we have with ourselves is a very important one and is key for building resilience. When we carry shame or feelings that “we are not good enough” we disconnect. Yet remaining connected to who we are is paramount for us as human beings. As adults, she noted that “it’s very hard for us to stand on our own two feet and say, ‘I’m awesome’”. It’s useful to understand the superiority/inferiority complex but it is the *Interiority Complex* - “that place in the middle where I’m at ease with myself” that is of particular interest for Gina. She explained

There’s a place where we live in ourselves and it’s very familiar to all of us in this room. The critic. We love the critic. We are designed to be on defence. ... We are designed to be very defensive which means we are deigned to be very critical. But we usually don’t need anyone to give out to us because we do a good enough job of that ourselves. We would never treat anyone the way we treat ourselves. We would never say out loud to someone the things we say to yourself.

We are also designed for change. And those who have experienced a farm accident or trauma understand what change really is. Gina told delegates that when we do not feel good enough, we go to a place of blame, self-doubt and vulnerability in ourselves. As humans, we do not like vulnerability because it brings up feelings of shame and inadequacy. We keep our thoughts to ourselves. And we have approximately sixty-six thousand thoughts a day, most of which are old. These are story lines that we carry with us in our life. These types of thoughts can keep us isolated. Mental health, Gina explained,

is about a whole series of thoughts running through our head and it’s about keeping them to ourselves. ... Positive mental health is about allowing those thoughts out and giving them a voice.

We ought to reflect on our thoughts and ask is it real, necessary or kind? We also need to take time to pause because we rarely give ourselves the opportunity to do this. Research has demonstrated that we need a five second pause to reshape our thinking which can have an impact on how we feel, and if we can change the way we feel, we can change the way we behave.

Gina noted that often when people attend therapy, it is during a time of crisis. Traditionally, more women than men attend for therapy, but that trend has reversed. Gina now sees more men than women and men stay longer in therapy – anywhere from one to three years. Her job as a therapist is not to try to “fix” people but to “support people to resource themselves”. She advised delegates to get to know their critic inside and ask if it is telling the truth.

As adults the middle years can present the most challenges – loans, mortgages, and it is also when most accidents can happen. We are so busy we are disconnecting. During this time in our life we need to be very aware of the relationship we have with ourselves. Gina cautioned that if we are to be resilient, we need to connect – connect into our vulnerabilities so we can share our stories. For survivors of farm accidents, she explained that the aftermath can most challenging because they are re-establishing the relationship with themselves – by asking who am I and what am I about? If we can learn to be with that pause, then we can get to be in these relationships that are healthier. We need compassion most and we need it for ourselves. If we approach life with compassion, it will be kinder, and we will be more resilient because we will have focus for the things we can do. Finally, she invited delegates

Invite yourself to do one thing different in your life that is focused solely on you and your relationship with yourself. ... Do something different that is focused on the positive. Because change is inevitable. And we don't have control over anything. But we can take charge of our thoughts that affect our feelings that affect our behaviour. More for positive than for negative.

Ann Doherty. Farm accident survivor.

Ann told delegates about her accident ten years ago. When driving home with her three daughters in the car, she came across a neighbour's cattle on the road. She called her husband who said he would come to help. Ann got out of her car to adjust the gate and was hit by a bull. There was no sign on the gate alerting people to the fact that there was a bull in the field. She described feeling the ground shake underneath her and she knew the bull was ready to charge again. She could hear her children screaming in the car and her husband on approach heard her screaming. Ann's accident was a life-changing one for her and her family. She has been terribly affected by pain since her accident and talked about having to take numerous medications to manage this. The medication has also caused Chron's Disease and she suffered from depression and also noted that there were a couple of occasions where she felt suicidal. She told delegates that “I'm struggling everyday”.

Ann also explained that initially people's support was great, but it does dwindle over time. She also explained that chronic pain and depression are “invisible illnesses ... people don't ask because it's invisible.”. This only adds to the stresses associated with having a chronic illness.

Alison Duck. Wife of a farm accident survivor

Alison's three children were aged six, two and newborn when her husband had his farm accident. “Cows ran him into a cement wall” and he spent six weeks in a coma. She experienced significant levels of stress during this time. She too acknowledged that “neighbours were great” but she described the shock she felt at that time. She and her husband had a mixed farm and the responsibility of this whilst caring for three young children was immensely stressful. Her husband now lives with a brain injury. In the panel discussion afterwards, both she and Ann spoke about their concerns of the effect the accidents would have on their children. Alison explained that she was concerned that children would be “listening at doors” to stories that had the potential to be distressing for them.

Helen led the panel discussion. It was noted that it is very important to be able to share and exchange personal stories. Support groups like Embrace FARM offer people the opportunity to feel empowered after their traumas because they realise they are not alone. It was also noted that there is a need to find the right person/therapist to talk to and that different types of therapies will cater to different people and their needs. Alison acknowledged that it was difficult initially because “there was no one to talk to about the farm at the time”. She also noted the nuanced nature of farming and being self-employed and how this can compound things further.

Gina then noted that while there is a sense of community among farmers, they are reluctant to ask for help and are “taught” to be resilient by being stoic. However, she explained that very often, people are on “auto-pilot” and may not be aware of the effects that shock and trauma can have. Shock, she explained, can live in the body for three years. Meeting others who have experienced similar trauma offers a “safer place to be. They don’t judge and no story is superior because they can resonate with one another”.

Helen then asked Alison to discuss the practicalities of farming in the context of dealing with her husband’s farm accident. Alison noted that there are so many agencies but that they are not linked up. She noted that there should be some form of structure that would serve to let people “know if there’s a name or a number” that they can turn to for help. More time needs to be spent listening, helping and guiding people during such challenging times. Alison explained that when deadlines need to be met and “things are coming in the door you don’t actually know where to turn”.

A delegate asked why we do not meet up more often and noted the benefits of the meetings/conferences.

Another delegate, Ashling Meehan, Embrace FARM board member, asked Gina how you get people to go to therapy. Gina noted that often she will see people who have been two or three years thinking about therapy before they actually attend their first meeting. Therapy is about “getting into a better relationship with the self”. Seeking help should not be considered a “failure”. Some people, men in particular, will always require some persuasion to take an interest in themselves. Sometimes it can be a challenge “helping them love themselves”.

This concluded the second session.

Afternoon Session

Dr. Jude McCann. CEO Rural Support and Nuffield Scholar. *Increasing Resilience & Knowledge Transfer*

Jude commenced his presentation by outlining the work of Rural Support and how they support the farming community in Northern Ireland. The Rural Support helpline offers advice and support in relation to relationships, banks, mental health issues, succession planning. It also has a support office for social farming. He noted that mental health and well-being are serious emerging issues for farmers in Northern Ireland. The stigma attached to mental illness still prevents many from seeking help. He noted that approximately one farmer per week dies by suicide in the UK. He cited the inherent stresses associated with farming, and the pace of change, as being implicated in the rise of mental ill-health among the farming community.

Jude also spoke about his own personal story. His own father survived a serious farm accident.

Jude then presented on the findings that emerged from the international research he undertook for his Nuffield scholarship *Securing Farmers' Resilience in a Changing World*. Resilience is key for farmers and the successful operation of their farms across the globe. All farmers he met with encountered various kinds of pressures but have successfully adapted. Resilience was a key theme throughout Jude's presentation. He described it as being the ability to not simply bounce back from adversity but an ability to be able to "bounce forward".

Similar stressors and challenges affected farmers across the globe and evidence demonstrated that many diverse supports exist to assist farmers building and safeguarding their resilience and wellbeing.

The importance of a Life-Farm balance was key. Evidence from Switzerland showed that having an apprentice on the farm facilitated the farmer taking time off. Diversification of the farm business and "thinking differently about how you get produce to market" provided new and innovative ways for the farmer to generate a new income stream thus ensuring the sustainability of the overall farm business into the future.

The need for farmers to keep socially connected was another important issue. Evidence from Cambodia suggested that drawing on the support of the local community in the small farm village means that farmers there are not isolated practitioners. Rather they draw on their well-developed social network which acts as a powerful 'buffer' against isolation and the demands of work. A farmer there noted, "We simply couldn't stay alive on our own. We are one tribe".

"...farm with nature, rather than against it" was a key message from Doug Avery in New Zealand who sought help when experiencing farming-related stresses. Doug's ability to function "seriously declined". Seeking help was an important step for him that facilitated thinking about his life and farming in a different way which ultimately led to his success. He grew a new crop called lucern which was more suited to drought conditions they were experiencing. Doug referred to this as a

process of discovery and change because we were changing the way we are integrating into the world

Consequently, this journey of change and adaptation has helped him become emotionally resilient. Doug explained that it was important to look after the "top paddock" (one's head) to safeguard against mental ill-health.

Jude then told the conference about the "most developed and robust support service for farmers in the USA" which is based at The Farm Centre, Wisconsin. Their mission is simply to "help farmers".

...we are interested in farmers' quality of life and sustainability of their farm businesses. Services offered include a helpline, financial consultation, succession facilitation, vouchers for counselling and additional services to minority farmers i.e. Mong farming families (who came as refugees from South East Asia). All staff are certified first aid mental health responders. The Farm Centre is a model integrating social, psychological help with business advice and support.

