

RURAL MENTAL WELLNESS TOOLKIT

ANGUS
NEW ZEALAND

At Angus NZ we often talk about “better balanced beef,” and when it comes to mental wellness, that same principle of balance rings true. Life is a constant juggle – whether it’s managing work, farm and home, keeping family dynamics on track, or simply staying on top of the chequebook. At a recent Angus NZ member event, with the help of the Tarras Community Fund, Kate Steadman from Second Nature Psychology, shared the following practical strategies for maintaining a healthier balance in our daily lives.

Change the cycle

Negative situations or thoughts can easily trigger strong emotions. This is a natural response – our brain shifts into a ‘survival state,’ often prompting reactions we’re not proud of, such as lashing out, criticising others, or withdrawing altogether. These behaviours can feed a downward spiral, where negative thoughts are reinforced and our ability to reason, plan, and make good decisions becomes harder.

To cope with emotional discomfort, many of us reach for unhelpful distractions to remove us from the problem – alcohol, avoidance, endless scrolling and overworking. These are often only a short term solution that can lead to greater long-term issues.

The key is learning to recognise these and instead choose healthier, more ‘grounded’ ways to ride out the emotional peak so you can think more rationally and in a more conscious problem-solving space.

As we get better in handling our thoughts, reactions and emotions our level of self-belief improves and provides each of us with the ability to cope better long-term.

Grounding techniques to cope with moments of high stress/anxiety:

- Hold an ice cube – jolts you out of your head and into your body. You can also splash cold water on your face or dip your hands in the trough! Please note this is not a form of distraction
- Sit on your hands – set a timer for 30min, feel the wave of emotions and learn you can ride through it
- Do the ‘5 senses’ method. Identify:
 - 5 things you can see
 - 4 things you can feel
 - 3 things you can hear
 - 2 things you can smell, and
 - 1 thing you can taste
- Hold something tactile
- Pause – take slow, deep breaths
- Name the emotions – we can’t change what we aren’t aware of, so how can we manage something we can’t name? Get familiar with your emotion language so you can learn to manage them.

These techniques will help you ride the peak and to reach a place where you can be curious about what you’re thinking, hearing or saying rather than assuming the worst.

Burnout vs depression

Burnout is a significant issue in the rural sector, especially in farming, due to factors like heavy workloads, isolation, and the blurring of work and home life.

The key difference between burnout and depression is that with burnout you tend to bounce back a little if you put yourself into a different context, whereas depression tends to follow you everywhere.

There is a number of signs of burnout such as constant exhaustion despite plenty of sleep, a lack of motivation or interest, constant sickness or headaches and poor memory. Essentially you feel like a ‘shell’ of your former self.

Ways to address burnout include:

- acknowledging burnout and seeking support from co-workers, friends, family and professional resources
- prioritising self-care and ensuring adequate sleep
- set boundaries (for you and others); and
- focus on what you can control.

Just remember, balance is not about perfection when it comes to mental wellness!

FARM STRONG
Live Well Farm Well

FarmStrong's Five Ways to Wellbeing



1.

Making friends and spending time with your mates makes a big difference to how you feel. Even when life is busy, try and make it a priority. The rewards will be huge.



2.

Take notice of the small things in life that make you happy. Each day take a few extra moments to stop and appreciate the good things that are happening for you.



3.

When you give to others, not only do they benefit, but it also makes you feel a lot happier. Consider ways you can give back to the people around you and don’t forget about yourself too.



4.

Being curious and learning new things on or off the farm, will help you farm smarter. At whatever age learning new things, keeps your thinking open and flexible.



5.

Keeping active is a great way to feel good. Working up a sweat releases endorphins that make you feel fresher and better able to cope with challenges.