

# Thematic Group on Supporting the Mental Health of Farmers and Farming Communities

*Working document*

**Key ingredients for supporting the mental health of  
farmers and farming communities**

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## Introduction

This document summarises 12 key ingredients for supporting the mental health and well-being of farmers and their communities. These were identified in the frame of the EU CAP Network's Thematic Group (TG) on [Supporting the Mental Health of Farmers and Farming Communities](#).

Relevant initiatives collected throughout the work of the TG and with help from TG members, their networks and other EU CAP Network's stakeholders **are then presented to illustrate how some of the key ingredients are applied in practice in different Member States. It should be noted that, for simplicity, this document relates each initiative to one key ingredient; however, in reality, each initiative applies more than one key ingredient.**

All the outputs produced by this Thematic Group are available on the [EU CAP Network website](#).

### **Disclaimer**

*This document has been developed as part of the work carried out by the CAP Implementation Contact Point under the EU CAP Network to support the activities of the Thematic Group (TG) on [Supporting the Mental Health of Farmers and Farming Communities](#). The information and views set out in this document do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Commission.*



## Key ingredients

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## Examples of initiatives illustrating the key ingredients in practice

### 1. Awareness

- a. Break taboos surrounding farmers' mental health by promoting open discussion and conducting awareness-raising campaigns.

**TABOER** (the Netherlands) is a taboo-breaking campaign that offers an independent helpline dedicated to addressing the growing mental health challenges within the agricultural sector. TABOER provides a supportive environment, offering a listening ear and assisting individuals in finding appropriate care providers. Through a multi-year campaign, TABOER educates and empowers the farming community by sharing information on overcoming biases, sharing personal experiences, and providing practical tips and example questions to facilitate conversations about mental well-being. As a crucial resource, TABOER stands alongside every farmer and grower, emphasising the importance of mental health awareness and offering guidance when self-reliance faces its limits.

Founded in 2018, **Make the Moove** (Ireland) is a mental health initiative run by Macra Na Feirme, and driven by the increasing rates of suicide, particularly among young rural males. In partnership with UCD Agri Mental Health Group, the initiative offers awareness campaigns and training to equip individuals with essential listening skills and guidance on responding to mental health concerns. In addition, a Critical Response Team, composed of experienced mental health professionals, provides non-judgmental ears and immediate assistance in the aftermath of tragedies, extending support beyond MACRA members to the broader community as a free service to initiate the healing process.

**FarmRes - Farmers Assistance Resources for Mental Resilience** (2022-24) is an Erasmus+ project that aims to raise farmers' awareness of mental health issues and guide them in shaping their daily lives, as well as their business and personal environment. The project focuses on awareness raising, prevention, detection, and providing first aid. It involves farmers, their families and agricultural consultants. FarmRes also offers strategies and tools for farmers to address mental health



problems, particularly by developing an online platform to access resources supporting mental health and well-being within the agricultural sector. Additionally, the project aims to advance the policy debate on the importance of mental health and well-being for sustainable economic and social development in agriculture.

#### b. Ensure social support

The Horizon 2020 European Thematic Network [FARMWELL](#) (2021-23) concluded its mission to improve the mental, physical, and social well-being of farmers by making social innovations more accessible. The project's primary goal was to strengthen the well-being of farmers by ensuring they fully benefit from innovative approaches, fostering stronger connections between the agricultural sector and society. Recognising the serious social challenges faced by farmers, including mental health issues, isolation, and societal perceptions, FARMWELL focused on innovative solutions tailored to farmers and their families.

The EU-funded [SafeHabitus](#) project (2022-26) strives to make farming safer by implementing digital storytelling methods to amplify the voices of farm workers who have experienced accidents. Through co-designing risk management tools and assessing consumer willingness to pay for safer food production, the project aims to address the alarming statistics revealing farming to be one of the most dangerous occupations in Europe. By actively changing habitual practices and collaborating with stakeholders, researchers, and end-users, SafeHabitus aims to advance safer farming practices across the EU.

## 2. Farmers' level

#### c. Encourage peer support and learning networks and involve women as key contributors.

The [Farmers4Safety Project](#) (Ireland) strives to shift attitudes and behaviours surrounding farm safety, health, and well-being in the Irish agricultural sector, known for its disproportionately high fatality rates. Using a peer-to-peer 'Buddy' mentoring approach in counties Cork, Wexford, and Tipperary, the initiative fosters networking, knowledge exchange, and collaboration among farmers to address and mitigate the



alarming number of annual farm accidents and fatalities. Through innovative strategies like the 'Stick2Safety' Sticker Competition and targeted mentorship, the project aims to instigate a transformative change in the broader farming community's perspectives and practices, with the potential for replication in other regions of Ireland and the EU.