The value of a working partnership between the farming community and industry, specifically the rural insurance industry, was presented with evidence from New Zealand. FMG Advice and Insurance are New Zealand's "leading rural insurer"¹⁷. FMG have partnered with the Mental Health Foundation

¹⁷ <https://www.fmg.co.nz/about-fmg/giving-back/farmstrong/>

(MHF) and are funded and supported by the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC). Together, they have developed *FarmStrong*

an initiative designed to give the farmers the skills and resources to live well, farm well and get the most out of life¹⁸

Moreover, it is also a “nationwide well-being programme for the rural community”¹⁹

Findings from Jude’s research shed light on the value of this initiative because it was designed to specifically meet the nuanced needs of farmers. A participant in Jude’s research explained

To engage with farmers and with men in particular, the language we use is crucial. We choose carefully how we address issues like depression, suicide, stress or mental health problems without using any terminology that people may feel uncomfortable or be unwilling to engage with. (Gerard Vaughan).

The two core principles that emerge from the study were (1) the need to increase co-ordination between farm support and other agencies and (2) a need to better broaden support to provide a more holistic aid package.

Recommendations for NGOs and Farm Support Organisations arising from Jude’s research were then provided:

- Increase collaboration with one another as well as with all other stakeholders in agriculture to support and facilitate farmers’ resilience through holistic advice system.
- Strive to identify the multiple drivers of stress and to incorporate existing social and emotional support for farmers to all members of the farm household and to ensure that such support also incorporates (or provides access to) business advice, technical expertise and marketing information as required.

Four key take homes messages from Jude’s research were then presented:

5. Ensure a positive Life-Farm balance
6. Be part of a Tribe Maintain and develop relationships and social connections with others (family/community/scientists/advisors) as an inherent strategy for resilience
7. Farm with nature, rather than against it
8. Look after the top paddock Seek help and become emotionally and socially resilient. ‘Man up’ to mental health.

Finally, Jude offered the following points that serve as a rationale for the conference theme *Farmers’ resilience is everyone’s business*

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ <https://farmstrong.co.nz/>

5. Farmers and farm support organisations, private sector and governments all have a responsibility to help farmers manage change/secure resilience.
6. Farmers' resilience is not just about personal resilience – but also the farm household/community.
7. Challenges facing farmers can no longer be addressed by solely focusing on current business issues.
8. Need for a more integrated approach involving all stakeholders. We need increased cooperation and an integration of support provided.

Harold Kingston. Former IFA Environment Committee. Cork. Personal Story.

Harold's story illustrates how a series of stressful and taxing events over time can cause significant pressure and compromise the farmer's well-being and their ability to farm.

He acknowledged that he is "fairly public" in what he does because "what happens on the farm is public". He noted that pressure was building up from the summer of 2017. TB affected a number of animals on his farm. Coping with this, among other things, meant that the reality was "cash flow went out the window". Following this, in October 2017, Storm Ophelia caused damage with power outages and time was spent helping neighbours. Several months later, another storm struck in late February/early March 2018 ('Beast from the East') which caused significant problems for the farming community. At this point, Harold noted the "constant, constant drudgery" of his work and the pressure of "making sure everything was fed and had shelter". By this point, he himself and his farming was affected. Milking became "intermittent" and it was a struggle "keeping everything ticking over". By April 4th of 2018 he explained

I physically wasn't capable of looking after the cows anymore. I was going to have to find something else to do. ... I was a safety nightmare. I couldn't focus on anything. Burnout can lead to depression and suicide.

The cattle dealer knew he was in trouble. Neighbours and good friends were supportive and helped him to keep going.

Harold told delegates that he needed time "not to think" and that he needed time off. He cautioned delegates and reminded them that the first person to look after is yourself and noted that you are "no use to anyone" if you are unwell. He explained that it is not sympathy that people in such circumstances need, rather it is more empathy. He knew that people were "starting to talk about me and it grew legs. And by going public I was taking control".

He offered simple, practical advice for others who may be struggling, such as (1) recognising signs early and being mindful of time. For example, recognising the need to eat every few hours to avoid things like headaches and feeling irritable. Prioritise time for all tasks – paperwork, keeping stock fed. (2) Recognise your support network, (3) the GP is the number 1 person you should talk to and "has your back", (4) he suggested talking to cows. He found this to be a "great help" acknowledging that he spends more time with them than humans. (4) Faith is important, and this was something he could use to "press pause", and (6) Recognise your friends and business associates – "never underestimate the value of your support network".

Fireside Chat 3: What Can We Do To Build a Community of Support? Chairperson: Amii McKeever, Editor *Irish Country Living*. Discussion Panel – Aisling Meehan, Agriculture Solicitors; Dr. Rebecca Orr, General Practitioner (NI); Shane Whelan, AIB.

After introducing the panel members, Amii spoke about the importance of networks and how they can support us during challenging times. She asked panel members what supports they can offer to the farming community and how can they help build a community of support.

Aisling Meehan commenced the discussion from a legal perspective. She noted that due to our human nature we have a tendency “to put things on the back burner” if they are difficult or challenging. However, she stressed the importance of having a will made. If there is no will (intestacy), “everything shuts down overnight”. Those left behind have no access to accounts, payments, assets etc. Payments can stay in probate for up to six months. She encouraged setting up a partnership with a spouse that will at least offer “signing capacity”.

Shane Whelan from AIB noted the importance of having life assurance and discussed the benefits of having income protection.

Dr. Rebecca Orr advocated for shared decision making. She noted that prevention is better than cure, but a GP must be given full knowledge of their patient’s circumstances in order to help their patients in meaningful way. When Amii mentioned the issue of stoicism and wondered if it complicates help-seeking. Rebecca explained that many people will be of the opinion “there’s nothing wrong with me” and that they are not prioritising their health. She recommends that there be an annual GP visit or at least one every year after the age of fifty and spoke about the possibility of connecting the annual health check with the single farm payment. Rebecca also highlighted the inequality issue in relation to health insurance. Many farmers do not have health insurance and if they were to become sick, they are faced with the possibility of having to sell assets. She also explained that there is room to develop occupational health services and she would like to see health on the top of the agenda.

Amii then asked Shane about training that the bank offers to its customers. Shane explained that unlike other industries, farmers are “exposed” to many challenges. AIB frontline staff are advised about those challenges because “we are one of those points of contact”. He noted that it is important for staff to “take a small amount of time to listen and talk”. By recognising those challenges, “we can flag it with someone”. The key message for Shane to customers is “come in and talk early. We can identify together” before a problem begins to spiral.

Aisling spoke about specific training for solicitors. Previously, agri law “wasn’t a thing”. Now, it is “a separate stand-alone sector”. Farming is in a league of its own she argued, given the huge amount of information available to farmers in relation to succession. Aisling acknowledged three challenges that currently affect farmers that she sees in her role as solicitor: (1) Information is changing so quickly and so too are rules and regulations, (2) Time is a significant constraint for farmers. The burden of “paperwork is huge, enormous”, and (3) The Department polices EU legislation and she argued there “could be a little more compassion in ensuring it”. Showing a little more empathy and offering to sit down with people to “talk it out” may be a more effective approach particularly when it comes to inspections because its associated stresses “can wear them down”.

Rebecca Orr discussed the ‘rural’ training that GPs receive. They spend three weeks in a rural area and travel with vets to gain a full appreciation of farming life. She regards this as a professionally stimulating experience as it “gets rid of the idea that rural GP isn’t attractive”. Scotland’s model for rural healthcare provision is exemplary as they have developed a specialised care model that has been influenced by “geography”. She also noted that

We have to make a point to Government. We need a good, healthy workforce. If farmers aren't well, they won't make decisions and will not be productive.

Furthermore, “equal air time” needs to be given for mental and physical health. We must encourage farmers to take health checks if they are being paid for. She reminded delegates that the “biggest asset is the farmer”.

Comments from one delegate noted that “a broken mind cannot recognise a broken mind” and this can present difficulties with help seeking.

Rebecca explained that when dealing with farmers, GPs can be a barrier if they are suggesting that farmers “take a couple of weeks off work” to rest and recover. Such suggestions are a “big no no” for farmers. Often, farmers desperately need to take breaks but are unable to. She briefly described the Farm Relief model that operates successfully in New Zealand.

Another delegate, William, noted that “banking is faceless” and that customer-facing banking officials need to be brought back into banks to ensure that people can have “positive meetings and have a good relationship”. Shane Whelan acknowledged that this was an industry-wide trend.

In terms of final points from the panel members. Rebecca Orr reminded delegates of the four pillars we need to live our lives: eat, sleep, relax and move. She also noted that we need to lobby Government “to have the fabric (of rural Ireland) built back in” and that we need more GPs in rural areas.

Shane Whelan explained that people need to identify their challenge and then reach out to their support network. He also noted the importance and power of the individual story and acknowledged that Embrace FARM ought to be offered a platform to continue their work.

Similarly, Aisling noted the need to identify what is within your control. Farmers, she said, will talk to their solicitors so it is important to listen to the them to help bring answers out.

Amii drew attention to the idea of peer-to-peer farmer mental health programmes/initiatives.

Closing Remarks: Norma Rohan, Co-Founder of Embrace FARM

In Stephanie Berkeley’s (Farm Safety Foundation, UK) absence, Norma invited all delegates to sign the pledge.

