



## **FARMRes Report, Finland**

### **Farmers Assistance Resources for Mental Health**

Finnish young farmers social and labour situation and its relationship with mental health and wellbeing

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# *Mental health in agriculture: Finland's perspective*

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the same time, the network consisting of agricultural entrepreneurs is becoming rarer as the number of farmers decreases. **The proportion of people who understand agriculture is decreasing.** Getting the right kind of help at the right time is challenging. **In practice, the Farmers' Social Insurance Institutions (Mela) Support the Farmer -project is currently responsible for providing low-threshold help for agricultural entrepreneurs.** There are hardly any other preventive actors for agricultural entrepreneurs unless the agricultural entrepreneur is covered by the voluntary self-paid occupational health care. Occupational health care is perceived to have a regionally varying ability to meet the needs of agricultural entrepreneurs.

**In Finland, there is quite a lot of training** available for agricultural entrepreneurs that supports mental health. The best way to organize training that supports mental health is to **discuss mental health in connection with other issues.** However, it is hoped that mental health training will be increased, especially for all the different school levels where agricultural entrepreneurs are trained. **Farm management studies should include studies that support mental health.**

**When people meeting agricultural entrepreneurs are ready to talk about well-being, it is easier to ask for help.** A significant factor in supporting the mental health of agricultural entrepreneurs is the training of the network members. Talking about mental health is felt to have become easier, but there is still shame and stigma associated with mental health.

Investing in the mental health of agricultural entrepreneurs is important. Agriculture is based on continuity. Finland cannot afford to lose self-sufficiency in food production. **The role of agricultural entrepreneurs in society should be taken into account much more than at present.** The voice of agricultural entrepreneurs must be heard in all decision-making. Appreciation of agricultural entrepreneurs should be reflected in actions in addition to words.

## 2. Knowing the farming sector of Finland

Farmers in Finland face challenges such as economic difficulties, increasing workload and extreme weather conditions. Crises in private life often have an impact on the farm, and problems on the farm have an impact on private life. In Finland, the majority of farms are family-run. Distances in the countryside are long and the number of working farms is decreasing every year. The average farm size increases every year, in 2021 the average utilizable agricultural area was 51 hectares per farm (figure 2) (Natural Resources Institute Finland, 2021). **The share of the population that understands the everyday life of an agricultural entrepreneur is getting rarer and health services move further away from rural areas.**

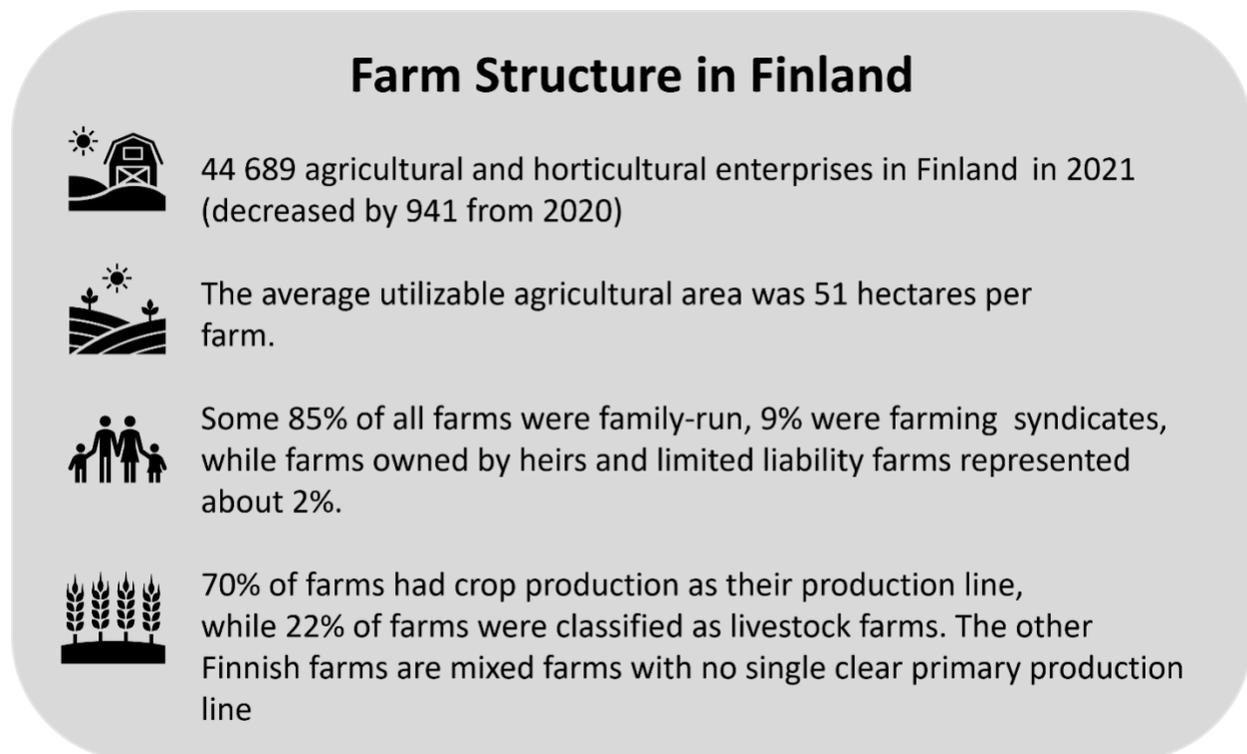


Figure 2. Finnish farm structure (Natural Resources Institute Finland, 2021).

### Farming in Finland

The **growing season in Finland is relatively short**, which is why only plants with a short growing season can be cultivated. **Climate change is extending the growing season** in Finland. During the review period 1950-2019, the growing season has advanced by an average of 15 days and the growing season has lengthened by an average of 23 days in Northern Europe. According to forecasts, this century the growing seasons in Finland will be extended by 1-2 months, depending on the amount of greenhouse gas emissions. (Finnish Meteorological Institute

2018; Aalto, Pirinen, Kauppi, Rantanen, Lussana, Lyytikäinen-Saarenmaa & Gregow 2022.) The **most common grains cultivated in Finland are barley and oats**, about 34% of land use is grassland (figure 3). **Among livestock farms, milk production is the most common** direction of production (figure 4). About 14% of the cultivated area is cultivated organically (Ruokavirasto 2021). The average age of agricultural taxpayers was 47 years in 2000 and 53 years in 2020. **The average age has increased by six years in twenty years.** (StatFin2022.)

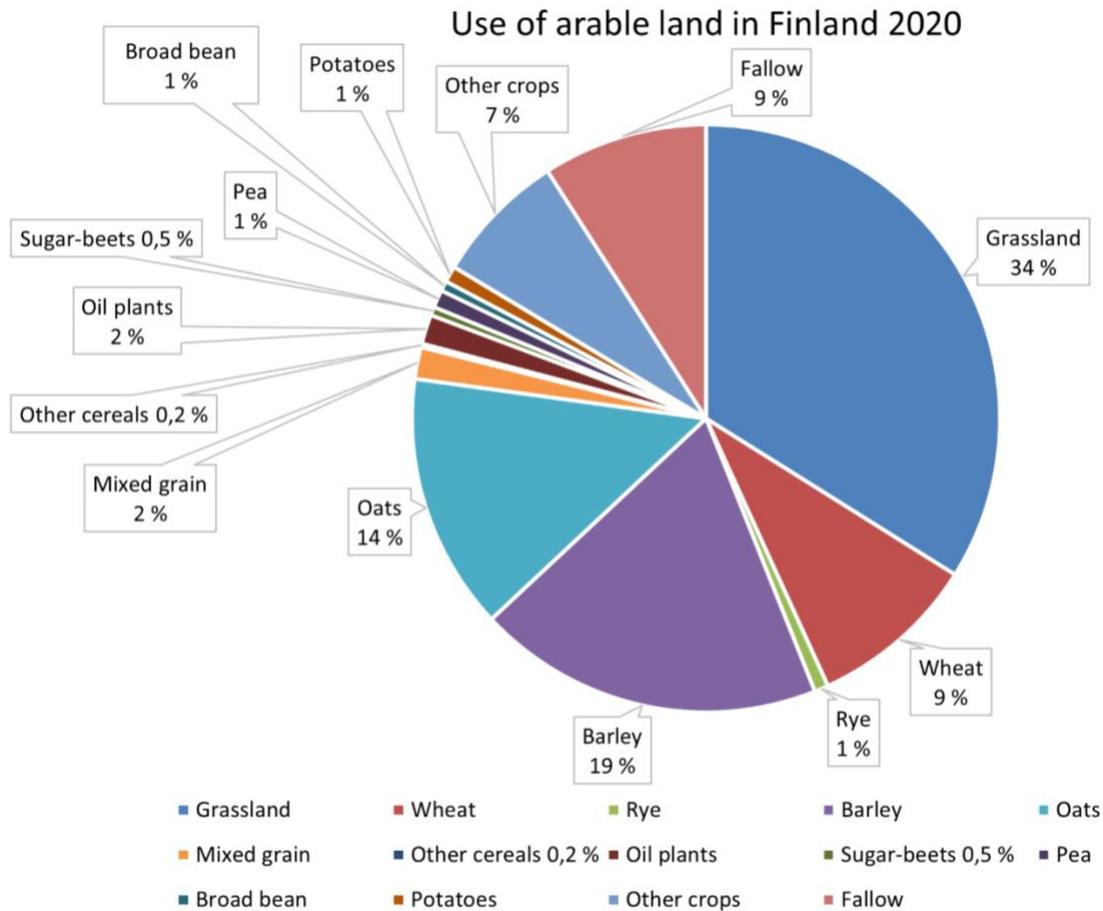


Figure 3. Use of arable land in Finland 2020 (Ruokatieto 2021, 35).

