

SUCCESS STORIES

## Farmers4Safety – Managing Risk Together

Farmers4Safety Managing Risk Together EIP AGRI Pilot project adopted a 'peer-to-peer' mentoring and champion approach to engage farmers in an attitudinal and behavioural change towards farm safety by tackling and improving the social norms around farm safety and emotional wellbeing

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Name of the interviewed	Niamh Nolan – Project Manager
Type of farming activity	Organisation established in partnership with the Department of Agriculture Food and Martin and The Irish Rural Network. The project was delivered on the ground by a trained Farm Mentor network comprising seven personnel; the Project Manager / Co-ordinator and the six mentors (2 per county). The project was delivered with BRIDE (Biodiversity Regeneration in a Dairying Environment) project, the Duncannon Blue Flag Farming & Communities Scheme, the New Futures Farming Group, and the Health and Safety Authority are carrying out this project in their catchment areas.
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Farm Safety Health and Wellbeing

### What is your story?

Farmers4Safety was an 18-month evaluated pilot project funded by the Irish Department of Agriculture Food and Marine and Food.

Lead partner, Irish Rural Link (IRL), established the peer-to-peer mentoring concept as a viable and successful precedent based on results from a previous Farm Safety Mentor Programme 'Farmers Inspiring Farmers', which took place in 2013 and focused on four midlands counties. This received positive acclaim and identified both challenges faced by farmers and possible solutions which could be adapted within other regions of the country.

Furthermore, peer-to-peer mentoring has been recognised within the Seanad which stated that "researchers have discovered that when there is a facilitated peer engagement of farmers talking to farmers in a practical way focusing on an issue on an ongoing basis, it tends to lead to greater adoption of the code of practice" (p. 169). [Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report on Farm Safety \(2015\)](#).

This farmer led approach has been highly valued by the participants in the previous programme and this project sought to expand upon it. Through successful delivery of this core principle, the project aims to achieve its objectives of raising awareness on farms regarding health, safety, and wellbeing. In addition, the project aimed to introduce the focus communities to practical ways of addressing the identified challenges and highlight the supports that are available.

The main aim is to signpost farmers and farm families to the relevant supports/services that they may require, to create a permanent farm safety, health, and wellbeing network by using appropriate discourse for farmers. Also to highlight the importance of creating a buddy system to tackle the issue of social isolation within the agriculture sector.

To achieve these aims and more a Team of Farmer Peer Mentors was established and trained into delivering the overall aims and objectives of the F4S Project.

An important aspect of their training was participation in a number of Mental Health Awareness workshop provided by Mental Health Ireland's Development Officer Finola Colgan with national lead for liaising with farm organisations and farmers

### Handling the situation

The types of issues that the Peer Mentoring Team addressed included Farm Risk assessment – as required by the Department of Agriculture Food and Marine

A key initiative that developed in partnership with Mental Health Ireland was a Quality-of-Life Index – self assessment – that can be downloaded and completed by the farmer in his or her own time. It was set out as follows:

- 1. Workload** – This section provides the user with an opportunity to assess their workloads
- 2. Physical and Mental Health** – This section provides the user with an opportunity to assess their physical and mental health
- 3. Quality Time** – This section provides the user with an opportunity to assess how you use your free time and interact with others

There is a rating scale attached to the questionnaire that provides the user you with an opportunity to become more aware of how they are getting on with their farming and personal life. It helps identify what areas the user may address. Links are provided to source help and support

Peer to Peer Mentoring: During the pilot phase of the project the Farm Peer Mentoring Team met farmers on site, assisted them with their farm risk assessment safety plans. Created buddy systems between farmers and conducted farm safety health and wellbeing attitudinal surveys. This activity allowed farmers to have a one-to-one conversation with their peer and to discuss or seek advice on any mental health concerns.

The farmers and farm families were open to conversing with the peer mentors because they were fellow farmers, making it easier for them to connect, listen, communicate, and engage with each other, thus creating a collaborative learning environment.

### Conclusion and tips

The Farmers4Safety – Managing Risk Together EIP-Agri Project Report April 2023 findings included in the post-evaluation and attitudinal survey showed that 94.8% of participants found the "Farmer4Safety" initiative beneficial in raising awareness of health & safety and mental wellbeing. Farmers4Safety – Managing Risk.

The team also discovered that 89.5% of farmers and their families would like to see more free mobile health check-ups, such as blood testing, eye test, heart monitoring, at their local marts or co-ops, highlighting the need for more accessible healthcare options.

Additional relevant numbers are:

35% of respondents knowingly take risks on the farm.

55% of participants find it difficult to spend quality time with their partner and their farm family when they are constantly working and thinking about the farm, while 45% do not.

#### Tips to other farmers

'It is important for farmers to look after their physical and mental health to ensure farm safety and safe practices. It is well recorded that most farm accidents are related to risk taking due to stress and time pressures.'

'Prioritize self-care – ensuring a good regular sleep pattern, eat well, make time for family and friends. Seek help and support rather than deny that there is a problem or problems.'

Have an annual medical check up to reassure your health status and if there are any potential underlying problems that can benefit from immediate attention. Use self-help lines.

It is a project that could be adapted to suit the aims and objectives of FARMRes Aim to highlight the essential role and value of the 'peer-to-peer' mentoring approach in tackling and improving the social standards around farm safety, health, and wellbeing.

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