Based on the work she does with Embrace FARM, Norma explained that their focus is primarily raising awareness of the human impact that a farm accident can have on families. Farming accounts for 6% of the workforce but loses 22 victims per year to farm accidents from a toddler to a grandad. Delegates heard that farmers often place the welfare of animals and crops ahead of themselves and she called on all stakeholders – industry, Government and the public and private sectors “to value the farmer, not just the product”. She also referred to the issue of mental health/ill-health and taking this and the UK suicide figure into consideration – on average one farmer per week dies by suicide in the UK – she questioned if there was a crisis in the industry. The message that farmer well-being is everyone’s business was reiterated once again. And the need to build resilience among the farming community was also highlighted by Norma.

Republic of Ireland Learning Outcomes

Several key learning outcomes relating to the issue of farmers' resilience emerged from an analysis of the conference feedback that was provided by delegates.

Conference Feedback Analysis

Delegates were invited to participate in a short survey relating to their experiences of the day's proceedings and the work/role of Embrace FARM. 38 delegates completed a short questionnaire.

Question 1 on the feedback form asked delegates the following:

Please state what you believe to be the take-home message from this conference for each of these sectors:

Public Sector, Industry, Voluntary Sector, Healthcare Professionals, Farming

The take home messages offered for each sector are discussed separately below. All responses are recorded for each sector and are analysed thematically.

Public Sector Take-Home Messages

32 delegates offered take-home messages for the Public Sector.

One major theme emerged – specifically **a call for the Public Sector to infuse their practice, approach and dealings with farmers with a more human-focused approach**. Delegates from across all sectors noted that farmers should be treated with empathy and understanding.

Be (a) lot more considerate (circumstances) (3IS)

Be more understanding of the pressures farmers are under (4)

Focus on customer needs (6FS)

Farmers are the foundation of our society and must be supported and valued as so (7IS)

That sales reps and Dept. officials should try to help farmers (8FMR)

We need to think about people's needs/history when dealing with them (10PS)

Understanding (17)

Keep connecting for life, embrace with each other (18PS)

Compassion (19PS)

Be aware of early signs/support each other as a team (20PR)

Needs to understand farmers more (23FMR)

Empathy – HSA/Gardai/Dept. of Ag (24PS)

Teagasc should step up to the mark and help farmers in need (25FS)

Treat farmers with courtesy and respect. 'Treat everyone as you would like to see your own mother treated' (26FS)

Need to be aware of farmers mental health during inspections (27)

Farmers have a higher rate of undiagnosed mental health issues than others (28PR)

Inspections, regulations are intimidating, they need to be more conscious of them not knowing what is happening behind the scenes (29FS)

Understand and listen to the challenges that farmers face and consider this in how they (WORD) (32PS)

Reactions matter, (positive/negative) influence personal endeavour/mental capacity. Think of the customer and be proactive in profiling supports (33IS)

Significant investment in healthcare needed. Farmers are people, not numbers, treat them as such. Significant work needs to be done to re-connect non-farming communities and 'urbanites' with farming and food production. Society cannot continue to exist in a bubble (38PS)

Another theme, closely aligned to the treatment of farmers, as noted by conference delegates was that it is **important for the public sector to be aware of pressures that farmers face that that they should have an overall awareness of factors affecting life in rural areas.**

Changing face of the farm industry (5)

Be more aware if the pressures imposed by regulation (15PS)

Awareness of country life needs to improve (14IS)

More awareness of rural needs (22)

Be aware of farmers situation (37FS)

It also was apparent from delegates' views that **more 'joined-up' thinking is required from agencies/departments across the Public Sector**, as noted in the following responses:

All these sectors need to meet to actually combine together to bring ideas together as everyone seems (to) be of same attitude to sort out farmer resilience (1FS)

Join up thinking in departments (2FS)

Multi agency connections (11PS)

Teagasc/DAF/IFA etc. To initiate and establish key contacts, supports and departments to assist farm families in the areas of business/farming/finance (13Pr)

Joined up thinking regarding red tape (16IS)

Industry Take-Home Messages

Some key thematic areas were identified based on feedback from 28 respondents. Numerous people felt that industry should be supporting farmers through listening and understanding their circumstances. Others highlighted things Industry could do to support farmers in terms of their general business, providing training to their Sales Reps and funding initiatives/activities that support farmers and their communities. A small sub-theme also emerged and that was for Industry to maintain their commitment to health and safety.

(1) Once again, a similar message goes out to Industry to support farmers by listening to them and understanding their circumstances.

Farmers are the primary suppliers “Look out for them” (3IS)

Without farmers in the wellies, we have no industry. We must all do our bit when on farm to listen and support (7IS)

Maybe industry in general should realise that farmers are very important to this country (8FMR)

Take time to embrace reality with your customers (15IS)

Look for support (18PS)

Support (19PS)

More understanding of farming changes (22)

Treat farmers with courtesy and respect. ‘Treat everyone as you would like to see your own mother treated’ (26FS)

Community. ‘How are you ... really?’ (30IS)

Take time to listen (37FS)

(2) Another important theme that emerged from the delegates’ feedback was **for industry to do things in a more pro-active way to support farmers and their communities**. This applies to how they do business; training their staff so they are equipped to support farmers on the ground when out visiting them; and through funding initiatives.

Business in general

It was felt by some that Industry need to be more mindful of farmers and how their business may need to change to support them in meaningful ways.

Can you join up initiatives your company have goals for (2FS)

Acknowledgement of social contract (6FS)

Accept suppliers as equal partners (9FS)

Competition needs to be reduced. Community rather than competition. (14IS)

Need to provide better returns to farmers (27)

Level the playing field – good price for a good product etc. (38PS)

Industry staff training

There is a feeling among some that Industry Reps could be a valuable asset for identifying ill-being among farmers. Some respondents see value in providing training to Industry Reps for this given the type of engagement they have with farmers.

Possibly training for Reps dealing with the agri-industry to spot difficult situations (4)

Train their sales or delivery staff, maybe 10% off to ‘spot’ farmers in trouble, to talk to the farmer and direct him/her in direction of help or advice (25FS)

Many industry reps are going to farms on a regular basis and can be the frontline in identifying vulnerable people (29FS)

Funding support

Your support e.g. funding activities is needed and valuable (15PS)

Invest in voluntary groups and charities' working to improve life in farming and rural communities (13PR)

(3) Safety should be a take-home message for Industry as noted by 3 delegates.

Continuation of spreading the health and safety message (5)

Multi-agency approach to safety (10PS)

Safety (11PS)

Voluntary Sector Take-Home Message

24 people offered messages for the Voluntary Sector. It was commended for their existing work and efforts with one delegate (29) noting that farm organisations need to promote this. It was suggested that a joined-up approach to service provision would be beneficial. Specific mention was given to provide services tailored to farmers.

The Voluntary Sector was highly commended for the work that they already do.

Their compassion cannot be quantified (3IS)

To continue the good work and look for support from above [industry & public sector] (4)

Is very good at this meeting (23FMR)

Voluntary sector do all they can with limited resources and they don't need any message (25FS)

More joined-up approaches are required between and across the Voluntary Sector.

Further integration (6FS)

Widen networks (9FS)

Don't reinvent the wheel, voluntary groups need to line up with each other (10PS)

Joined up thinking (37FS)

Join up, pool resources (38PS)

'Farmer-specific' support services and approaches are required to address farmers' needs.

To simplify message to farmer (2FS)

Need more farmers involved spreading their real-life message that all other farmers can relate to (7IS)

Provide social support outlets tailored to farmers (27)

Social groups for farmers are really important for their mental and physical health (28PR)

Take time to reach out and promote well-being with services that people can avail of (16IS)

Treat farmers with courtesy and respect. 'Treat everyone as you would like to see your own mother treated' (26FS)

Miscellaneous: Some delegates offered very general contributions that are noted here for the record: Interestingly, a farmer noted that it was *'Great to have Samaritans here'* at the conference. There was a suggestion by another delegate that the Voluntary Sector should *Do the 'Little Things' campaign (18IS)*. Still others offered very concise contributions: *Rural isolation (11PS)*, *Empathy (24PS)*, *Training (30IS)*.

Healthcare Professionals' Take-Home Message

Three key take-home messages emerged for Healthcare Professionals based on 28 delegates' responses. It was noted by one delegate that their *contribution is vital (3IS)*.

Healthcare Professionals need to understand farmers and farming-related matters.

To understand their farmer patient problems – part of training for GPs (4)

Expanding their knowledge of the uniqueness of farming industry (5)

Relate and understand the farming community life and spread the message through these channels of services available (7IS)

Be more aware of issues facing farmers and more creative in reaching out (15PS)

Need to understand the pressures of farming (27)

Suggestions were made about how their professional practice can adapt to meet the needs of farmers and others. Healthcare professionals listening and taking the time to listen was noted by several delegates. It is important to note that this is in the context of an over-stretched GP and mental health service, particularly in rural areas.

Be visible (6FS)

Open days – there is time for people (9FS)

Streamline care to allow more time for life rather than dwelling on the illness (14IS)

Spread the message they are there to help and farmers can avail of their services (16IS)

Talk plain language (18IS)

Listen and take time to listen (24PS)

Listen, listen, listen (26FS)

Take time to listen (37FS)

Stigma in rural areas can be crippling for mental health treatments. Move away from prescription drug-based approaches to treatments and deal with issues/tragedies/traumas that are the cause of ill-being and pain in the first place. Appreciate the pressures rural GPs and mental health services are under that why significant buy-in is needed from Government (38PS)

Mental Health/ill-health is cause for concern. Mental healthcare and service provision would appear to require more investment.

