



# Supporting the mental health of farmers and farming communities

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# Structure of the presentation

- › Mental health v. mental well-being
- › What is mental health in farming?
- › The EU and mental health
- › Examples of best practices
- › The way forward



# Mental health v. mental wellbeing

- There is a lot of overlap in the literature between mental health issues and mental wellbeing.
- Terms like mental health and mental wellbeing are often used interchangeably.
- What exactly do we mean?





# What is mental health in farming?

- › What do we mean by mental health?
- › Mental health in farming is usually affected by economic, political geographical, environmental, social, and cultural factors
- › Whose mental health? Women and farm families
- › Suicides, stress, and anxiety have been recognised as major issues in farming communities.
- › Due to the specific work-life balance in farming, mental health in farming is often associated with occupational and safety health measures.
- › Despite the recent academic and political interest, there is still disagreement on what mental health in farming means.

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# The EU and mental health

- › In June 2023 the European Commission issued a comprehensive mental health strategy.
- › Mental health is described as ‘an integral part of people’s health. It enables individual to realise their own abilities, to cope with the stresses of life, to socialise, work and contribute to community life’ (European Commission, 2023).
- › The three guiding principles in the Commission’s approach to mental health are *prevention, access to mental healthcare and treatment, and reintegration*.
- › According to the European Commission, initiatives on mental health need to be horizontal across policies.

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# Examples of best practices

- › Embrace FARM, Ireland;
- › CCMSA (Caisse Centrale de la Mutualité sociale agricole), France;
- › MELA (Farmers' Social Insurance Institution of Finland - Maatalousyrittäjien eläkelaitos), Finland;
- › FARMRes, Europe.





# Embrace FARM

- In Ireland, there is a long-standing commitment to ensuring the well-being of farmers through farm safety and measures to address stress and anxiety.
- Embrace Farm is one of the few organisations that provides support for mental health rather than well-being.
- It supports people who have suffered post-traumatic stress following a death, suicide or witnessing a fatal farm accident.
- Embrace FARM is an excellent example of how any EU funding to address mental health at a national level could achieve a successful outcome. They have a trained team and are very knowledgeable in this space.

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# CCMSA (Caisse Centrale de la Mutualité sociale agricole)

- CCMSA is the central agricultural social mutual fund of France. It is a private organisation that manages social protection of agricultural workers in France, together with local agricultural mutual funds and the French Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of the Economy and Finance, and the Ministry of Health.
- In 2011 MSA established a national plan to prevent suicide in agricultural work. The plan focuses on four main areas: prevention, detection, support, and orientation.
- To help assist agricultural workers in their mental health and mental well-being, MSA set up Agri'écoute, a telephone service run by medical, and healthcare and social work experts.
- MSA and Agri'écoute have been successful in the prevention of suicides among agricultural workers, developing a sustainable model that might be replicated in other member states.







# MELA (Farmers' Social Insurance Institution of Finland - Maatalousyrittäjien eläkelaitos)

- › MELA is the Farmers' Social Institution of Finland. It is a social insurance institution, and it is the main provider of pension insurance for farmers and rural entrepreneurs in Finland. MELA operates within Finland's Farmer Pension Act (MYEL).
- › In 2017 the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health appointed MELA as the leading institution for the project 'Support the Farmer'. Farmers are supported with one-on-one consultations from MELA's project workers. They help farmers identify the issue, coordinating with them, reaching an agreed solution with designated experts.
- › When the support provided by the project workers is not sufficient, MELA provides farmers with a voucher to spend for mental expert services.
- › Finally, the project also aims to create a permanent early intervention model. MELA organises meetings and seminars for the network, helping them identify signs of burnout or stress.





# FARMRes

- FARMRes is an Erasmus+ Project. Its main aim is to 'raise awareness and provide strategies for farmers to deal with mental health problems'.
- Members of the project are the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA), COAG, Hot Und Leben (HuL), Mental Health Ireland, OnProjects (OnP), and Satakunta MTK.
- Together with raising awareness on good mental health and mental well-being among farmers, the FARMRes aims to provide farmers and their wider community (i.e. farmers' families and farming associations) with the necessary tools to 'prevent, detect, and aid' in case of distress.
- Ultimately, FARMRes will advance the debate at the policy level on the importance of mental health and mental well-being for sustainable economic and social development in agriculture.
- FARMRes has created a platform for European farmers and farming associations to look for resources available to support mental health and mental well-being in the agricultural sector. Success stories of farmers interviewed by FARMRes provide a useful insight on the personal and structural challenges that people face in the agricultural sector.

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## The way forward: critical questions to ask ourselves

- Which actor should be responsible for planning and sustaining initiatives on mental health across the European farming communities?
- How is it possible to maintain long-term sustainable initiatives on mental health at local, national and European level?
- Are bottom-up initiatives only 'reactions' to traumatic events? How can they be institutionalised in a more systematic framework?





## The way forward: critical questions to ask ourselves

- › What kind of initiatives are best received by the farming communities?
- › Should mental health in farming be separate from general debate on mental health at the European and national level?
- › Are there peculiar factors of mental health in farming that need specific political and institutional consideration?





# Thank you!

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