### Specialization in agricultural and horticultural enterprises in Finland 2020

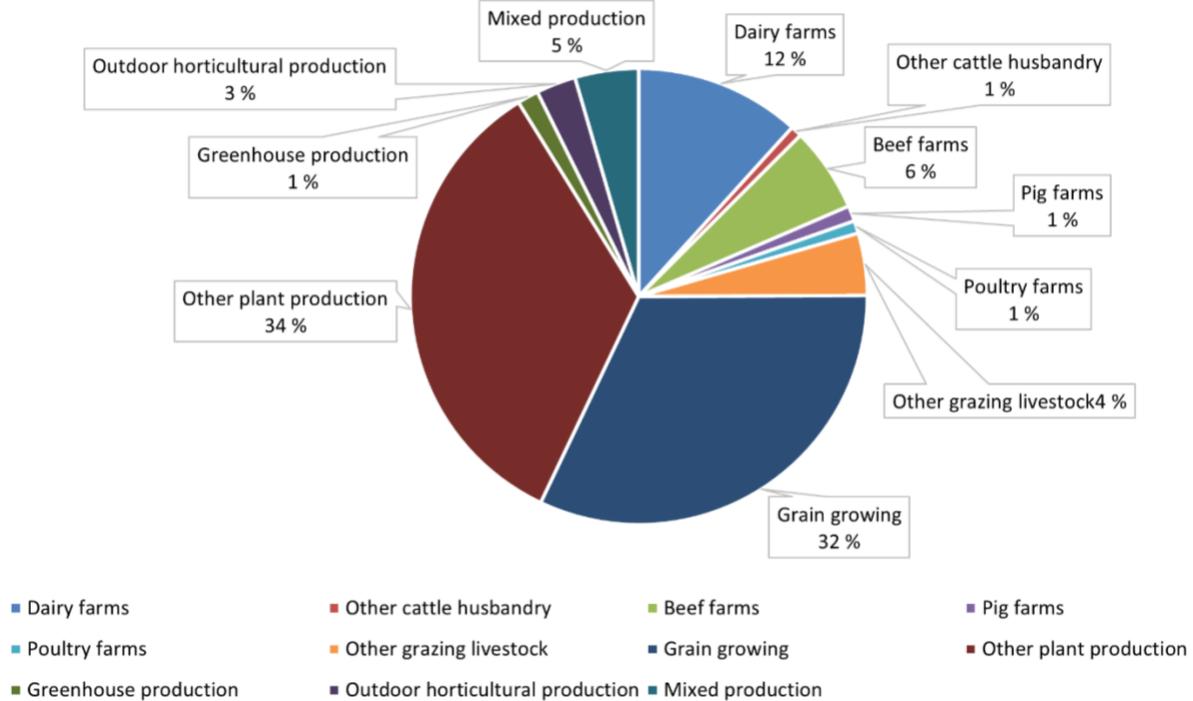


Figure 4. Specialization in agricultural and horticultural enterprises in Finland 2021 (Ruokatieto 2021, 42).

### The effects of climate change

Climate change causes challenges for Finnish agriculture, although the lengthening of the growing season can also be seen as an advantage in a way. Extreme weather causes damage to production and enables the spread of plant and animal diseases and pests. **The average temperature in Finland has risen particularly rapidly in the last twenty years.** Cold winters are an advantage, as they reduce plant diseases and pests. **The winter months have warmed the most** (figure 5). Excessive warming in the winter months contributes to the increased risk of plant diseases and pests. (Aalto ym. 2022; Finnish Meteorological Institute 2022; Ruokatieto n.d.)

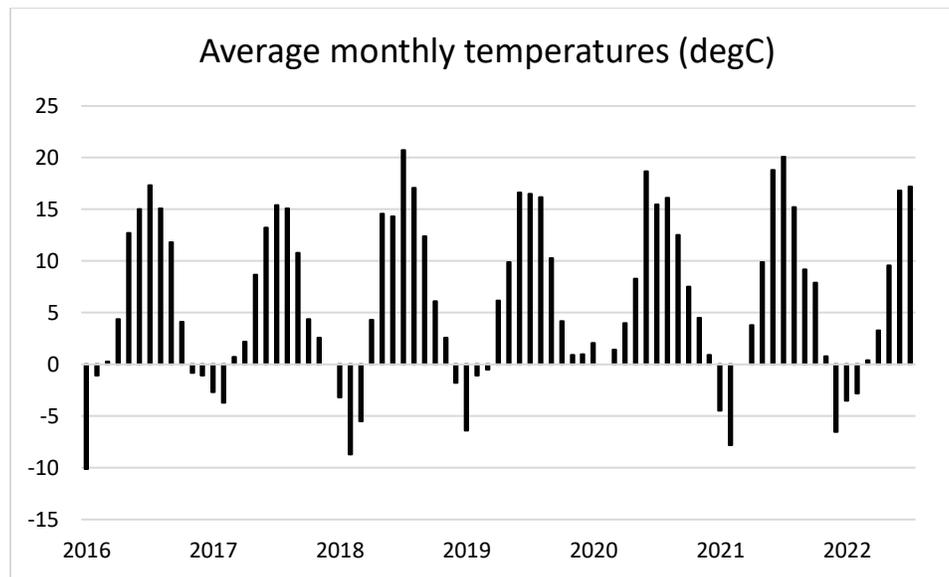


Figure 5. Average monthly temperatures in Finland (Finnish Meteorological Institute 2022).

**Heavy rains become more common throughout the year.** As the snow cover thins, river flooding in spring decreases, but in **general the risk of floods caused by heavy rains increases.** Heavy rains also influence the yield level, depending on the timing of the rains in the phases of the growing season. In addition, the **lengthening of the summer heat period increases the risk of crop losses.** Extended periods of heat and, on the other hand, increased heavy rains cause variations in the quality and quantity of the harvest. Climate change is not predicted to increase windiness in Finland, but **storm damage is predicted to increase due to the shortening of the frost season and amount of rains.** (Gregow, Rantanen, Laurila, Mäkelä 2020; Ilmasto-opas 2017.)

### Economic situation

**Finland's grocery trade is highly concentrated.** In total, the market share of the two largest grocery groups is more than 80% (figure 6). This **creates challenges for securing healthy and functioning market competition in primary production.** Problems with primary production are caused especially by the **low price of the products** (Björkroth, Frosterus, Kajova & Palo 2013) **and long-term supply contracts without the possibility of price checks.** In August 2022, the Food Market Commissioner issued a recommendation to clarify the contractual practices of the food chain and a recommendation to improve the profitability situation of the food chain, especially to solve profitability problems related to primary production (Ruokavirasto 2022).

### Market shares of Finnish grocery trade in 2021

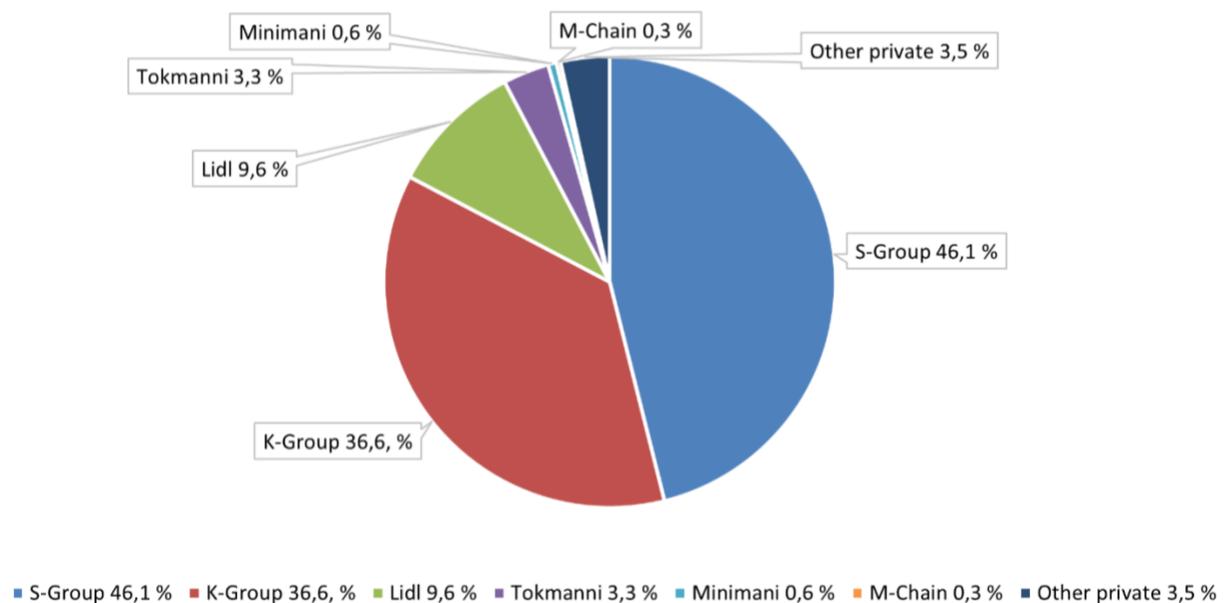


Figure 6. Market shares of Finnish grocery trade in 2021. (Päivittäistavarakauppa ry 2022).