The Polish Association of Sustainable Agriculture and Food has launched the [Agro Woman project](#) to promote a sustainable model for agriculture in Poland. Focused on women in agriculture, the initiative aims to make their work more attractive by providing substantive education in finance, business management, foreign languages, and soft skills development, addressing economic, social, and environmental aspects through mentoring, mental well-being support, and active participation in the sustainability shift in agriculture. In December 2023 it organised a conference on [“Psychological well-being of female farmers: the perspective of agricultural producers, science and business”](#).

- d. Provide training for advisors, veterinarians, and other actors working with farmers, to signpost to mental health support resources and support farmers.

The [On Feírm Ground](#) initiative (Ireland), funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), the Health Service Executive (HSE), and the Department of Health, is part of a comprehensive farmers' physical and mental health awareness programme. Coordinated by the Men's Development Network, the initiative trains agricultural advisors nationwide, encompassing veterinary practitioners, DAFM staff, and other professionals regularly in contact with farmers, with the aim of guiding farmers to mental health support resources. The programme aims to normalise conversations surrounding men's mental health, and empowers participants with the skills and confidence to engage farmers in health programmes and services, addressing the farmer's hesitancy to seek help when facing mental health challenges. This programme is informed by multi-actor research that took into account the needs of both farmers and farm advisors.

- e. Offer mental health training for farmers to detect and cope with mental health issues, and provide information about existing support systems.

The project [Mental well-being starts at school](#) (Belgium) aimed to create a tailored educational pathway on mental well-being for young farmers and students in agricultural and horticultural disciplines in higher education. Through co-creation with



young farmers and students, the project translated the 'happiness triangle' into an educational course, merging scientific knowledge from VIGL (Flemish Institute for Healthy Living) and ILVO (Institute for Agricultural, Fisheries and Nutrition Research) with practical insights from farmers, aid organisations, and higher agricultural education. The resulting educational pathway, called 'Seeds of Happiness', includes group sessions, a seeding calendar with group assignments, and publications providing additional background information and resources to promote mental well-being.

[LQB - Lebensqualität Bauernhof](#) (Life quality on Farm) was launched in 2007 as a nationwide educational and information initiative in Austria, aiming to support farmers in difficult and conflict-ridden life situations. Experts collaborate closely with farmers, allowing them to develop a profound understanding of their needs and challenges. In 2023, a resolution in the Austrian Federal Parliament gathered all political parties to express their support for the expansion and promotion of services in the field of psycho-social support for farmers. Specifically, the psycho-social counselling and training services offered by the Chambers of Agriculture are to be strengthened, and educational programmes will continue to be an integral part of the project.

**“Gesund bleiben”** is an Austrian CAP-funded project focused on the mental and physical health of Austrian farmers (2024-2027). It is co-funded by the State of Austria, the Federal States of Austria, Machinery Rings, and the Rural Institution of Further Education. Partners include the Machinery Rings in Austria, the Chamber of Agriculture, the Rural Institution of Further Education, "Lebensqualität Bauernhof," ARGE Bäuerinnen, and the Austrian National Insurance Institution. The project is creating a summary of opportunities to prevent mental health issues among Austrian farmers. Additional goals include raising awareness about health; training and supervising machinery employees; evaluating and optimising "Soziale Betriebshilfe" (see page 13); promoting animal welfare; enhancing stakeholders' networking; and organising volunteer support for farmers in Tirol.



### 3. Community level

- f. Establish local support systems based on trust and effective coordination of different types of support services.

The [Farming Community Network](#), FCN (UK) is a voluntary organisation and charity that supports farmers and families within the farming community through difficult times. FCN volunteers, comprising a network of over 400 individuals with strong ties to farming, offer free, confidential support to farmers, farm workers, and families facing various challenges. From assisting with paperwork, building relationships with bank managers, and acting as family mediators, to providing a sympathetic ear through the confidential helpline, FCN helps individuals navigate issues such as financial difficulties, animal disease, mental health, and family disputes.

