

SUCCESS STORIES

Training as a mental health tool for young farmers

This case study shows the importance of training in the technical and management areas necessary for successful farming. The more prepared farmers are, the more tools that are made available the greater the opportunities to prevent situations of uncertainty, which should result in fewer situations that are difficult to manage from an emotional or mental health point of view.



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Our promoter is a new farmer who has to take over the reins of the family business due to his father's illness. Having no previous experience in managing a farm causes him frustration and confusion, which leads him to a situation of continuous stress and lack of self-esteem, and he has to hand over many decisions to his workers. The desire for self-improvement led him to enrol in a vocational training programme in which he acquired the knowledge and skills that eventually led him to take over the farm in a satisfactory manner.

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Name of the interviewed	Anonymous
Type of farming activity	Olive grove and cereals.
Mental health issue and affecting factors	<p>MH issue: Anxiety, frustration, confusion, lack of self-esteem.</p> <p>The factors that most affected this case are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolation from activity. • Long self-learning cycles. • Uncertainty of the activity. • Lack of technical knowledge.

What is your story?

Our case study person is a professional with a background in economics, who belongs to a family with long experience in agriculture, who owns an average Olive and Cereal farm. While working in Madrid in a multinational company, his elderly father falls ill, a situation that makes it difficult for him to continue farming. For this reason, our case study person decides to leave his job to take over the family business.

From the beginning, our promoter found himself alone, with only the help of his foreman. The process of adaptation was complicated, being used to planning and working in very professional teams, he finds himself in a field where conditions are uncertain and where he has to adapt to new situations all the time.

From the beginning, he shows a total lack of technical knowledge, he does not know when the tasks have to be carried out, he does not know the characteristics of the farm, the importance of irrigation and how to plan them, the nutritional and phytosanitary products, as well as the processes of commercialisation and negotiation with suppliers.

In these early stages he is lost, frustrated, and has to delegate many of the decisions to the farm workers, who help him on the basis of how things have always been done. Our person tries to learn, but the need to adapt means that he does not fully understand the routines and processes. He perceives that every year is different, that suppliers provide him with contradictory information, and he ends up not understanding what criteria he must apply in his decision-making processes. All this ends up frustrating him, causing stress and permanent confusion.

One day, talking to another young farmer, he tells him that he attended the Marmolejo School of Vocational Training for two years, obtaining certification as a Higher Agricultural Technician. He sees this new colleague as a well-prepared person with clear ideas, and since then he has not stopped thinking about whether the training could help him to resolve his confusion. He thinks that dedicating two years and combining work and training is going to be complex. However, he prefers to take on this extra work rather than continue with the situation he is in. So, he decides to enrol in Marmolejo the following year and start a training process that should give him the knowledge, skills and abilities to manage the farm according to his own criteria.

Handling the situation

He enrolled in the two-year vocational training course in which he has to study and take exams in various technical and administrative agricultural subjects. These include knowledge about crops, irrigation, pest management, nutrition, livestock, farm administration, labour management, machinery, mechanics, plant multiplication, phytotechnics, botany,

He talks to the teachers to inform them of his situation, and the very understanding teaching staff allows him to miss some classes, but on the condition that he takes his exams like the rest of his classmates. For two years, he makes the most of his time, as he can apply all the learning he acquires in the modules in his day-to-day life, so he attends as many classes as possible and studies with great enthusiasm and motivation, as he finds everything he is studying very practical.

After two years he feels fully trained, he feels that the great effort he has made has been worthwhile, he now has clear criteria on agronomy and agricultural business management and he feels confident and motivated to take up the reins of his professional life, with sound and solid knowledge for decision making.

Training is a fundamental tool for young farmers, who are a group more likely to suffer the difficulties of agriculture, as they have less experience and do not have sufficient tools to face the uncertainties and management of a farm, if they do not have sufficient support and tutoring.

The possibility of attending this education and training course also allowed him to meet other colleagues, exchange opinions, and interact with well-prepared teachers who supported him during the two years. This experience was highly motivational and has helped him to maintain a positive attitude towards the work he has to do, to the extent that he continues to run the family farm but has also started running his own farm.

Conclusion and tips

The desire for self-improvement and to feel in control of his decisions led him to train professionally in an activity with which he was unfamiliar. The desire to overcome frustrations and overcome stress and confusion led him to an exercise in self-improvement that required a great deal of effort and commitment. Necessity often pushes us to look for solutions; if we believe in them, we will always find rewards and experience validation.

Tips to other farmers

"We young farmers need to build our knowledge in a solid way, and to do this, in addition to obtaining information from our environment, it is always good to have a solid education that allows us to contrast the suitability of what is proposed to us, as well as allowing us to feel confident in the decisions we make".

The FARMRes Summary Report(SR) highlights the need to improve the farmer's decision-making processes and how management and planning are essential to adapt to the circumstances and uncertainties of the activity.

As we have seen in the SR, in addition to specific training for the prevention, identification and resolution of problems related to emotional health, training in professional farm management can be considered as a protective factor for mental health. Integrated farm management is considered to consist of three different areas: Self-management, work management and network management.

Therefore, professional training can become a very important solution to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills that enhance decision-making, farm management from a technical perspective that allows for better planning. This gives the farmer more confidence and self-confidence to face the difficulties that may arise.

Providing business management and personnel management training, so that farm leaders can professionalise their management and facilitate their decision making, can be very important factors from the point of view of promoting positive mental health and preventing the impact and consequences of farmers and other members of the agricultural sector experiencing mental health challenges.

Considering that the most vulnerable profiles were young farmers, women, and small farms, it is essential to bring technical training as a core tool and an opportunity for the prevention of situations affecting mental health. With more tools we have, there is better opportunities to respond to the complicated situations that may arise from time to time. This can reduce the consequences of these complications, avoiding falling into situations of stress, and reduce the risks of anxiety or depression.

FARMRes seeks to define and create prevention and self-help tools for farmers, and although the development of technical and management training is beyond the scope of the project, it is necessary to make it clear that this type of training can complement any preventive training approach related to the management of emotions and mental health. It may be interesting to provide access to platforms or vocational training courses that can ensure that this area of training is covered.

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