**Producer prices have risen, but the price increases have not been enough to cover the increased production costs** (Luke 2022). The economic situation in agriculture has been difficult for a long time. The current cost crisis has deepened the economic plight of agricultural entrepreneurs. The profitability ratio is well suited for comparing different production directions. A profitability ratio of 1 means that the salary and interest requirements set as targets for own work and own capital have been achieved. When the profitability ratio is less than one, it means that compensations for own work and own capital are lower than the target. Between 2016 and 2021, only poultry farms have reached profitability ratio of one or more (figure 7). **According to forecasts, the profitability ratio of poultry farms will dive into the negative during 2022. The profitability ratio of crop farms is predicted to improve, in other production directions the change is negative or predicted to remain almost the same.** (Luke 2022b, Luke 2022c.)

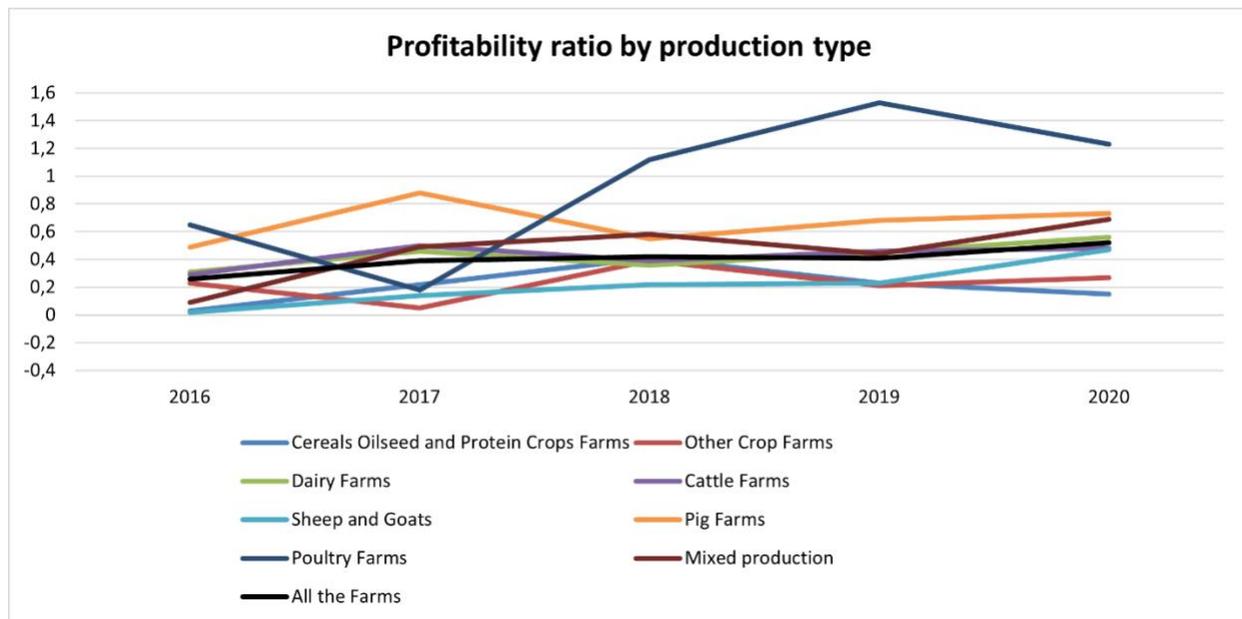


Figure 7. Profitability ratio by production type (Luke 2022c).

The Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK) asked its members about the liquidity of farmers in the beginning of 2022. More than 1,600 MTK members from different areas of production responded to the survey. Based on the results, **the liquidity on farms has weakened and livestock production is being reduced**. Agricultural entrepreneurs were worried about their financial survival after the summer. Two-thirds of the respondents had a **strong decline in their liquidity** in the past year, and approximately the same amount believed that their liquidity would further decline in the next 6 months. (MTK 2022.)

In a survey aimed at livestock entrepreneurs in Finnish Lakeland, **the most important target for farm development was economic profitability**. The development of profitability defined what the farm will be able to develop after that. More than a third of the respondents felt that **their coping was an obstacle to the development of their farm**. 375 livestock entrepreneurs in the Finnish Lakeland responded to the survey. The study investigated the occupational well-being of livestock entrepreneurs in Finnish Lakeland and the obstacles to business development from the perspective of occupational well-being. (Hämäläinen 2022.)

### 3. Social situation and farmer social position

#### Education

In Finland, by the end of 2020, almost three-quarters of those aged 15 and over had completed a post-primary education qualification. In August 2021, a new law came into force in Finland, which extended compulsory education to also cover studies at the second level (high school and/or vocational school). The aim of expanding compulsory schooling is to raise the level of education and skills and to increase educational equality and the well-being of children and young people (Ministry of education and culture 2022). **The educational level of agricultural entrepreneurs has increased, but for now the educational level is lower than the average of the population** (figure 8) (Luke 2022d; StatFin 2022). **The expansion of compulsory schooling also promotes an increase in the educational level of coming agricultural entrepreneurs.**

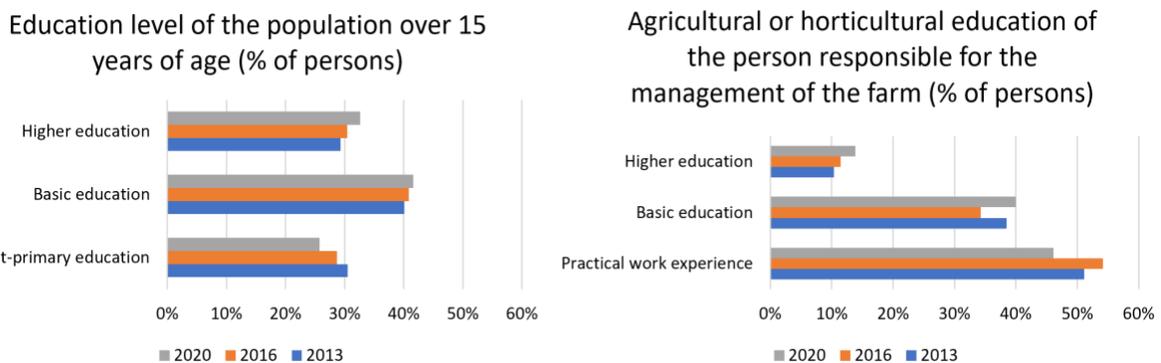


Figure 8. Education level of the population and agricultural or horticultural education of the persons responsible of the farm (Luke 2022d; StatFin 2022).

#### Appreciation and reception

The farmer is Finland's 56th most respected profession (out of 379 profession) (Suomen kuvalehti 2018) **In Finland, the appreciation of agricultural entrepreneurs is perceived to be good.** Most Finns were perceived to value agriculture, but the **general discussion was to blame.** The share of those who blame agriculture is believed to be a small but vocal minority. The one-sidedness of the point of view is seen as the challenge of the blaming conversation. (Interviews 2022.)

*"When they think about what is burdening the climate, the thing that immediately comes to their mind is that agriculture needs to be stopped."*

*"Climate matters are outsourced, and they end up blaming agriculture because it is far from their own environment."*

**The appreciation of agricultural entrepreneurs is increased with the discussion on security of supply.** The security of supply debate became stronger due to the Russian attack to Ukraine. In Finland, **self-reliance is valued.** The increase in respect of the farmers is currently felt to remain at the **level of speeches. It is felt that the appreciation is not yet sufficiently reflected in the prices of the products.** Due to the concentrated grocery trade, **there is no confidence in a sufficient increase in prices.** (Interviews 2022.)

*"Is appreciation measured in what is spoken? In speeches, the appreciation has risen. But does the appreciation show in the prices? The store takes the excess away from the producer through the competition."*

Regarding the climate change debate, it can be observed that the solutions made by agriculture to reduce climate change come to the fore better than before. Overall, the reception of agricultural entrepreneurs has improved (figure 9). (Interviews 2022.)