More resources for mental health (10FS)

Mental well-being (11PS)

Educate on key indicators in mental health problems and first aid tips and actions (13PR)

Streamline care to allow more time for life rather than dwelling on the illness (14IS)

Physical health issues for farmers could be a sign of mental health issues (28PR)

Mental health services around the country must be increased to meet needs (29FS)

Help should be available to people with difficulty or to family members who have identified such an individual (25FS)

Other 'miscellaneous' and concise responses were offered by some delegates *GP visits (22)*, *Talk And communicate more (35IS)*, and some of which may not directly relate to the healthcare professional sector *Don't be afraid to seek help (8FMR)*.

Farming Community Take-Home Message

There was an overwhelming sense of agreement among delegates that farmers need to engage more, talk more and connect with neighbours and friends. Within that overarching theme, it was also noted that farmers should look after each other – essentially build community within their own community. Some delegates believed that the take-home message should be more professional-based insofar as farmers need to remember the safety aspect of their work and be more vigilant in their professional practice.

Farmers need to engage more and be pro-active in terms of looking out for themselves.

Talk more! (2FS)

Keeping in touch – take a minute – recognise your neighbour and chat (4)

Engage with community (6FS)

Meet and greet neighbours (9FS)

Information, contacts and spread awareness (12)

Keep an eye on each other and speak up to help a neighbour/friend (13PR)

Social events and communication needs to increase (14IS)

Develop support networks and share experiences. Don't be afraid of acknowledging stresses (15IS)

Use all the services ... go visit neighbours like old times (18IS)

Mental and physical health needs to be prioritised; income important too (23FMR)

Be extremely proactive in relation to possible mental health issues (28PR)

Sharing/Talking/Listening (30IS)

Take time for yourself, be good to yourself (37FS)

Farmers should look out for one another

A need to co-operate/socialise/offer understanding (3IS)

All farming sectors should try to help each other more (8FMR)

Really connect with each other and know there is real issues with real people (16IS)

Need to look out for and help each other (25FS)

Support each other (26FS)

Health and Safety is an important issue and farmers need to be mindful of this all the time

Paying attention, if possible, to dangerous situations and ask for help if necessary (5)

Think of the bigger picture, take a minute, you are more important than a job “that has to be done today” (7IS)

Safety (11PS)

Stop and think before you take action. The 5 second pause could have ‘better’ results. (25FS)

Need to keep up to date through on-going professional development (27)

Farmer is most important on any farm. Take care in all matters (34FMR)

Accidents will occur tomorrow as well, be careful (35IS)

Q2 (a) There is inequality in health and social care between urban and rural areas in Ireland.

38 delegates responded to this question and an overwhelming majority of people **81.5% agreed** that inequality exists in terms of health and social care between urban and rural areas in ROI (**NI 87.7%**)²⁰. Only two people disagreed with the statement (5.2%). Five people (13.2%) expressed neither agreement nor disagreement

Q2 (b) There is sufficient emphasis placed on ensuring rural health and wellbeing needs are met in health and social care policy.

²⁰ For ease of comparison, Northern Ireland (NI) data is presented here alongside data for the Republic of Ireland

36 people responded. **63.9% (n= 23) of delegates disagreed** with this statement (NI 83.6%). 25.0% (n= 9) agreed with this statement. 11.1% (n= 4) expressed neither agreement nor disagreement.

Q2 (c) Rural Ireland's health and wellbeing needs are well understood by decision makers

37 delegates responded to this statement. **62.1% of respondents disagreed** with the statement that the health and well-being needs of rural ROI are well understood by decision makers (NI 75%). 13 respondents (35.1%) agreed (NI 25%).

Q2 (d) There is a greater stigma around mental health in rural areas than in urban

36 delegates responded. Once again, the vast majority **83.3% (n= 30) believe greater levels of stigma surrounding mental health exist in rural areas** compared to urban areas (NI 75.1%). 6 people expressed neither agreement/disagreement, no one disagreed in any way with this statement

	N	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Q2 (a) There is inequality in health and social care between urban and rural areas in Ireland.	38	28.9 (11)	52.6 (20)	13.2 (5)	2.6 (1)	2.6 (1)
Q2 (b) There is sufficient emphasis placed on ensuring rural health and wellbeing needs are met in health and social care policy.	36	13.9 (5)	11.1 (4)	11.1 (4)	33.3 (12)	30.6 (11)
Q2 (c) Rural Ireland's health and wellbeing needs are well understood by decision makers	37	16.2 (6)	18.9 (7)	2.7 (1)	37.8 (14)	24.3 (9)
Q2 (d) There is greater stigma around mental health in rural areas than in urban areas	36	25.0 (9)	58.3 (21)	16.7 (6)	--	--

Q3. What can your organisation do to ensure the Health and Wellbeing needs of Irish farmers are met?

31 delegates offered responses to this question. Responses are organised by sector.

Farm Support Sector

We will work with Embrace FARM (2FS)

Bring onboard mainstream (6FS)

Remind us that members' well-being is primary (9FS)

Bring professional people, farm accident survivors, people with mental issues and their success or ongoing issues to IFAS Co. Executive Meetings (25FS)

Keep them informed – keep them included – praise (26FS)

Working to raise awareness and build mental health supports (29FS)

More social interaction (37FS)

Private Sector

Continue what is doing at present (3PR)

Spend more time listening to farmers when on farm and help to promote the work Embrace FARM do (7PR)

Ensuring my safety workshops remain positive for children and encourages the farm safety conversation is had at home (13PR)

Aid those that have accidents regain functionality (14PR)

Promoting awareness (20PR – finance)

Encourage industry to get involved (30PR)

Promotion and communication (32PR - ins)

Talk, we all have our objectives inside the farm gate, but can also be ‘support’ other than just financial (33PR – finance)

Open talk (35PR)

Public Service

Positive engagement, feedback and listen (10PSGS)

More community engagement (11PSGS)

Continue to organise peer support days and expand to include wider group of farmers (15PS - hospital)

Help promote Embrace FARM and highlight issues (16PS)

Keep promoting our service (18PS – health)

Education is one of the ways of improving the situation (19PS)

Take time to listen and talk to farmers daily (24PS/GS)

Pay attention! (38PS)

Voluntary Sector

We provide mental health and well-being workshops – community aid work with farm organisations to... (31VS)

Individual responses (from farmers FMR, and other individuals who did not state what organisation they were from)

Continue the good work (4)

Join a club locally (8FMR)

Give information (22)

Be aware of the impact of inspections on farmers (27)

As a counsellor to do all I can to make it easier for farmers to access counselling (28)

Hold more non-technical events (36FMR)

Q4. What do you feel Embrace FARM can do to support the Health and Well-being needs of Irish farmers?

Two key issues emerged from the responses that 35 delegates offered. Firstly, an overwhelming majority availed of the opportunity to commend the work that Embrace FARM currently do. It is clear that the charity's work is well recognised and highly valued in terms of its contribution to the lives of those it helps, specifically in relation to the words the delegates used when commending the work – *continue, keep, keep up*. Thus, suggesting that much of what Embrace FARM already does is highly effective and worthwhile. This also relates to some of the comments that were offered in the final part of the feedback form ('Any further comments') where the founders and their efforts were personally acknowledged. Secondly, several suggestions were put forward in terms of what Embrace FARM could potentially do in the future to support the health and well-being needs of Irish farmers.

Commending the work of Embrace FARM

Keep up good work you are doing (1FS)

Continue the excellent work (5)

Continue & enlarge highlighting issues (6FS)

... Already doing a fantastic job - Keep raising awareness with campaign on farm safety (7PR)

Continue the good work (8FMR)

Continue educational/support role (9FS)

Continue to organise days like today highlighting issues ... disabled farmers (15PS – hospital)

Keep raising awareness and educating politicians (16PS)

Keep up the good work, great to bring farmers together (18PS – health)

Continuing their good work (20PR)

Continue the good work – keep in touch with IFA (26FS)

Keep promoting both farmer health and farm safety (27)

They are doing all they can – are fantastic and deserve great credit for turning a personal family tragedy into a group to help fellow farmers in similar situations and advice on 'avoiding' more tragedy (25FS)

Continue its great work and support for those that have been affected by farming accidents (32PR – ins)

Continue the good work. Having point of contact and 'peer' network available offers not just comfort but hope that things can change for the better (33PR – finance)

Continue what you are doing (34FMR)

Continue your good work (37FS)

Continue your remarkable work (38PS)

Suggestions for going forward

Some interesting suggestions were offered by delegates: more education and awareness-raising including more conferences like the one held on the 25th April. A small number of suggestions/comments were offered for more support work.

- **Education and Awareness-raising, including more conferences**

Open door – today is the start (4)

... more awareness (11PSGS)

...possibly educate industry/Reps going into farm(s). How we can help farmers more with safety and well-being (7PR)

Providing links and important information regarding help and resources (12)

Collaboration such as this are ideal in reaching more people and including other organisations (13PS)

Train more groups to know to ask and listen (30PR)

Small write up each week in IJF (35PR)

More advertising to get the message out that Embrace is not just for bereavement (36FMR)

More conferences

Discussion groups (22)

More conferences (23FMR/SVR)

Maybe an annual conference on the health and well-being of farmers (28)

This national conference is high-value, highly engaging. I think it could be helpful and hold regional events (survivors as well) (31VS)

- **More support work**

Helpline (2FS)

Support people in farming community (10PSGS)

Support mental health after injury (14PS)

- **Misc.**

As much as possible within resources (3PR)

The personal story is so important (19PS)

Embrace are doing it (24 PS/GS)

Q5. What do you know the current role and purpose of Embrace FARM to be?