The [Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Familie und Betrieb e.V.](#) (Germany) is an association for farm family counselling and helplines, providing psycho-social support for families, farming communities, and individuals facing various challenges. It acts as an advocate at the federal and EU levels, trains staff, organises conferences, and supports research. The association is financed through membership fees, donations and grants. Its members benefit from comprehensive assistance in challenging family, personal, or economic situations while maintaining legal and financial independence. Since 2014, the association collaborates with farmers' organisations in France and Belgium to exchange knowledge and continually improve support for farmers and their families.

[Agrical!](#) (Belgium) is an organisation dedicated to supporting farmers and their families in Wallonia who are facing economic, technical, legal, psychological or social challenges in managing their farms. An interdisciplinary team of agronomists, psychologists, a legal expert, and a social worker assists them in analysing their overall situation, identifying suitable solutions, and guiding them through implementation, utilising a comprehensive approach based on a nuanced understanding of the realities of the agricultural sector.





- g. Implementing support measures tailored to geographical diversity, addressing barriers through innovative approaches (e.g. mobile health teams, online counselling) and ensuring reliable, safe, and anonymous spaces for farmers to seek assistance.

**Bäuerliches Sorgentelefon** (Farmers' Care Hotline – Austria) is a telephone consultation service that serves as a low-threshold initial point of contact, where specially trained psychosocial advisors listen and help find possible solutions. The hotline's anonymity and prompt availability lower the barrier to seeking help. All counsellors have a background in agriculture, enabling them to better understand the specific issues related to the farming context. Since its inception, the telephone consultation has been used over 10 000 times.

**Zorg om Boer en Tuinder** - ZOB (Care for Farmers – the Netherlands) provides confidential and cost-free support to farmers and gardeners facing a variety of challenges. Volunteers, often meeting farmers at their kitchen table, offer assistance in navigating issues and finding appropriate solutions. Additionally, ZOB collaborates with the national platform [www.taboer.nl](http://www.taboer.nl), contributing to mental health support for Dutch farmers.

- h. Foster inclusive communities through events, campaigns, and training initiatives, aiming to raise awareness and normalise discussions about mental health.

The Irish Cattle & Sheep Farmers' Association (ICSA) established the **ICSA Life Focus group**, a support initiative where farmers with lived experiences come together to offer assistance and understanding on a range of challenges, including mental health, farm succession, family disputes, and more. Conducting awareness campaigns and organising panel discussions, ICSA Life Focus aims to address farmers' challenges and provide a supportive space for sharing concerns.

The Irish Farmers Association (IFA) has teamed up with Mental Health Ireland and Teagasc to develop a **Farming Resilience programme** to help farmers develop resilience in overcoming serious setbacks in life and business. In addition, initiatives such as the **Green Ribbon Walk** and **Talk event** provided platforms for open discussions, while **leaflets** and partnerships with organisations such as **Pieta House** offered tangible support and crisis helplines.



The [DPJ Foundation](#) (UK) was set up in July 2016 in Pembrokeshire, supporting those in the agricultural sector. The mental health farming charity has grown, and covers the whole of Wales in all areas of support. The DPJ Foundation works with leading organisations in agriculture, including NFU Cymru, FUW, YFC, vets, and the Welsh Government, to help provide an accessible and flexible service. The service offers three main strands: support through specific local counselling, awareness through social media discussing mental health, and mental health awareness.

[Embrace FARM](#) (Ireland) is a grassroots organisation founded by Norma and Brian Rohan, following the tragic loss of Brian's father in a farm accident. Together with IFAC, Agricultural Solicitors, Agricultural Consultants Association, Rural Support, and the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention, they have developed the 'Encircle' Programme to assist farm families dealing with sudden accidents or trauma on their farms. Over time, Embrace FARM has expanded its services, boasting a trained team with extensive expertise. Today, the organisation offers various services, including an annual remembrance service for farm accident victims, support groups for survivors, tailored assistance for farm families, and consultations on farm succession, legal, and financial matters.

#### 4. Institutional level

- i. Collaborate with farmers' organisations, farmers and their families to design mental health support packages specifically addressing farmers' needs, incorporating evidence-based assessments.