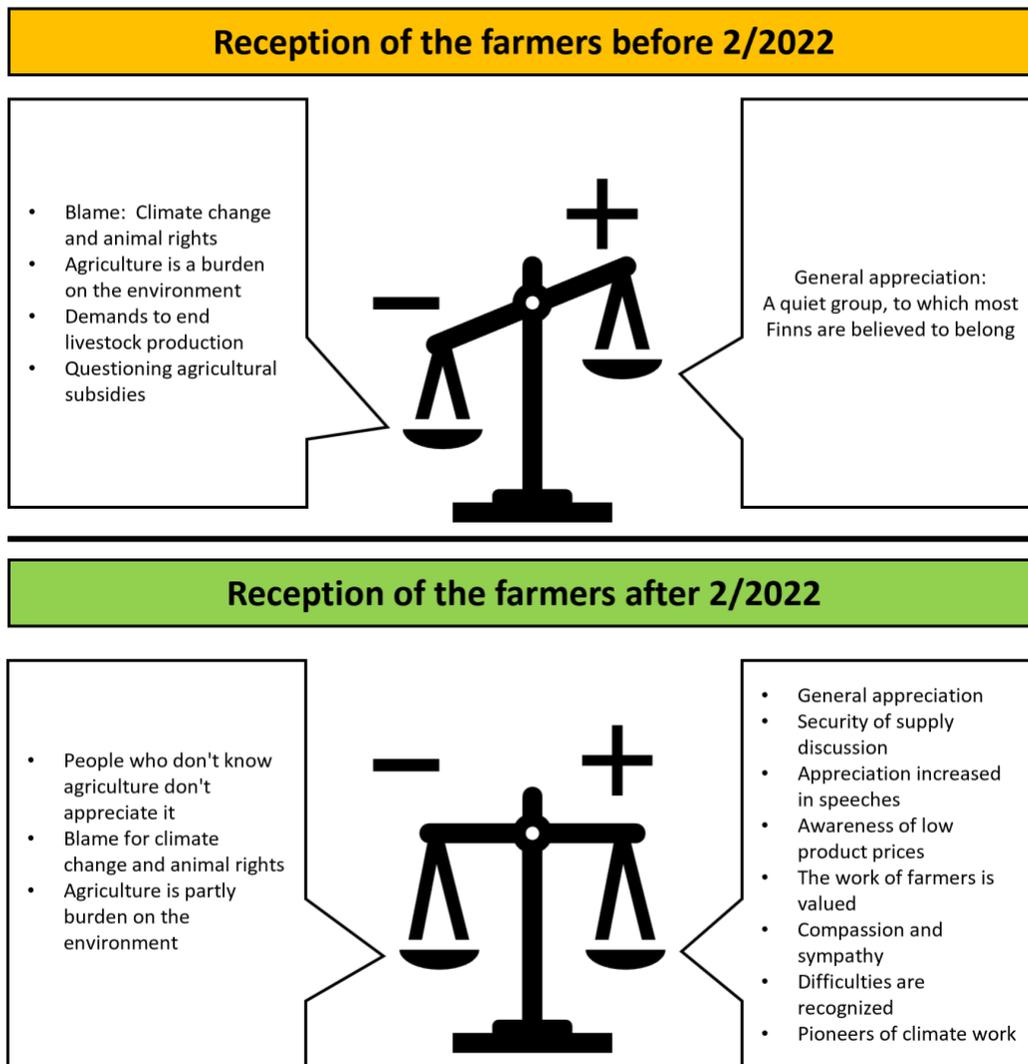


Figure 9. The reception of farmers has improved (Interviews 2022).

### possibility to influence

In 2015, Natural Resources Institute Finland (Luke) made a preliminary study of the administrative burden on Finnish farmers. The preliminary study was the first in its nature to clarify the administrative burden for the agricultural sector in Finland. The administrative burden in the survey refers to the actions of farm entrepreneurs that are only necessary due to legislation or to fulfill other obligations but would otherwise not be necessary or would not necessarily be required in other EU countries. In the preliminary study, **it was found that agricultural entrepreneurs have an administrative burden. Livestock farms were found to have more administrative burden than crop farms. Changes in regulations cause stress to farmers and increase the burden on the administration. The administration should make the changes well in advance. Varying payment dates also cause stress and liquidity problems for farmers.** In the preliminary study, it is stated that when

preparing new legislation, it is necessary to consider what kind of costs the legislation incurs for agricultural entrepreneurs. In addition, it is suggested that estimates regarding the administrative burden should be considered already in the preparation phase of the regulations. (Karhula, Koikkalainen, Leppälä, Mattila 2015: 3, 28-31.)

**Agricultural entrepreneurs do not seem to have the opportunity to influence decisions concerning themselves.** There is no influence on decisions related to prices, legislation, and subsidy policy. Influencing prices is more possible, for example, through farmers cooperatives. In the case of large cooperatives, the potential for influence arouses conflicting thoughts. On the one hand, **farmers cooperatives are seen as a solution, but on the other hand, the possibilities of influence in large cooperatives are seen as disappearing.** The voice of agricultural entrepreneurs will be heard through farmers interest organization (MTK). The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry seems to understand the issues of agricultural entrepreneurs, but other ministries do not. **Consequently, regarding several decisions, their effects on agricultural entrepreneurs have not been considered.** The public opinion rounds of laws and regulations are considered good, but on the other hand, **it is felt that the statements do not have a real effect. It is often seen just a formal way of operating without influence.** (Interviews 2022.)

*"It seems that for farmers there are a lot of things that they can't influence. At the decision-making level, there should be an understanding from the farmers point of view that what everyday life is like and how different decisions affect the agricultural entrepreneur's life"*

### Risk of social exclusion

**Agricultural entrepreneurs are seen to be at risk of social exclusion, and social exclusion is seen to be already happening.** A larger group than before is estimated to be at risk of social exclusion. The situation is perceived to be polarized. **Exclusion develops slowly. At first, the farmer experiences, for example, exhaustion or financial challenges, for which they do not dare to ask for help. Many farmers work alone,** which increases the risk of social exclusion. **Especially farmers without family and those who do not have close interpersonal relationships are easily unnoticed. With Covid -19, it seems that more and more farmers are closing into their own farms.** Other social services, than the Farmers' Social Insurance Institutions (Mela) Support the Farmer -project, do not reach agricultural entrepreneurs. **Access to services that meet the needs, especially in rural areas, is perceived as a big challenge.** Services are constantly moving away from rural areas, so **society is not expected to notice the social exclusion of farmers.** (Interviews 2022.)

## Development of the number of psychotherapists and psychologists

In Finland, there were both around **15 psychotherapists with protected occupational title and registered psychologists in 2020 per 10,000 inhabitants** (figure 10). For some, both the rights of psychotherapist and psychologist are registered. Statistically, it was not possible to separate these, the statistics show both professional rights separately. The number of psychologists under the age of 65 is growing slowly. **The number of psychotherapists under the age of 65 is slightly decreasing when comparing the years 2015 and 2020.** During the review period (2010–2020), the relative share of psychotherapists over the age of 65 has increased. (Avoindata 2022.)

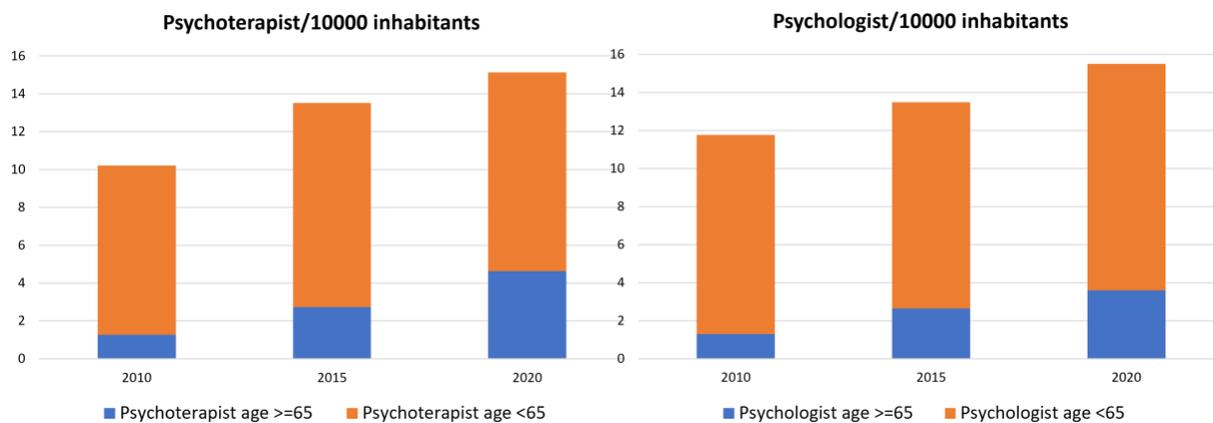


Figure 10. Number of mental health professionals /10,000 inhabitants

## Availability of treatment for mental health disorders

A review conducted in the Helsinki and Uusimaa region about the duration of access to psychotherapy in 2018-2019 showed that **20% of patients start psychotherapy within a month and about half received treatment within three months.** Regarding psychotherapy, it has been shown that a long waiting time for the start of treatment weakens the effectiveness of the treatment and increases the likelihood that the patient will drop out of treatment. **Speeding up access to treatment is one of the key goals.** (Wahlstedt, Rosenström, Stenberg, J-H & Saarni 2020). A recent study conducted at the University of Tampere shows that **access to rehabilitation psychotherapy is unequal.** Those with a **higher education were much more likely to receive rehabilitation psychotherapy compared to those who only completed elementary school.** The use of psychotherapy increased fairly steadily as the level of education increased (Leppänen, Kampman, Autio, Karolaakso, Näppilä, Rissanen & Pirkola 2022).

**Those who are well off get more effective help for mental health problems.** It is estimated that only **about half of those with mental health disorders receive the**

**treatment they need.** In Finland, **one in five will suffer from depression during their lifetime, and at least one in five will experience mental health disorders during the year.** (Mieli 2021.) The **fragmentation of mental health services** makes it difficult to access treatment. There are regional differences in mental health services. In Finland, **the challenge is the successful assessment of a mental health patient's need for treatment and the fact that the necessary mental health treatment cannot be started quickly enough.** (Rissanen, Parhiala, Hetemaa, Kekkonen, Knape, Ridanpää, Rintala, Sihvo, Suomela & Kannisto 2020.)

Saari (2019) studied the usefulness of the Support the Farmer -project, such as the professional help of project workers and the expert help purchased with a voucher. **Most of the respondents had acquired expert help for various types of therapy services (81%),** in addition, expert help was for financial expert assistance (15%) and legal assistance (3%). Help was gained especially for coping and relationships. **The men who responded felt that they had received professional benefit from voucher more than the women who responded to the survey. The younger respondents felt that they received more social and professional benefits from expert help than older age groups. The experienced work ability of agricultural entrepreneurs clearly improved with expert help.** (Saari 2019.)