32 delegates responded to this question. The role and purpose of Embrace FARM is clearly identified as a support/help providing one. In fact, 28 delegates used the word 'support' or 'help' in their response, another said 'back up service'.

Back up service for families that have had a loved one killed on their farm (1FS)

To be a support network (2FS)

Providing support, compassion and pragmatism (3PR)

To offer support to people from farming communities that have experienced accidents and trauma (5)

Support farming families who have been involved in farm accidents (7PR)

To help people and families who have serious injuries as a result of farm accidents (8FMR)

Support network to agriculture (9FS)

Supporting farm accident victims and wider community in coping with grief (10PSGS)

Support network (11PSGS)

To provide support and remembrance for farm (12)

Support network for those affected by a farm accident and/or fatality (13FS)

Inform, support and lobby for better rural healthcare (14)

Rich and varied! Support, education, advocacy (15PS – hospital)

Support organisations for the survivors of farm accidents (16PS)

Farm support for accidents (17)

To support families, post and bereavement (20PR – finance)

Help farmers with physical and mental issues (23FMR/SVR)

Support farmers through loss and grief (24 PS/GS)

Help and advice on farm safety (25FS)

Voluntary organisation that supports people following farm accidents (27)

Highlight issues around farm accidents and support survivors (28)

To help support those left behind and the survivors of farm accidents (29FS)

Supporting those surviving accidents on farm (30PR)

Support network for farm families dealing with unexpected life changing events (31VS)

Farm accident support network (32PR – ins)

Support bereaved and accident survivors (35PR)

Support for farmers and farm families (36FMR)

Support victims of farm accidents (37FS)

Supporting families who are bereaved and who are survivors (38PS)

3 individuals did not make specific mention of the word’s ‘support’ or ‘help’ in their responses, but the content of their responses clearly points to the supportive role and purpose that Embrace FARM have. In fact, what these delegates refer to are some of the fundamental values and principles that underpin the charity’s supportive efforts.

Listening – and get the conversation going (4)

A special day of remembrance each year (22)

Advocate for farm safety; families of farm fatalities/injury; policy influence (33PR – finance)

Question 6: This question asked delegates for their feedback in relation to the organisation, logistical and technical aspects of the conference. An overwhelming majority provided high scores. 36 people scored the ‘Overall’ conference and all 100% awarded a score of 4 or more. Delegates were asked to rate variables on a scale of 1-5, with 5 representing a high, positive score. For the purposes of analysis, scores of 4 and 5 are merged.

Aspect	N	% Scores of 4 or more	Number of scores less than 4
Venue	38	97.3	1
Accessibility	37	97.3	1
Time	38	92.1	3
Publicity	38	77.8	8
Catering	38	100	-
Handling	34	100	-
Range of Speakers	38	100	-
Content of speakers	38	100	-
Opportunities for networking	36	97.2	1
Overall	37	100	-

Any further Comments:

Thank you for the invite (2)

Brian/Norma, Keep up good work. (3)

A very well worthwhile conference – the 5 speakers with personal stories were more than excellent. They don’t know the impact they had on us all. (4)

Excellent conference. Well done!! (5)

*We can help: stop & listen (6) ***

Excellent conference & campaign. Keep up the good work. (7)

Would be lovely to see more people here today (8)

I do not support any attempts to accentuate a rural-urban divide (9)

Excellent (11)

A perfectly pitched event putting emphasis on broader underlying issues affecting farm safety and farmer health. I think bringing the mental health & farm safety topics together makes them more effective and resonates far better. (13)

More effort needed in encouraging non-rural people to attend to grasp the issues faced (14)

Well done and thanks (15)

Powerful message which needs more highlighting in the society we live in (16)

If you could check out the 'Wellness Workshop' run by Suicide or Survive (18)

Excellent (19)

Excellent day, thoroughly enjoyed it. Great speakers (24)

As a survivor of a serious farm accident I would like to commend you all particularly Norma and Brian. Thank you. (25)

A great event – continue the great work (26)

This has been very well organised – I think some element of follow-up is important -. We are available to deliver workshops on request. (31)

Excellent conference (32)

Excellent event, personal stories really powerful and most impactful (33)

I believe it is important to talk but it is vital to talk to the right person. Many professional as well as ordinary individuals are unable to understand human misery and can medicate and diagnose "mental illness" because of panic on their part. (34)

Media coverage

Some links to the national, regional and online coverage.

<https://www.farmersforum.ie/news/Farm-Safety/Resilient-Farmers-Conference-in-Portlaoise/23-927/#>

<https://www.longfordleader.ie/news/elections-2019/378084/breaking-the-silence-builds-resilience-mep-mcguinness-tells-farm-conference.html>

<http://tipptatler.ie/2019/04/resilient-farmers-conference-farmers-health-wellbeing-building-a-community-of-support/>

<https://www.agriland.ie/farming-news/mcguinness-breaking-the-silence-builds-resilience>

<https://www.tipperarylive.ie/news/home/376394/tipperary-farm-families-urged-to-attend-embrace-farm-conference.html>

<https://www.farmersjournal.ie/farming-takes-mental-and-physical-toll-mcguinness-459211>

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/farming/farmers-advised-to-seek-help-when-pressures-of-the-job-beat-them-down-920321.html>

<http://www.irishfarmersmonthly.com/latestissue/document.pdf>

<https://www.thatsfarming.com/news/wellness-farmers-conference>

Key Thematic Areas for Consideration

Farmer vulnerability

Numerous challenges facing farmers were highlighted throughout the day through panel discussion and engagement with delegates. Farmers' vulnerability in terms of their health and well-being was to the fore. Disassociated and disconnected relationships with the department and other stakeholders such as banks, were implicated in the stress and pressures farmers regularly feel. The stress associated with inspections was also discussed. This is in keeping with a key take-home message from the Northern Ireland conference where their Department of Agriculture's punitive approach to farmers was described as being particularly problematic. Feedback from the Republic's conference demonstrates that a more joined up approach coupled with a more 'compassionate' approach to dealing with farmers would be beneficial specifically in two ways (1) to relieve the stress/anxiety that some farmers currently feel and further prevent others from experiencing this and (2) assist with building a more supportive framework through which farmers can operate within and engage with stakeholders.

Men's and farmers' vulnerability was also discussed in the context of farm accidents. The majority of fatal farm accidents happen to men and they are overrepresented among survivors. Tailored approaches to assisting survivors are required, when the complex and difficult journey to recovery, rehabilitation and adaptation is considered. Embrace FARM's work was highly commended in this regard.

Men's reluctance to ask for help and seek help during times of stress/distress emerged across both Maria and Gina's presentations in addition to other discussions throughout the day. From a sociological perspective, aspects of masculinities theory (men feeling the need to be 'stoic'/'macho', hegemonic masculinity) explained men's reluctance to seek help in addition to acknowledging that, traditionally, there were few safe spaces/channels through which men could disclose their emotional distress thus further compounding their distress. From a psychotherapy perspective, men's willingness to work on themselves in therapy was noted once they made the initial steps to engage with therapy in the first place. Realising that they require help and making the first step into therapy are huge challenges for some men. The importance of recognising that the most important relationship is the one we have with ourselves, is the first step towards understanding how and why we feel the way we do and how we can go about changing negative and stressful thoughts into positive ones. This is one important self-help strategy that becomes accessible and helpful when people take the time to pause and reflect on themselves and their circumstances. However, it was also noted that this is difficult to achieve when a person is experiences significant levels of stress/anxiety.

Consequently, it is unsurprising that the state of farmers' mental health emerged strongly. Given the multiple and complex challenges that farmers experience in relation to their work, such as the

pressures/stress associated with inspections and compliance and the isolating reality of modern farming, it is not surprising that some farmers experience difficulty when coping with the demands of the job. This in addition to the constraints they experience in recognising their own ill-health and distress. Being unaware of one's own health in this regard

(health literacy) can have serious adverse effects on their mental well-being. Mental ill-health still carries significant stigma, especially in rural areas and can prevent farmers from engaging with their GP and other health professionals thus limiting their own capacity to support and develop their own resilience.

The power of the personal story

Feedback from delegates demonstrates that listening to survivors' personal stories was a powerful exercise for understanding the impact of trauma and resilience. Many delegates spoke of a need to have more conferences like this one to (1) raise awareness about farm accidents and realities of farming by placing the human story and personal experience 'front and centre' and (2) to bring more stakeholders together to provide a platform for developing a more joined-up approach to supporting farmers and helping to build communities of resilience across Government, industry and the public and private sectors.

Farmers Supporting Farmers

Keynote and panel speakers discussed the importance of farmers supporting one another. One farmer spoke about how he felt farmers were being 'pitted against' one another in terms of their sectors. However, if commonalities rather than differences were acknowledged, farmers could serve as a powerful community of support to one another. Some initiatives like this currently exist such as the Macre na Feirme's *Make the Moove – Farmers Matter*

a community-based response to positive health and wellbeing for farming men in their rural communities. ... Farming can be a lonely occupation with little human interaction during the working day; therefore, it is important to establish a network of support and provide an opportunity where farming men can help one another. While it can be challenging –and sometimes scary - to speak up; it does help!²¹

The role of Embrace FARM was commended in this regard for bringing people from all over Ireland together.