[Farmers at a Crossroads](#) (Flanders, Belgium) began 15 years ago with a helpline, funded by the Flemish Government, as a last resort for struggling farmers. Recognising the mental health challenges faced by farmers, the project recently introduced workshops to make problems debatable and recognisable, aiming to connect with farmers before it's too late. This approach reframes the helpline as a valuable resource, leading to a significant increase in calls and additional government support. Besides the helpline, Farmers at a Crossroads addresses mental health through psychologists, lectures, and Farmers Pubs, and trains farm visitors to recognise signals and start conversations for professional help, emphasising a holistic approach for better results.



The [SaCuRiMa COST Action](#) (2017-21) aimed to investigate the persistent challenges in occupational health and safety within European agriculture, addressing the sector's ranking as being among the most dangerous occupations. With five established Working Groups, the project sought to analyse prevention and compliance programmes, identify factors contributing to varied national safety outcomes, and ultimately produce evidence-based recommendations for reducing work-related deaths, injuries, and illnesses in agriculture. The initiative's specific objectives included evaluating national health and safety programmes, understanding farmers' attitudes, developing measures for integrating vulnerable populations, establishing indicators for monitoring progress, and disseminating results to stakeholders and the agricultural community to enhance social sustainability and the safety culture.

- j. [Implement a national plan for farmers' mental health, integrating local and community-based approaches.](#)

[Caisse Centrale de la Mutualité Sociale Agricole](#) - CCMSA (France) is the social security system for farmers and agricultural workers, offering retirement support and other benefits. In 2011, the Mutualité Sociale Agricole (MSA) launched a national suicide prevention plan, operating through 35 local branches for rural accessibility. This plan, covering prevention, detection, support, and orientation, introduced Agri'écoute, a hotline staffed by medical professionals, successfully reducing suicide rates among agricultural workers. Expanding in 2021, MSA refocused on preventing distress and promoting well-being, using a local branch-based approach with over 70 correspondents. As a single contact point organisation, MSA provides tailored interventions, replacements, and proactive support services, while disseminating best practices through its network and collaborating with local services and national-level task forces.

- k. [Secure support from governmental and healthcare organisations for funding and resources, ensuring sustained and predictable funding for mental health initiatives.](#)

[MELA](#) (Finland) is the Farmers' Social Insurance Institution, which has integrated mental health support within its pension insurance framework. The project started in 2012 through LEADER support, in response to escalating psychosocial stress among farmers, driven by factors such as excessive workloads, financial difficulties, societal



demands, concerns for the future of farming, and challenges in family interactions. Given its success, in 2017 it was appointed by the Minister of Social Affairs to lead a nationwide project called 'Support the Farmers', providing key support measures such as personal consultations, mental health service vouchers, an early intervention network, and stress-reducing courses. Its primary goal is to establish an intervention model and raise early awareness. Its success has led to its permanent establishment, ongoing funding, and forthcoming legislation under the Farmers Pension Act, ensuring continuity and stability through funding from the State budget reserve for Social Affairs and Health.

- I. Implement holistic mental health support within farmers' compulsory health insurance systems, integrating mental health check-ups and signposting initiatives to provide comprehensive assistance and relief services without additional costs.

**SVLFG** (Germany) is the Social Insurance for Agriculture, Forestry, and Horticulture, a statutory institution specialised in providing comprehensive social insurance coverage for the green sector throughout Germany, including agricultural accident insurance, health insurance, long-term care insurance, and partial old-age insurance. Furthermore, SVLFG implements various initiatives such as the 'With us in Balance' campaign, crisis hotlines, online health training services, risk assessment seminars for mental stress, and symposiums on mental health to address the specific needs of individuals within the green sector and promote well-being.

**ENASP**, the European Network on Agricultural Social Protection Systems, was established by social security institutions from five European countries heavily reliant on agriculture. Comprising Austria, Finland, France, Germany, and Poland, ENASP focuses on sharing and promoting comprehensive agricultural social protection, including health, pensions, workplace accidents, occupational illnesses, and family-related services. Member organisations tailor their initiatives to address the specific needs of rural populations, aiming to enhance safety, health, and overall well-being for farmers and their families. By fostering collaboration among members, ENASP actively monitors developments in mental health, provides low-threshold services, and contributes to destigmatising the topic, ensuring that tailored support is accessible to everyone in the green professions.



**Soziale Betriebshilfe** - Social farm operating assistance (Austria) is a service that assists agricultural businesses in securing temporary staff replacements during short to medium-term periods of illness for the farm manager, addressing both mental and physical health concerns. Organised by machinery rings, the service operates on a non-profit social insurance basis, offering a successful programme with simple and cost-effective access to assistance.