Availability of a therapist in rural areas is more difficult than in cities. It is a long distance from the countryside to all health services, including basic health care. **Obtaining self-paid psychotherapy is not considered a realistic option for agricultural entrepreneurs due to the economic situation of agricultural entrepreneurs.** Getting into rehabilitation therapy is difficult. There seems to be interest in developing the mental health of rural areas and agricultural entrepreneurs, but the **resources are small.** In practice, **preventive work is currently the responsibility of Mela's Support the Farmer -project and individual regional projects that deal with, for example, farm management.** The hope is that **both services supporting mental health and preventive work would be increased** and diversified among agricultural entrepreneurs. Service structures must be permanent. (Interviews 2022). In addition to these, in the CAP period starting 2023, farms have the opportunity to receive subsidized **social dimension advising.** The social dimension advising can support the agricultural entrepreneur in matters related to well-being, coping and networking, among other things (CAP-plan 2023-2027 for Finland).

## Suicides in Finland

**In Finland, the number of suicides has decreased little by little** since 1990 (1990: 1512, 2020: 717). The COVID-19 pandemic has not had a statistically noticeable effect on the number of suicides in Finland. **Almost three quarters of those who committed suicide were men.** In 2020, women committed suicide five percent more than the previous year, and men seven percent less than the previous year. In 2020, the average age of those who committed suicide was 44 years for women and 46 years for men. Suicides are the main cause of death among young people: among 15-24-year-olds, suicide accounted for more than a quarter of all causes of

death. In part, this is because the mortality of young people from other causes of death is low. Compared to the rest of Europe, young people in Finland commit a lot of suicides. Suicide accounted for about one percent of all deaths. In 2020, **the suicide mortality rate was 13/100,000 inhabitants.** (StatFin 2022.)

### Agricultural entrepreneurs' sickness allowance decisions and disability pensions

Kela makes sick leave decisions for sickness allowance for agricultural entrepreneurs for sick leave lasting more than nine business days (Mela 2021). Kela is an independent social security institution supervised by the Finnish Parliament. **The number of positive decisions regarding mental health-based sickness allowance for agricultural entrepreneurs increases annually by about one percent** (Kela 2022). **The share of agricultural entrepreneurs' mental health-based disability pensions among the granted disability pensions is increasing at an annual rate of several percentage points** (Ruokatieto 2018-2021). Regarding musculoskeletal diseases, the ratio for disability pensions (Ruokatieto 2018-2021) and sickness allowance solutions (Kela 2022) is better. **The data give indications that mental health-based illnesses can be treated more poorly, and mental health-based illness is a stronger predictor of agricultural entrepreneurs' disability pension than musculoskeletal disorders** (figure 11). For the entire population, more than half of disability pensions have been granted based on mental illness (Kela 2022b). **For agricultural entrepreneurs, the share of mental health-based disability pensions is a good quarter** (Ruokatieto 2021). **The percentage of mental health-based disability pensions for agricultural entrepreneurs increases faster than for the rest of the population.**

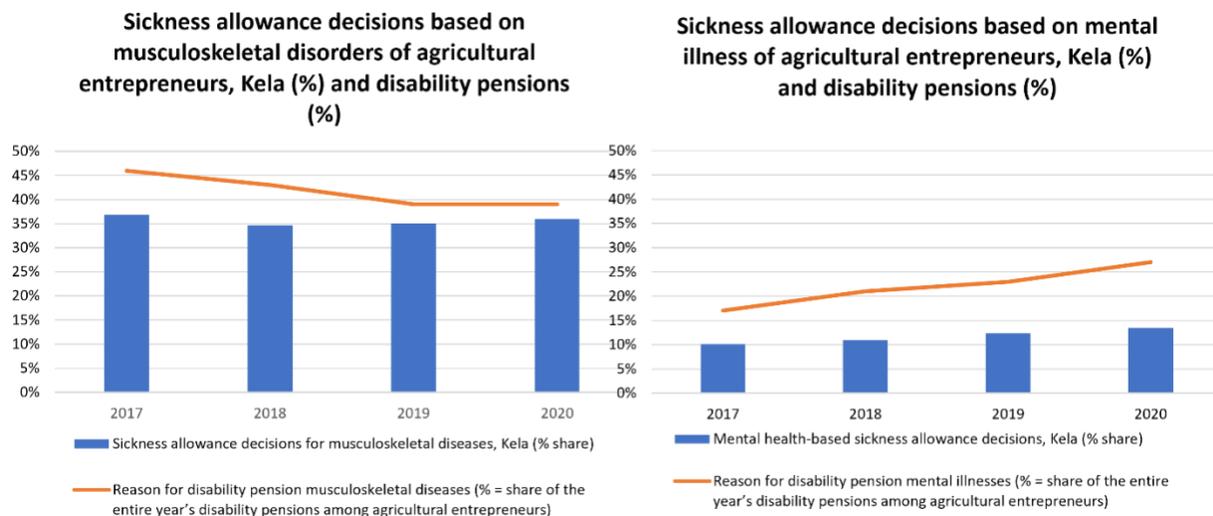


Figure 11. Agricultural entrepreneurs' sickness allowance decisions and disability pensions (Kela 2022, Ruokatieto 2018-2021).

Based on the age distributions of disability pensions granted in the last five years, it can be observed that disability pensions based on mental health are currently focused on younger age groups, disability pensions based on musculoskeletal disorders on older age groups. **Estimated as years of labor lost, the share of disability pensions based on mental health is the highest.** Based on the granted disability pensions, the share of mental health diseases in the lost labor years was 37%, while the share of musculoskeletal diseases was 29% of the lost labor years (figure 12). (Mela statistics 2022.)

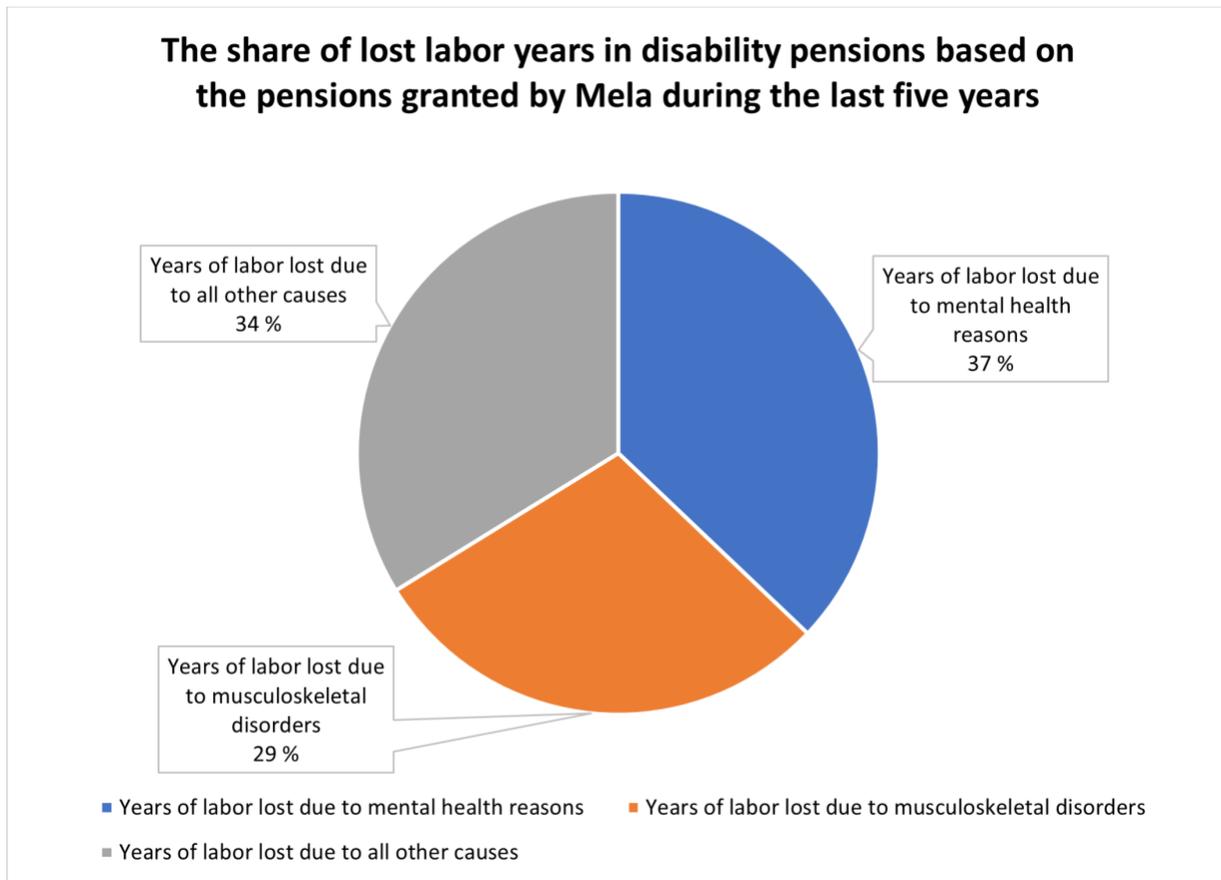


Figure 12. The share of lost labor years (Mela statistics 2022)

## 4. Factors impacting the mental health of farmers

### Economic factors

**Economic factors are seen as a significant risk factor for an agricultural entrepreneur's mental health. Financial uncertainty causes prolonged, burdensome stress.** If farms do not develop their operations, it weakens the farm's chances of survival. **A farm where no development takes place will quickly become old-fashioned and backward as structural development progresses. Selling a farm for financial reasons is not an easy decision, but it is noticeable that the shame associated with giving up the farm is diminishing.** (Interviews 2022.)