Realities of Rural Life and Society

Discussion about the realities of rural life and society provided a framework for considering how we might develop targeted and meaningful approaches towards building communities of support across all sectors of society. Demographic issues affecting rural life such as low and slow population growth, population decline, and an ageing population shed light on why such realities require specific approaches to policy making across health, education and other sectors in terms of service provision. The withdrawal of some public services such as the closure of banks and post offices and under-investment in others (e.g. rural broadband) demonstrates the fragility of the social fabric in some rural communities. Specifically, and in relation to the farming community, the persistent lack of access to proper broadband has the potential to limit some farmers' ability to embrace technological advances on their farms, yet there appears to be a constant push on farmers to embrace such technologies. Understanding these realities assists us with understanding the social and economic challenges and

²¹ <https://www.thatsfarming.com/news/moove-jan-2019>

inequalities people experience as they live their lives in rural Ireland whilst navigating various constraints and 'rural-specific' challenges. It also offers the opportunity to understand how socio-economic factors affect personal well-being and the ability to remain well and resilient in the face of adversity. Such realities and nuances require consideration at policy level, since one-size-fits all policy approaches simply do not work in rural areas when the realities of life there are so complex.

Conclusions from the Republic of Ireland Conference

1. The reality and experiences of health and well-being for those in the agriculture sector are as diverse and nuanced as the farmers and farming communities it represents. Different farmers experience ill-health and ill-being in different ways, often with different causes. Farmers' are at risk for numerous health issues such as cardio-vascular and muscular-skeletal problems but also issues relating to mental ill-health such as stress, anxiety and depression.

Delegates heard that greater unity among farmers themselves is necessary towards building a stronger community overall. Moreover, it would help build resilience from within – by members for members. A cohesive sector is a stronger one that would be well placed to offer understanding and meaningful support to members. Ultimately providing opportunities to address health and wellbeing issues in cost-effective and targeted ways.

2. A diverse agricultural sector is served by an equally diverse range of service providers (doctors, vets) and industry partners (sales reps, banks). An appeal to all, including Government departments, was issued at the conference to remember that it is farmer and their family behind herd and account numbers. An inhumane distance is maintained when business relationships are quantified, and this makes sustaining a trusted and flexible working relationship more challenging. Meaningful relationships characterised by familiar points of contact and continuity of service provision, would assist farmers and farm families in their running their business. Moreover, taking the time to listen and understand the farmer's individual story or circumstances would also be beneficial.
3. Farming families and communities are but one group residing in rural Ireland which is an increasingly diverse place in terms of its social, economic and demographic realities. Undoubtedly, farming and non-farming communities within rural areas identify as being different, yet they share many commonalities such as their progressive and sustainable visions for rural life (e.g. expressed need for investment in service provision such as rural broadband). It is possible to make progressive strides forward on many issues through a collaborative consultation among all residents and communities in rural Ireland towards ensuring its social, environmental and economic security and sustainability.
4. What is perceived as distanced and ill-considered engagement from policy makers and Government departments ought to be addressed. It is clear from both conferences in Ireland that a more meaningful approach, where the farmer is front and central, is required rather than policies that are simply deemed 'farmer/farm friendly'. The result will be less constrained, and contested, working environments and structures, through which the farming community are expected to navigate. This has the potential to reduce the stress associated with dealing with such departments/agencies thus making a positive contribution towards health and wellbeing among the farmer population.

5. Farmers and the farming community are one important group, among many, in rural Ireland. Yet, given their position as food producers in an increasingly regulated ‘professional’ space and their unprecedented vulnerability and exposure to global threats and risk (trade tariffs, open markets), places them in a uniquely precarious and often misunderstood position. While it is important to offer specific types of support to farmers experiencing stress and distress arising from their own circumstances, bringing the general public to a place of understanding about the reality of farming and contemporary food production also merits attention. Recent local events have caused particular stress and anxiety to farmers, such as the environmental movement as it gathers momentum and targets farmers in the most negative ways. Of particular concern, in Ireland, is the recent clandestine invasion of a farm by so-called environmental activists. This type of attack against a farmer and invasion of the farm business is unprecedented and the farming community alone should not be expected to address such problems. Therefore, greater support to assist farmers with such issues is required. Indeed, it requires significant investment from Government – effort in terms of public education and farm/farmer protection.

PART 4: England, United Kingdom.

Conference Schedule

Farm Safety Foundation – Resilient Farmers’ Conference

Tuesday, 21st May 2019. NFU Mutual Head Office, Stratford-Upon-Avon, UK

Morning Session 1

Welcome and Introduction: Charlotte Smith, Countryfile and Farming Today

Setting the Scene: Richard Percy, Chairman NFU Mutual

How NFU Mutual Cares for rural communities

Keynote Speaker – Tricia Allen, DEFRA Resilience and Transformation

Farmers’ health and wellbeing – what are the responsibilities of government?

Speaker – Minette Batters, President National Farmers’ Union

Understanding the Challenges and Risks of Farming in a post-Brexit World

Morning Session 2

Speaker: Gina Fusco, Chair of Trustees, Farm Safety Foundation

Making farmers and farming safer – giving the physical and mental wellbeing of farmers equal airtime

Speaker: Jude McCann – Nuffield Scholar and CEO Rural Support NI

Building farmers’ resilience in an ever-changing world

Afternoon Session 1

Speaker: Jonathan Glen, Harper Adams

Reflection – What the next generation of agricultural students need from education institutions

Speaker: Rick Brunt, Head of Operational Strategy, HSE

How to deal with stress management in agriculture

Speaker: Glyn Evans, Mentor with Farming Community Network

What does being a FCN mentor look and sound like?

Afternoon Session 2: Breakout Sessions

Charities:

Claire Saunders, Prince’s Countryside Trust

Education:

Jonathan Glen, Harper Adams

Industry:

James Chapman MBE, Trustee, FSF

Closing Remarks and Call to Action – Stephanie Berkeley, Farm Safety Foundation.

Dialogue and Debate: Proceedings from the Farm Safety Conference

Mr. Richard Percy – Chairman, NFU Mutual.

As Chair of NFU Mutual, sole funder of the Farm Safety Foundation, Richard set some context for the day's proceedings. Delegates were reminded of the harsh realities now facing the agricultural sector. One farm worker dies by suicide every week in the UK and, while the agriculture sector accounts for only 1% of the working population, it witnesses approximately twenty per cent of all workplace fatal injuries.

Currently, the Farm Safety Foundation delivers training to young farmers at 41 land-based colleges and universities across the UK and through the Young Farmers Club network and it is imperative to 'shape attitudes' about the importance of health and wellbeing among the new generation of farmers and support them in their efforts. The Farm Safety Foundation successfully does this, most recently through its *Mind Your Head* and *Farm Safety Week* campaigns. As in the two previous conferences, the issue of Brexit was raised by Richard, specifically in relation to the impact it will have on environmental and agricultural policy.

Ms. Trisha Allen. DEFRA. Keynote address: DEFRA Resilience and Transformation.

Defra is responsible for preparing the agriculture sector for changes due to happen as we move towards a new agriculture policy. We want to help farmers and land managers to be ready for change, with sufficient resilience to transform the agriculture industry for the future.

The tragedy of farmer suicide was noted at the outset by Trisha. Looking forward, DEFRA has a five-year 'Mental Health Policy Plan' that is in keeping with the UK's National Suicide Prevention Strategy. While suicide is not inevitable, it is certainly preventable, and DEFRA remains committed to increasing awareness and supporting those in need particularly given that "the standard mortality rate [for suicide] for people working in the agricultural occupations is higher than the national average".

For example, Trisha highlighted the issue of 'loneliness' as being a key factor associated with ill health in rural areas. She drew attention to some of DEFRA's efforts such as the recently launched paper *Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit*. While changes alongside Brexit are inevitable and unpredictable, Trisha also emphasised that this also had the potential to present opportunities. She then outlined DEFRA's role in terms of how it engages in partnership: 1) Create Policy and 2) Provide Funding. DEFRA's aim is to

- Design policy *with* those affected
- Plan policy changes with regard to capacity
- Ensure efforts are feasibility-tested
- Listen to farmers' lived experiences
- Design policy with a clear focus on outcomes
- Ensure that policy changes are effective for and accessible to those who have greatest need

Listening to and understanding farmers is key and is necessary for managing and designing "policy in a safe way to provide support to enable change". She referred to the *Grow Yorkshire*²² as one example of DEFRA's successful efforts in this regard, specifically in terms of "how we can build support services" in rural communities. However, she did acknowledge that such efforts require a "shared responsibility" among numerous partners. Finally, Trisha offered a reflection on the role of the natural environment.

²² <https://www.growyorkshire.co.uk/>

The farming and countryside stewardship sector can provide access to mental health support for the wider community by offering an essential gateway for other parts of society to benefit from our shared natural environment. The natural environment had a major role to play through, for example,

- *Social prescribing opportunities*
- *Provision of care farms*

Projects will contribute to Defra's commitments in the 25 Year Environment Plan.

