

Supporting farmers' mental health: action-oriented recommendations

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

Introduction

This document presents 15 action-oriented recommendations elaborated by the members of the EU CAP Network's Thematic Group (TG) on [Supporting the Mental Health of Farmers and Farming Communities](#).

The TG aimed to:

- Identify and discuss barriers (physical, social, economic and personal) that hinder access to mental health support in farming communities;
- Explore specific strategies and tools to raise/increase the awareness of policymakers, educators, advisors and the public about mental health challenges in farming settings, as well as methods for disseminating information related to mental health support within these communities;
- Explore successful approaches and best practices from EU Member States or regions that have effectively addressed the mental health challenges of farmers in rural areas, as well as discuss the replicability of such practices in other contexts;
- Discuss how to improve access to mental health support, including measures that could be introduced into relevant policies at different levels (local, regional, national, EU), providing concrete recommendations.

Discussions held in the frame of the TG work (formal and informal meetings organised between February and June 2024) led to the definition of **key ingredients to support the mental health of farmers and farming communities**, which are presented in a [separate document](#). These were further refined, and form the basis for the recommendations included in the following pages.

Areas of the recommendations

The recommendations in this document are clustered around five areas of intervention: **education and awareness; policy frameworks enabling community-led initiatives; support services and infrastructure in rural areas; research and data; and institutional approaches.**

Target groups

These recommendations can be targeted at different actors - from farmers to institutions, from research bodies to LAGs and rural communities.

In translating these recommendations into real-life initiatives, all the relevant stakeholders should also consider the [key ingredients](#) identified by the [Thematic Group](#).

Disclaimer

This document has been developed as part of the work carried out by the EU CAP Network 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.

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Expected benefits

These recommendations can contribute to improving the mental health and well-being of farmers, their families and communities, who can all access (better) support services.

More effective support services for better mental health and well-being can encourage farm succession planning, and make farming a more attractive career option for

young people – both of which are conducive to generational renewal. Improved well-being is likely to have positive impacts on farm productivity and sustainability, and plays a vital role in strengthening food security.

All the outputs produced by this Thematic Group, including a collection of good practices and an overview of possible approaches for skills development, are available on the [EU CAP Network website](#).

Recommendations

Education and awareness

1

Educate media and influencers: Educate media staff and other influential people about the need for responsible reporting on farming and the role of farmers in order to avoid inaccurate stories and their negative consequences. This effort should be led and coordinated by national authorities (e.g. ministries) in cooperation with relevant farmers' organisations.

2

Raise awareness among policymakers and legislators: Increase awareness among policymakers and legislators at the EU and national levels about the importance of farmers' mental health, the stressors affecting them, and the implications of legislation on their well-being. Enhance communication channels with farmers to help involve them in decision-making processes implemented by responsible farmers' organisations, which will also mobilise others.

3

Inform farmers, healthcare providers and other supporting professions: Educate and inform farmers, healthcare providers and other supporting professions about mental health needs, destigmatising the topic and explaining occupational stressors. This should be done via trained professionals, peer-to-peer exchanges among farmers, and awareness-raising campaigns run by farmers' organisations.

4

Make mental health education mandatory: Implement mandatory mental health and occupational health courses in agricultural, veterinary, agronomy, and related fields at universities, colleges, and vocational training institutions to equip farming and agricultural professionals with essential knowledge and skills for managing their well-being.

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Raise awareness in local communities and beyond: Provide support for raising awareness about the role of farmers and the implications for mental health, including both active farming and non-farming members. Facilitate networking, knowledge exchange, and community-level actions.

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Policy framework enabling community-led initiatives

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Enable community-led initiatives: Establish a strategic policy framework and associated tools at the EU and national levels that enable community-led, multi-actor initiatives to enhance farmers' mental health and quality of life. Tailor these initiatives to local needs and to different stages - including prevention, early intervention, and care. Foster connections among various actors within communities and across different initiatives.

Support networking: Facilitate networking, sharing of knowledge and experiences, awareness-raising and participation at local and national levels, promoting coordination and incorporating evidence-based policy tools. This framework should be supported by simple, stable, and sustainable funding options that are accessible to these initiatives.

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Support services and infrastructure in rural areas

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Design support services that foster trust among farmers and communities. Engage professional stakeholders (advisors, veterinarians, agricultural organisations) familiar with farming/farmers' issues to deliver high-quality guidance and support whilst ensuring credibility and reliability in addressing the mental well-being of farming families. Allowing for anonymous mental health-related consultations and ensuring a timely sign-posting function at the farmer level is key.

Target 'hard-to-reach' farmers: Implement targeted actions to reach isolated or hard-to-reach farmers, ensuring inclusivity across the farming community. Address barriers to accessing a wide range of support services in rural areas effectively by incorporating staff familiar with farming/farmers' issues.

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Encourage social insurance schemes for farmers: This can include relief services, fixed number of annual leave days, and care provision for mental health support. Farmer leave replacement systems can provide support during parental leave, sick leave or holidays, ensuring skilled replacements are available. Integrate mental health into mandatory check-ups and establish a voucher system for early intervention.

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Research and data

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Develop proofing tools: Develop mechanisms to test and validate policy tools, ensuring they effectively support community-led, multi-actor initiatives in raising awareness and improving farmers' mental health.

Develop statistics & databases: Establish comprehensive databases and data collection systems - at the national and EU levels - to track and analyse farmers' mental health and social insurance protection. Increase funding for research to provide evidence-based support for implementing necessary measures.

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Funding and resources

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Mobilise funding and resources for farmer-centric activities: Secure EU funds and agreements for multi-stakeholder and inter-ministerial initiatives aimed at enhancing the mental well-being of farmers and farming communities. Provide a two-level set of specialised, 'soft' training courses and resources tailored to, first, advisors and other professionals (including those in educational and research establishments) who interact with farmers and, second, farmers themselves and their families. Ensure combined packages which use various funding sources to support networking and the sustainability of these initiatives.

Institutional approach

Adopt a holistic approach: Foster collaboration among different national ministries and EU directorates to develop a comprehensive mental health safety strategy for farmers. Implement cross-cutting policies and budgets to optimise costs and mitigate the consequences of poor mental health among farmers. A key step at European and national levels would be to conduct a matching-up/gap analysis to identify where institutionally - and within what existing programmes - the main interventions should be placed.

14**15**

Enhance CAP Strategic Plans: Enhance the social dimension of the CAP Strategic Plans by increasing measures and their scope to improve farmers' conditions, ensuring that these objectives are also funded by complementary funds.