Agriculture is strongly capital-intensive. Investing farms have large amounts of loans. **In Finland, the repayment of loans is taken conscientiously. The relationship between the agricultural entrepreneur and the financier is seen as a factor in mental health** in terms of the economy. **The financier can be feared and seen as a threat.** The financier is perceived to be the one who can decide what happens to the farm. Such an approach is seen as a burden factor and an obstacle to contacting the bank in time about financial problems and opportunities to negotiate different options. **Some agricultural entrepreneurs perceive the financier as an important partner.** In this case, trust increases on both sides and even large loan amounts do not seem too burdensome. (Interviews 2022.)

**It is seen that only temporary reliefs are available for the economy, not long-term solutions.** Because of this, the **economy is seen to some extent burden all agricultural entrepreneurs.** Economic uncertainty is a factor that affects every agricultural entrepreneur (figure 13). **Developing profitability is seen as a solution to reduce financial uncertainty. However, it is hardly believable that the market would develop in such a way that the primary producer's share would increase to the required amount.** (Interviews 2022.)

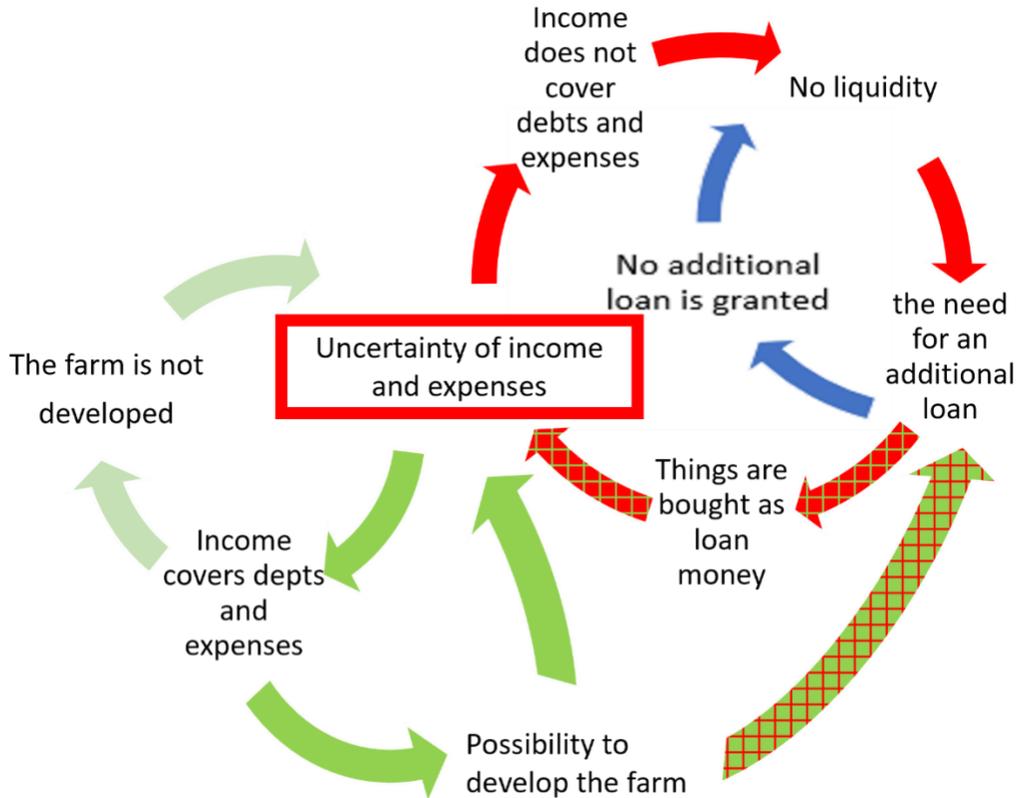


Figure 13. Financial uncertainty affects all agricultural entrepreneurs.

### Personal – family factors

The agricultural entrepreneur's work is at home. **Separating home and work is difficult.** On family farms, the spouse and children can also be co-workers. The quality of interpersonal relationships is important for the mental health of an agricultural entrepreneur. **Interpersonal relationships can be a great asset or a great burden factor. Good relationships and good communication skills protect mental health.** (Interviews 2022.)

**Increasing loneliness is seen as a risk factor for mental health.** There are fewer and fewer people who understand agriculture and neighbors live far away. The agricultural entrepreneur is busy with work. **Free time can be hard to find. It is believed that the challenges associated with long distances can be helped by digital tools. However, they are not believed to completely replace the needs of social situations.** (Interviews 2022.)

*“Family really matters a lot in agricultural companies, because it is so passed down from generation to generation. It has a much bigger meaning than in any other professions.”*

**Developing self-awareness has an impact on interpersonal relationships.** Recognizing one's feelings and putting them into words is seen to play a significant role. **Increasing self-awareness training for each school level is recommended.** Self-awareness development trainings should be organized for agricultural entrepreneurs, so that in addition to **recognizing feelings, the recognition of one's own needs and limits increases.** The increase in **self-awareness is also seen to be supportive in situations related to coping.** Self-awareness increases the ability to recognize, for example, when one is too burdened. **Once the issue is recognized, it is then possible to try to influence the load factor.** (Interviews 2022.)

### Professional factors

**In agriculture, there are many professional factors that cannot be influenced, such as weather conditions and the rush of work in spring and autumn.** Professional factors affecting mental health are seen to be **competence.** The concept of competence is broad. **It includes production and financial know-how, change know-how and forecasting and risk management know-how.** Planning is seen as important. **The constant need to react is considered a way of working that puts a strain on mental health. Planning and risk management help get out of the cycle of constant reacting.** (Interviews 2022.)

**Farm work is binding, and it is difficult to break away from it. In cases of illness, it is not easy to find a replacement employee,** which is why agricultural entrepreneurs work even when they are sick (Interviews 2022). In Finland, **livestock farmers who meet the legal requirements for stand-in scheme have the option of stand-in help in cases of illness** (figure 14). Stand-in services are organized by municipalities which Mela has an agreement. It is possible to use provided stand-in only for work related to animal care. **Plant cultivation work is not included in the scope of stand-in services and plant cultivation farms do not have a similar system** (Mela 2019). According to agricultural entrepreneurs' work well-being barometer, working when sick is more common among agricultural entrepreneurs than among wage earners. **Almost half of the agricultural entrepreneurs answered that they had had to work when they were sick.** (Mela 2022.)

## Farmers' holiday and stand-in scheme

- For livestock farmers who work on daily basis looking after animals. Farmer needs to have compulsory MYEL insurance, livestock production is taxed in accordance with the Agricultural Income Tax Act, there is at least six animal units, no receiving a pension that disentitles these benefits and the farm is not a "farm in difficulty" according to EU agricultural subsidy regulations
- The annual leave entitlement for farmers is 26 days per year (free of charge)
- Agricultural entrepreneurs can receive stand-in help and additional leave at a subsidised price (for example due to illness)

Figure 14. Farmers' holiday and stand-in scheme for livestock farmers (Mela 2019).

Many plans are made at farms, for example in connection with investments. **Calculations may be made for different alternatives, but nevertheless in such a way that the different alternatives mean, for example, price risks concerning the investment. In order to support acting in changing situations, it is suggested that plans should also be made for completely separate alternatives.** In this way, the farms have more operational possibilities under consideration. However, such a method of operation requires extensive professional skills and the ability to see alternative operating models from both the advisor and the agricultural entrepreneur. (Interviews 2022.)

**Professional farm management is seen as a protective factor for mental health. Comprehensive farm management is seen to consist of three different areas: Self-management, work management and network management** (Figure 15). (Interviews 2022.)

