

Recognising and responding to stress in challenging times

Living in rural Australia can be very rewarding. However, farming in particular can be a stressful occupation. Keeping yourself in a fit state to enjoy the good times is important. Keeping yourself in a fit state to weather the difficult times is even more important. After all, the most important asset on any farm is the people.

Frequently named stressors in farming environments include extreme climatic events, unpredictable markets, social and geographic isolation, reducing services, family illness and long working hours. Many people deal with stress by focusing or working hard on the problem and putting everything else aside, and, this generally works in the short-term. While a small amount of stress is normal and usually motivating, persistent elevated stress can be very debilitating, affecting our bodily functions, mental alertness, decision-making ability and energy levels. It is also a factor in farming accidents.

When faced with ongoing stress, we tend to neglect the very things that would help us get through it, such as our relationships, quality sleep, recreational activities and our health. Neglecting these important facets of life can lead to poor business decisions. Research involving over 2000 Australian farmers found that over 90% of them agreed that improving their health helped them to make better business decisions.

We know that people in the farming community are renowned for their willingness to help others—it's what keeps small communities alive. Unfortunately, farmers are often not so good at asking for help themselves. Overcoming this barrier should be seen as a positive business decision. Talking through issues with family, peers or professionals—who are able to use their experiences and skills—can help lead to new insights and new strategies to deal with challenging circumstances. You may find that you are also able to help someone else by speaking openly. Seeking help and staying on track with your physical and mental health is vital. Don't become discouraged if your first efforts at seeking help are unsuccessful. There is no 'one size fits all' solution and you may have to make an ongoing effort to find support that suits your needs.

Key tips for tough times

Some tips for helping to get through difficult times:

- Eat healthy, nutritious food, (avoid sugary, high salt and fatty foods)
- Get adequate sleep (7- 8 hours per night)
- Keep physically active
- Make time to get off the farm (even for a couple of days)
- Find things to laugh about
- Allow yourself time to do something you enjoy. A short walk, sitting with a cup of tea, a hit of golf, or some deep breaths—these can change the path of the day.

**Remember your best farm asset is you.
Act smart, act early and recognise when
stress is doing you harm.**

Resources for support

Some supports you may find helpful for your situation include:

- Rural Financial Counselling Service (T: 1800 686 175)
- Mensline (T: 1300 78 99 78)
- Parentline (T: 1300 30 1300)
- Kids Helpline (T: 1800 55 1800)
- Beyondblue (T: 1300 22 4636)
- Find a mental health professional in your area through the beyondblue website <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/find-a-professional> or your local GP.
- Farming Fit videos: [Part 1](#) & [Part 2](#)

More support services can be accessed on the Farmer Health drought page via <http://www.farmerhealth.org.au>