Ms. Minette Batters. President, National Farmers Union. *Understanding the Challenges and Risks of Farming in a post-Brexit World.*

Minette provided context around the state of farming in the UK. On the subject of Brexit she urged caution. Specifically, she noted that the Britain should “not become a nation of little Englanders”. From an historical perspective, she explained that the 1947 Agriculture Act, underpinned by the Treaty of Rome, meant a “new era for farming” but that “there are very few farming then, who are still farming”. She also highlighted the following points of consideration to delegates:

1. The farming sector needs support. “16% of farming businesses are unprofitable without support”
2. 42% will be non-profitable without direct support
3. 17% of farm businesses are down on profitability

Minette then moved on to discuss recent Brexit machinations and its associated uncertainty: leave with a deal, leave with no deal, and “don’t leave”. Her work in this regard has involved 18 bi-lateral trade agreements, 6 visits to Geneva, and 650 MP visits and noted that leaving will involve “seismic pieces of legislation” for Britain and the agriculture sector – specifically in relation to the Agriculture Bill, food production standards, the annual agricultural budget and a “Trade Bill”. Imperative to all of this is that Britain “produce enough food that country may need at any given time”. Minette also argued that was also important to remember that “prices will drive the agenda”. Another challenge that Britain has experienced is the loss of the “eighty thousand seasonal workforce” that supports the British agricultural sector. Consequently, Britain needs to “make sure we are relevant”. She also acknowledged that as Britain moves closer to the Brexit deadline that “My job is to be honest ... but I have a moral duty” – specifically to ensure that the farming sector obtains “a long term commitment” of support as it enters a precarious era.

Ms. Gina Fusco. Chair of Trustees, Farm Safety Foundation.

Gina gave an overview of some of the work the Farm Safety Foundation do, specifically their aim is to make “farmers and farming safer” given that farming has the poorest safety record of any occupation in the UK. As was noted earlier by Richard Percy, Gina explained to delegates that since the charity was established they had delivered their unique Lantra-accredited training to 8,666 young farmers in 41 different land based colleges and universities in the UK and at 166 Young Farmers’ Clubs in England alone. The Foundation has made admirable progress in recent years:

- Awareness of Farm Safety Week has grown from 26% to 80%
- Awareness of the Foundation has also grown from 24% to 68%
- 16,205 followers on social media; 11,166 email addresses; 19 published blog posts
- 58% of 16-40 year old farm workers have actively engaged with us over the last 12 months.

Gina also drew delegates' attention to the dangerous realities of farming that lead to farm accidents such as working with machinery and animals, working alone, tiredness, rushing to complete jobs. Furthermore, there are other stressful aspects of farming such as the feeling that one "can't get away from it". In 2014, the Farm Safety Foundation was established as an independent charity with the following objectives :

... to preserve and protect the mental health and physical health of farm workers, dwellers, the rural community and all others affected by farming and agricultural accidents by providing facilities and support services... (28 March 2014)

Consequently, Gina explained there is now a well-established link between mental health and farm safety and the Foundation is committed to supporting farmers' mental health. Finally, given the challenges that Brexit will bring for the farming population, Gina explained that the UK will "want farmers to be fit to work, therefore will need to take mental health seriously".

Dr. Jude McCann. CEO Rural Support and Nuffield Scholar. *Increasing Resilience & Knowledge Transfer*

Jude commenced his presentation by outlining the work of Rural Support and how they support the farming community in Northern Ireland. The Rural Support helpline offers advice and support in relation to relationships, banks, mental health issues, succession planning. It also has a support office for social farming. Currently, in Northern Ireland there are twenty-five thousand registered farm businesses across the sheep, beef, pig and poultry sectors. A significant majority of those are reliant on subsidies, which represented 85% of income in 2015. Another difficult reality for some farmers is Northern Ireland at the time of the conference was that 10% of farms were closed due to TB.

He noted that mental health and well-being are serious emerging issues for farmers in Northern Ireland. The stigma attached to mental illness still prevents many from seeking help. He noted that approximately one farmer per week dies by suicide in the UK. He cited the inherent stresses associated with farming, and the pace of change, as being implicated in the rise of mental ill-health among the farming community.

Jude also spoke about his own personal story. His own father survived a serious farm accident.

Jude then presented on the findings that emerged from the international research he undertook for his Nuffield scholarship *Securing Farmers' Resilience in a Changing World*. Resilience is key for farmers and the successful operation of their farms across the globe. All farmers he met with encountered various kinds of pressures but have successfully adapted. Resilience was a key theme throughout Jude's presentation. He described it as being the ability to not simply bounce back from adversity but an ability to be able to "bounce forward".

Similar stressors and challenges affected farmers across the globe and evidence demonstrated that many diverse supports exist to assist farmers building and safeguarding their resilience and wellbeing.

The importance of a Life-Farm balance was key. Evidence from Switzerland showed that having an apprentice on the farm facilitated the farmer taking time off. Diversification of the farm business and "thinking differently about how you get produce to market" provided new and innovative ways for the farmer to generate a new income stream thus ensuring the sustainability of the overall farm business into the future.

The need for farmers to keep socially connected was another important issue. Evidence from Cambodia suggested that drawing on the support of the local community in the small farm village

means that farmers there are not isolated practitioners. Rather they draw on their well-developed social network which acts as a powerful 'buffer' against isolation and the demands of work. A farmer there noted, "We simply couldn't stay alive on our own. We are one tribe".

"...farm with nature, rather than against it" was a key message from Doug Avery in New Zealand who sought help when experiencing farming-related stresses. Doug's ability to function "seriously declined". Seeking help was an important step for him that facilitated thinking about his life and farming in a different way which ultimately led to his success. He grew a new crop called lucern which was more suited to drought conditions they were experiencing. Doug referred to this as a

process of discovery and change because we were changing the way we are integrating into the world

Consequently, this journey of change and adaptation has helped him become emotionally resilient. Doug explained that it was important to look after the "top paddock" (one's head) to safeguard against mental ill-health.

Jude then told the conference about the "most developed and robust support service for farmers in the USA" which is based at The Farm Centre, Wisconsin. Their mission is simply to "help farmers".

...we are interested in farmers' quality of life and sustainability of their farm businesses. Services offered include a helpline, financial consultation, succession facilitation, vouchers for counselling and additional services to minority farmers i.e. Mong farming families (who came as refugees from South East Asia). All staff are certified first aid mental health responders. The Farm Centre is a model integrating social, psychological help with business advice and support.

The value of a working partnership between the farming community and industry, specifically the rural insurance industry, was presented with evidence from New Zealand. FMG Advice and Insurance are New Zealand's "leading rural insurer"²³. FMG have partnered with the Mental Health Foundation (MHF) and are funded and supported by the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC). Together, they have developed *FarmStrong*

an initiative designed to give the farmers the skills and resources to live well, farm well and get the most out of life²⁴

Moreover, it is also a "nationwide well-being programme for the rural community"²⁵

Findings from Jude's research shed light on the value of this initiative because it was designed to specifically meet the nuanced needs of farmers. A participant in Jude's research explained

To engage with farmers and with men in particular, the language we use is crucial. We choose carefully how we address issues like depression, suicide, stress or mental health problems without using any terminology that people may feel uncomfortable or be unwilling to engage with. (Gerard Vaughan).

The two core principles that emerge from the study were (1) the need to increase co-ordination between farm support and other agencies and (2) a need to better broaden support to provide a more holistic aid package.

²³ <https://www.fmg.co.nz/about-fmg/giving-back/farmstrong/>

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ <https://farmstrong.co.nz/>

Recommendations for NGOs and Farm Support Organisations arising from Jude’s research were then provided:

- Increase collaboration with one another as well as with all other stakeholders in agriculture to support and facilitate farmers’ resilience through holistic advice system.
- Strive to identify the multiple drivers of stress and to incorporate existing social and emotional support for farmers to all members of the farm household and to ensure that such support also incorporates (or provides access to) business advice, technical expertise and marketing information as required.

Four key take homes messages from Jude’s research were then presented:

1. Ensure a positive Life-Farm balance
2. Be part of a Tribe Maintain and develop relationships and social connections with others (family/community/scientists/advisors) as an inherent strategy for resilience
3. Farm with nature, rather than against it
4. Look after the top paddock Seek help and become emotionally and socially resilient. ‘Man up’ to mental health.

Finally, Jude offered the following points that serve as a rationale for the conference theme *Farmers’ resilience is everyone’s business*

1. Farmers and farm support organisations, private sector and governments all have a responsibility to help farmers manage change/secure resilience.
2. Farmers’ resilience is not just about personal resilience – but also the farm household/community.
3. Challenges facing farmers can no longer be addressed by solely focusing on current business issues.
4. Need for a more integrated approach involving all stakeholders. We need increased cooperation and an integration of support provided.