### Professional management of an agricultural enterprise as a protective factor for mental health

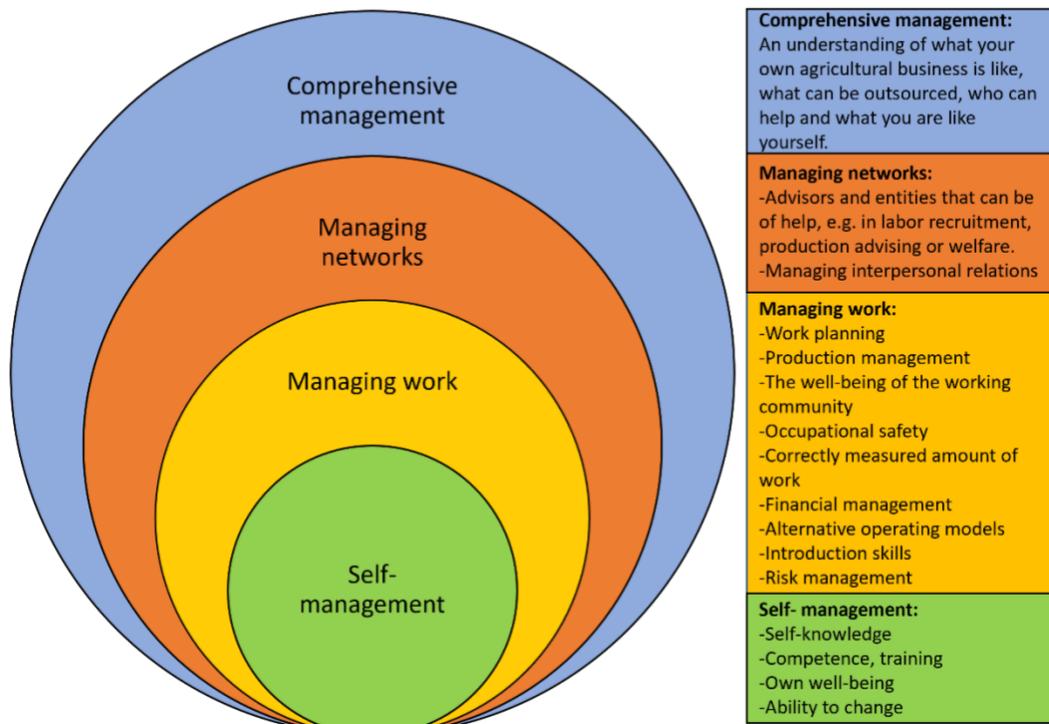


Figure 15. Professional farm management

### Impact of professional life on mental health

Since 2017, the Farmers' Social Insurance Institute (Mela) has done a **work well-being barometer that clarify the work ability and well-being experienced by agricultural entrepreneurs**. The latest data was collected in February-March 2022 and it was weighted to reflect the structure of Finnish agriculture according to production direction, area and farm size. The distribution of production directions was crop farming 30%, dairy farming 21%, other crop farming 17%, cattle farming 12%, other production directions 9%, other livestock production 7% and pig farming 4%. 4,718 responses to the survey were received. (Mela 2022.)

**Work satisfaction was the lowest in the measurement history.** In the results of 2022, only 40% of respondents were satisfied with their work (2020: 47%). The most satisfied with their work were young entrepreneurs, farmers with larger farms and crop farmers. (Mela 2022.)

The experience of work ability of agricultural entrepreneurs is generally lower than other professional groups. The lower experience of work ability is explained by physically demanding and accident-prone work. **In addition to job satisfaction, agricultural entrepreneurs' experience of their work ability has decreased compared to previous years** (estimate 7 on a scale of 0-10. 2020 & 2018: 7,2). **It is worth noting that based on the results of 2022,**

**especially the experience of work ability of the younger age groups (under 40 and under 54) had weakened.** (Mela 2022.)

Among the psychological symptoms, the most common was **weakness and tiredness, which was experienced by about half of the respondents. Tiredness** was most common on dairy farms. Compared to previous years, especially **depression** (2018: 23 %, 2020: 22 %, 2022: 28 %) **and irritability** (2018 & 2020: 33 %, 2022: 39%) **had increased.** Two thirds of respondents experienced stress. **On animal farms, larger farms, and entrepreneurs under the age of 40, stress and psychological symptoms were more common.** (Mela 2022). 78% of Finnish Lakeland livestock entrepreneurs had experienced mental stress during the past six months. 77% of them had not look for help for mental stress, although only 29% of them felt that they could manage without help. **Perceived symptoms of mental stress were irritability, sleep problems and anxiety.** (Hämäläinen 2022.)

MTK-Satakunta members responded (175) to the survey aimed at agricultural entrepreneurs in the MTK-Satakunta area. The data was collected at the beginning of 2021. One of the goals was to identify what kind of support agricultural entrepreneurs will need in the future in relation to their work ability. In connection with the changes, almost half of the agricultural entrepreneurs were worried about the change in the attitude climate (49%), 45% were worried about their liquidity and 37% were worried about their own ability to cope. **More than half (52%) of the respondents wanted more information about mental well-being.** (Hindström 2021.)

Agricultural entrepreneurs have the same symptoms of mental health disorders as all individuals. There can be large variations in the symptom picture. It is perceived to be difficult to get sufficient support for mental health challenges related to coping. **Support measures to support work ability in Finland are designed to support the needs of wage earners rather, and thus the options available to entrepreneurs are narrow. Exhaustion must be tackled with sufficient efficiency early enough** so that the situation does not threaten the agricultural entrepreneur's ability to work in the long term. (Interviews 2022.)

**Farmer can work as an agricultural entrepreneur, even if the farmer has mental health challenges. However, a positive attitude towards services that support mental health is a prerequisite for succeeding at work.** The challenge is the low availability of mental health services in rural areas and the **stressfulness and workload of farm work.** Mental health plays a big role in how farmer manage to take care of the farm. When, for example, it is difficult to **cope with work and the mood starts to get depressed, seeing your options becomes narrower. It's easy to isolate yourself on a farm.** Mental health challenges can manifest in many ways, for example, in addition to **depression, aggression and excessive alcohol use.** (Interviews 2022.)

## Existence of stigma associated with mental health

According to the Finnish mental health barometer 2021, **attitudes towards people with mental health problems have become more positive in recent years.** However, there is **still a stigma around mental health.** 11% of respondents are afraid of meeting people who have experienced mental health problems. The assumption that you cannot live a full life with mental health problems is also still strong (41%). (The Finnish Central Association for Mental Health 2021.)

**Stigma related to mental health are seen to have decreased among agricultural entrepreneurs as well. Rural areas are seen to be somewhat behind cities in reducing stigma. Talking about mental health at the level of society, including among agricultural entrepreneurs, has increased. The threshold for asking for help has lowered over the past ten years.** (Interviews 2022.)

However, there are still stigma about mental health, especially in rural areas. **The stigma of “being crazy” or misconceptions, such as that a doctor would rule out hunting guns for any reason related to mental health, lives on especially in rural areas. Shame and fear of dealing with mental health problems are obstacles to seeking treatment.** Mental health is not yet seen as that we all have a vulnerable mind and for others, the threshold for seeking help is high. **Seeking help for mental health problems is also prevented if there is a person who belittles the symptoms experienced by others.** (Interviews 2022.)

## Training on mental health

**At the moment, there are trainings available for agricultural entrepreneurs that supports mental health. Mental health first aid 1 (MHFA1) -training for agricultural entrepreneurs is popular.** MHFA 1 -training is a trademark of MIELI Mental Health Finland association in Finland and all instructors have undergone their training. Since 2018, there are almost 1,000 agricultural entrepreneurs who have undergone training. **MHFA 1 -trainings for agricultural entrepreneurs are organized by the Support the Farmer -project.** The MHFA1 -training is two days long. All of the participants in the training are agricultural entrepreneurs. **Based on the feedback, the peer support received from the group is highly valued.** The training is organized in a comfortable environment and the Support the Farmer -project pays for accommodation and food during the training. Thus, **training is at the same time a break from everyday life for the agricultural entrepreneur.** The Support the Farmer -project **also organizes other course that support the mental health of agricultural entrepreneurs, both in person and remotely.** (Interviews 2022.)

**Training supporting mental health is organized on a smaller scale in several projects aimed at agricultural entrepreneurs. Matters related to mental health are**

**presented, for example, in various farm management projects.** The best way to organize training related to mental health is considered to be a way in **which topics related to mental health are discussed along with other topics.** It is not believed that there will be enough participants for the events dealing only with mental health. However, the MHFA 1 -training makes an exception here. (Interviews 2022.)

**Training of farmers network members on the subject is considered as important as training aimed at agricultural entrepreneurs.** It is important that the representatives of the networks **create such an atmosphere with their presence that farmer can also talk about issues related to mental health.** Network members training covers, among other things, **bringing up a topic, meeting farmers in different situations and getting to know the network. Knowing the network ensures that the agricultural entrepreneur is directed to the right party.** Network member training is currently the responsibility of the Support the Farmer -project. There are no other organizations responsible for training. At the same time, it's felt that if the Support the Farmer -project is not responsible for the training of the networks, there is no other entity that would be responsible for the training. (Interviews 2022.)

**A significant development target is to attach studies that support mental health to all school levels in the agricultural sector. Studies that support mental health are seen as an integral part of agricultural business management studies. The most important skills that are hoped to be developed are the ability to recognize a state of mental health, the ability to recognize one's own limits, increasing self-knowledge and emotional skills.** (Interviews 2022.)

### **Prospects for the mental health of agricultural entrepreneurs**

The sustainability of services that support the mental health of agricultural entrepreneurs is important. **In addition to the need for permanent services, more preventive services must be developed to promote mental health.** At the same time, the availability of the service network in rural areas needs constant attention. Threats to mental health in the future (figure 16) have been described as largely the same type of issues that agricultural entrepreneurs face now. The concern is that the impact of existing mental health risk factors will increase. (Interviews 2022.)

Future threats to the agricultural entrepreneur's mental health	
<b>Economic uncertainty</b>	The economy is a big factor of uncertainty. Agricultural entrepreneurs are perceived to have only few opportunities to influence their income generation. It is very difficult to predict costs. The economic effects caused by the change in the period of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) will only be seen close to the implementation date.
<b>Network fragmentation</b>	The number of agricultural entrepreneurs is decreasing, so there may not be neighborly help and conversation partners anymore. Loneliness increases. The network of both mental health and other health services is fragmented and concentrated in urban areas. Fewer than before understand the work of an agricultural entrepreneur and the factors affecting it.
<b>Changes that cannot be influenced</b>	The volatility of the agricultural sector. Uncertainty is seen to be increasing all the time. Agriculture is undergoing drastic changes. The uncertainty related to changes in CAP –period is also seen as a threat to mental health.
<b>Laying blame</b>	Blame for climate change, animal rights and poor condition of nature shifted and escalated towards farmers even more than currently. Blame is also seen as a threat to professional identity and professional pride.
<b>Lack of elements supporting work ability</b>	The development of working life and mental health is considered in Finland for the needs of wage earners. Innovations that develop services do not support the needs of entrepreneurs.
<b>World situation</b>	Pandemics, wars and other crises affecting society are also a threat to agricultural entrepreneurs and food production.

Figure 16. Future threats for mental health

Threats to mental health were easy to spot, but opportunities were hard to spot. It is not easy to find ways to eliminate threats to the mental health of agricultural entrepreneurs, because agriculture is currently affected by such a large number of mental health threats. **The increase in mental health support and the mental health know-how of agricultural entrepreneurs, increase in appreciation, a fair price from the market, the increase of influence opportunities, and digitalization were seen to create opportunities to support the mental health of agricultural entrepreneurs** (Figure 17). (Interviews 2022.)

The future possibilities of the agricultural entrepreneur's mental health	
<b>Development of support</b>	The skills of the network to bring up a topic and networking is strengthening. Asking for and receiving help becomes easy. The educational level of agricultural entrepreneurs increases, and the knowledge and skills related to mental health develop.
<b>Appreciation</b>	Self-sufficiency, domestic food and primary production are valued. People are interested in the origin of food. The price that can be obtained from the market is such that the financial survival and development of farm is possible. Finnish food becomes a brand known for its purity and high quality.
<b>Changes that the agricultural entrepreneur can influence</b>	Working life is becoming more diverse. The growth of farm businesses increases professional farm management. On the other hand, sideline agricultural entrepreneurship is seen to be increasing. It is significant that the things that farmer can influence are observed on the farms.
<b>Digitalization</b>	Digital tools enable collegial support, even if other agricultural entrepreneurs are not physically nearby. Digitalization increases the availability of health services over long distances. Farm automation reduces the amount of physical work that can reduce the large workload of an agricultural entrepreneur.

Figure 17. Future possibilities for mental health.

## 5. Mental health in the Finnish policy making: agenda-setting initiatives

**National Mental Health Strategy and Programme for Suicide Prevention 2020–2030.** The mental health strategy has five priorities, which are mental health as capital, mental health of children and young people, mental health rights, services and mental health management. The goals of the strategy will be implemented by increasing the availability of preventive and treatment services at the basic level, the cooperation structure will also be developed. In addition, employment-oriented mental health services, level of mental health competence in municipalities, and suicide prevention will be improved. To achieve the goals, several proposals for measures are presented. For example, as a measure to achieve wide-ranging services in line with human needs, it is proposed to develop versatile services that are easily accessible and bring into the everyday environments of client, especially for people who are difficult to reach for various reasons or are at risk of being marginalized, and for groups who are vulnerable in terms of their cultural or social status. In addition to this, the most difficult-to-reach persons should be applied for by searching work. (Vorma, Rotko, Larivaara & Kosloff 2020). The Support the Farmers -project, which is currently in operation, also supports this measure for agricultural entrepreneurs

**Therapies for the frontline** - project. The fragmented mental health services and long queues for mental health services in Finland can be fixed. Currently, the costs of mental health disorders are already over 11 billion euros per year. Mental health disorders are the most common cause of sick leave. In the Therapies to the Frontline - model, primary care staff are trained as brief therapists. In addition to training, the project will form a network of therapy coordinators, develop digital services, and monitor the quality of therapies. The goal is that people suffering from mild and moderate mental health disorders can quickly access effective treatments. The project will last until the end of 2023, and during that time permanent service structures will be created in the regions. The Therapies at the Frontline project is financed with a state grant. (Terapiat etulinjaan 2022).

A Finnish citizen with the right to vote can make **a citizens' initiative**. A citizen's initiative can be used to propose a new law, to propose a change to an existing law, or to propose the repeal of an existing law. If the citizens' initiative collects at least 50,000 declarations of support within six months, it will proceed to the parliament's consideration. A citizen's initiative can be supported by over 18-years old Finnish citizen with the right to vote. (Kansalaisaloite 2022).

**“The therapy guarantee”** citizens' initiative advanced to parliament's consideration in 2019. The goal of the initiative was to make psychosocial treatment methods within the scope of primary

care and available in a timely manner. The goal of the initiative was to make it possible for people in a weaker financial position to have access to private sector psychotherapy. According to the therapy guarantee, the treatment must start within one month after the need for treatment has been established in primary health care. The initiative received widespread support, but based on the proposal, it will only be partially implemented in legislation. According to the proposal, only the easily and quickly accessible mental health work appointments organized in primary health care are covered by the treatment guarantee, psychotherapy is not covered by the guarantee. (Mielenterveyspooli 2019, YLE 2022).

**“In favor of psychotherapy - Citizens' initiative to change psychotherapy training to free”** - the citizens' initiative advanced in the parliament in 2021. The consideration of the initiative ended in the parliament in May 2022. The citizens' initiative demanded that the psychotherapy training program in Finland be reformed into a free education. In the initiative, it was proposed to start preparations for the creation of legislation that enables more equal access to psychotherapy training, primarily according to professional ability, regardless of economic status. Now, the government continues to clarify funding options, so that adequate availability of psychotherapists and other persons working in mental health work and the availability of services in both national languages can be secured. The clarification will not be limited to only the cost of education, but the position of psychotherapy education in the education system must also be resolved. The report states that currently the training of psychotherapists is unreasonably expensive for an individual student to pay for. (Eduskunta 2022).

## 6. Strategies and initiatives to improve farmers' mental health

**The Support the Farmer -project offers help and support in various situations to agricultural entrepreneurs.** The model deals with the agricultural entrepreneur holistically. Meetings are mainly organized on the farm. The project worker can be a **support in relation to, for example, coping, interpersonal relationships, challenges of agricultural business, changes on the farm, and work ability challenges.** Through the project, it is possible to obtain a **voucher for the professional help.** Farmer can get a voucher for individual therapy, couple therapy, family therapy, psychologist or psychiatrist sessions, work supervision or other expert services that support coping, for example debt counseling. The value of the voucher is €500. **Support the Farmer -project gathers a network of stakeholders to implement the early care model.** The project also trains network members in early care model and issues related with mental health. The Support the Farmer -project works throughout Finland. The project is financed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and it is free of charge for agricultural entrepreneurs. (Mela 2022b). The project is financed one year at a time. Currently, it is known that the funding will be arranged for 2023 and the funding has been reserved from the 2024 budget.

**A rural support network of voluntary workers offers peer support.** Through them, it is possible to get peer **support by phone, through various online chats** and in troublesome situations they can also go to the farm and **temporarily help with everyday work.** Support and help are free. (Maaseudun tukihenkilöverkko 2022).

**In the CAP 2023-2027 advisory services,** in the advisory section on the **change resistance of farms,** farms have the opportunity to obtain **advice on risk management,** which includes a farm risk survey, recommendations for minimizing risks, work safety and a risk management plan. In addition, **social dimension advisory is part of the change resistance advisory section.** Advising in the social dimension can provide advising related to well-being, for example in terms of coping, networking and cooperation skills. **The advice section on the change resistance of farms supports topics that affect the mental health** of agricultural entrepreneurs. The agricultural entrepreneur pays the VAT share for the advice. The maximum compensation per farm is €10,000 during the CAP period. (CAP-plan 2023-2027 for Finland).

## 7. Conclusion

- **Agricultural entrepreneurs are seen to be at risk of social exclusion, and social exclusion is seen to be already happening.** Services are constantly moving away from rural areas, so **society is not expected to notice the social exclusion of farmers.**
- The best way to organize training that supports farmers mental health is to **discuss mental health in connection with other issues.**
- **The data give indications that mental health-based illnesses can be treated more poorly, and mental health-based illness is a stronger predictor of agricultural entrepreneurs' disability pension than musculoskeletal disorders.**
- **Based on the age distributions of disability pensions granted in the last five years, it can be observed that disability pensions based on mental health are currently focused on younger age groups.**
- **The experience of work ability of the younger age groups (under 40 and under 54) had weakened.**
- **Economic factors are seen as a significant risk factor for an agricultural entrepreneur's mental health. It is seen that only temporary reliefs are available for the economy, not long-term solutions.**
- **For agricultural entrepreneurs, there are many things beyond their control. It is important to highlight issues that the farmer has the opportunity to influence.**
- **The constant need to react to various changes puts a strain on mental health.**
- **Training of farmers network members on the mental health and bringing up a topic is considered as important as training aimed at agricultural entrepreneurs.**
- **Professional farm management is seen as a protective factor for mental health.** Comprehensive farm management is seen to consist of three different areas: Self-management, work management and network management.
- **Need for permanent services to promote farmers mental health.** Currently, the Support the Farmer -project is the only entity that takes responsibility for promoting the mental health of agricultural entrepreneurs and training farmers network members in matters related to mental health.
- **A significant development target is to attach studies that support mental health to all school levels in the agricultural sector.** Studies that support mental health are seen as an integral part of agricultural business management studies. The most important skills that are hoped to be developed are the ability to recognize a state of mental health, the ability to recognize one's own limits, increasing self-knowledge and emotional skills.

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