Mr. Jonathan Glen. Harper Adams Reflection – *What the next generation of agricultural students need from education institutions.*

Jonathan opened his reflection by discussing the social contexts young people experience in contemporary society. Social media and the internet have had a significant impact on the rate at which young people are exposed to a vast array of information. Consequently, he argued that their “expectations are changing as quickly as they are being formed”. Resilience is key under such circumstances as it assists them in trying to “manage and control all of this”. Resilience, he explained, “is something from experience”. Challenges or barriers to building resilience can occur if one’s “ability to self-regulate lags”. Mental ill-health can affect resilience building. Jonathan explained to delegates that we all have “Mental Health Threshold” – a limit that we ought to be aware of to understand the

point at which we know when to ask for help with whatever issue we may be experiencing. Reaching a point that is beyond one's mental health threshold has the potential to "manifest as depression" for some, particularly if they have a "genetic predisposition to depression". He offered three important factors associated with resilience that delegates should be mindful of:

1. Know your threshold – be able to identify when you are reaching your threshold (pressure point)
2. Proactive resilience – remain positive and proactive
3. Reactive resilience – "knowing what to do when things go wrong"

He gave an example of being aware of and managing one's use of/time spent on social media.

He also noted that "Resilient people ask for help".

In terms of how the education sector can support young people today, he explained that it should offer "continued reactive support". He acknowledged that young people experience "big pressure" in the higher education sector and cautioned that "education is about life skills not just technicalities". Exam time, he explained, often means students reach their mental health threshold and this is when they need support to help build resilience. Mental health guidelines are available now and they should be built into the education curriculum in order to help adequately for life. Jonathan concluded his talk by reminding delegates that investing in young people in this way is important because today's youth are tomorrow's future.

Mr. Rich Brunt. Head of Operational Strategy, HSE. *How to deal with stress management in agriculture.*

Rich explained to delegates that the HSE works in partnership with industry, and others, to advance safety at work. He noted that 44% of all ill-health in Britain relates to stress, depression and anxiety. In relation to the agriculture sector, 17,000 workers are suffering from work-related ill-health with 52% of these reporting musculoskeletal disorders (2018). Rick acknowledged that spreading the safety message is complicated given that different groups of workers exist. He identified four groups of workers, a framework that helps identify those who are most at risk

- **Planners (45%):** *Most risk adverse, but feel safest and most able to manage risks – and had fewest accidents.*
- **Pragmatists (14%):** *Least worried about risk and consequences, but relatively safe behaviours.*
- **Risk Takers (18%):** *Most likely to enjoy risks and behaviour reflects this – but worry about consequences.*
- **Unclear (23%):** *Feel least safe and have most accidents, but also seem unclear what do to.*

The 'Unclear' group also report the "lowest mental well-being".

Rich then described a series of stress management standards for the agriculture sector. Managing these and recognising the importance of each distinct one, can assist with understanding and managing one's own stress and ultimately knowing when to seek help whether it relates to duties on the farm or one's mental well-being. Sometimes, he argues that confusion may arise in terms of understanding each distinct standard, but they provide a useful "Tool Kit" that can assist with understanding and analysing an individual's circumstances and identifying sources of stress and what solutions might mitigate against such stresses in a meaningful and feasible way. These six standards are:

- Demands

- Control
- Support
- Change
- Relationships
- Roles

Ultimately, in terms of the broader issue of health and safety in agriculture, this 'tool kit' serves as a valuable and tangible means of prevention.

Mr. Glyn Evans. Mentor with Farm Community Network. *The Human Touch – What does being a FCN mentor look and sound like?*

The Farming Community Network (FCN) is a voluntary organisation and charity that supports farmers and families within the farming community through difficult times.²⁶

Glyn noted that the FCN has approximately 400 volunteers and provides a helpline service to members of the farming community in times of need. On average, they support 1,000 "ordinary people" each year. They offer support in four distinct ways:

- **Listening:** Often times the FCN is the first 'port of call' for those experiencing stress and so provide a valuable service to those in need.
- **Sign-posting:** Depending on the level of need discussed by the caller, and identified by the volunteer, the FCN will sign-post the individual to "other specialised help", particularly in the case of mental wellbeing.
- **Supporting:** Glyn noted that above all else, the FCN exists to support the farming community, not make demands of them. The organisation is committed to offering practical and pastoral support to those seeking help.
- **Advocacy:** The vulnerability of those who sometimes reach out to the FCN was highlighted by Glyn – "sometimes people won't be able to speak up for themselves". Consequently, an FCN volunteer will act on their behalf thus providing a critical level of support to those experiencing difficulty.

Ultimately, the FCN aims to offer 1) Hope, 2) Confidence, 3) Encouragement and 4) Well-being to those it serves.

Ms. Stephanie Berkeley. Manager Farm Safety Foundation. Closing Remarks and Call to Action.

As with the previous two conferences, Stephanie issued a plea to all delegates, to increase awareness about farm safety and wellbeing in the farming sector, specifically with regard to mental health.

Stephanie also introduced the Foundation's newest resource – The Little Book of Minding Your Head, a copy of which was provided to every delegate. The Foundation's research revealed that four out of five young farmers (under 40) believe that mental health is the biggest hidden problem facing farmers today. In 2018, the charity launched a new campaign Mind Your Head, to raise awareness of this growing issue in the industry. Stephanie explained that, as an industry, we have a collective responsibility to do something about the issue of poor mental health and the risk of suicide and every one of us has a role to play.

²⁶ <http://www.fcn.org.uk/>

Increased understanding, and discussions around mental health will, in time, reduce the discrimination experienced by those who have mental health issues. There is a wealth of information on mental health for the general public but there is little specifically relating to agriculture and the unique stressors facing the industry every day. The Foundation's new booklet offers just that - a pocket guide to understanding mental health and stress management in agriculture - from outlining what mental health actually means, to the ways you can support others through challenging times, the publication offers practical content for those working in agriculture and allied industries so we are all better equipped to support farmers' mental health in this ever changing world.

Before closing the conference, Stephanie appealed to delegates to consider the following:

- Can you get your team mental health first trained?
- Can you as a business fund this training for other?
- Or can you simply educate yourself about the signs and symptoms of poor mental health and learn how to signpost those who need it, to the best source of help for that individual.

Conference Feedback Analysis

As an overview, we were delighted to welcome 75 delegates to the event and, from the feedback forms we had **100%** good/excellent rating – with 88% of attendees saying the event was “excellent”²⁷.

Comments on social media included:

- Great [#ResilientFarmers](#) event today. Thanks [@yellowwelliesuk](#) and [@nfum](#).
- Thank you [@yellowwelliesuk](#) for a brilliant day @ [#ResilientFarmers](#) conference. Learnt a lot about what we can do to better provide a network of support for farmers & better training to know the signs of someone who is struggling [#mentalhealthfirstaid](#) [#LetsTalk](#) [#ruralcommunity](#)
- Fantastic [#ResilientFarmers](#) conference today with some powerful presentations and challenging discussions. Thank you to [@yellowwelliesuk](#) [@nfum](#) and all of the speakers and delegates for refocusing us on how we can all drive change and build a safer and more resilient industry

Comments on the Feedback Form included:

*Well done – If ever I can help please get in touch
Very useful and important for me to meet others doing similar things, Thanks.
Keep up the great work and please let us know how we can help promote and communicate.
Wonderful to have mental health and safety included on the same platform*

Follow up emails:

Just a huge thank you for an excellent conference today. It was good to meet old friends and to make new, and indeed to see and hear about so much commitment to the needs of the farming community.

²⁷ Data analysis for the UK conference provided by the Farm Safety Foundation, UK.

I'm sure you are exhausted after yesterday. Just wanted to say congratulations on a really brilliant conference. The content and speakers were excellent and the calibre of people you were able to get in the room were testament to you and the agenda you put together!

Conclusion

The series of three conferences provided a very powerful platform to raise awareness about farmers' resilience and consider the real and many issues that have the potential to compromise their resilience and well-being and how these issues can be addressed. They were valuable opportunities for engagement among all sector partners.

The work of the charities was highlighted thus reminding all delegates of the various ways in which farmers and farming communities are supported. While the work and commitment of the charities was highly commended, the challenges they face in providing support were also acknowledged. It was also noted that the charities could not work alone to support farmers and farming communities. Indeed, this was one of many reasons for the multi-charity collaboration. The conferences were a way in which to engage with Government, healthcare, and the public and private sectors to seek their support and commitment in moving forward to address the issue of farmers' resilience.

Key messages were short and simple: farmers require support, especially given the current uncertain circumstances in which they work; farmers ought to be supported to engage in healthcare provision and realise the benefits that health has to offer – a healthy farmer is a safe and productive one. Appeals were issued for industry and Government departments for more people-focused working relationships. While farmers are more than willing to work with the Department, the punitive approach towards farmers is having a significant negative effect in terms of the stress and distress it causes with regard to inspections and compliance. Calls to reconsider such harsh practices were issued at all conferences.

Other appeals centred around the need for more conferences like these ones to bring people together to collaborate on developing effective solutions to address the issue of farmers' resilience. The idea that the broader rural community and society be supported and invested in, was agreed upon by all. A well supported and resourced rural society is the foundation for building communities of support.

The conferences were a first step to raise awareness about the issue of farmers resilience and how we can support building communities of support. Engagement on the day and feedback from delegates provided the opportunities for the charities to reflect on how they can progress with this message in terms of their own strategic development plans in the short to medium terms. Moreover, the conferences also provided further opportunities to collaborate going forward. The first major step is to engage with Mr. Doug Avery, farmer and author of *The Resilient Farmer* (2017) and embark on a second series of conferences and meetings throughout Ireland and the UK. This tour takes place in October 2019 and presents another important opportunity to raise awareness about farmers' resilience. It also represents the dynamic approach the charities are taking thus demonstrating their commitment to building communities of support throughout Ireland and the UK in support of farmers' and farming communities.