

SUCCESS STORIES

## Diana's path of resilience and self-assurance in the Vineyard

Diana is a young farmer from Tuscany who has been running her family's winery since 2008. Since she took over the farm, she began to experience anxiety due to the high levels of responsibility she was under, and a loneliness generated by leaving her friendships to move to the countryside. After several years of experiencing these feelings, in 2018 it all spiraled into depression as her children (twins) joined her life and, with them, more pressure and anxiety. It was at this point that she decided to seek professional help and, today, she is able to manage these problems more rationally.



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Name of the interviewed	Diana Lenzi
Type of farming activity	Family vineyard in Tuscany (Italy) where they produce traditional red wine known as Chianti Classico, as well as other crops such as olives for EVO and ancient grains for flour and pasta.
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Anxiety and depression, caused by strong sense of responsibility and loneliness.

### What is your story?

Diana struggled at many points with anxiety and mental health issues. Her story begins when she took over the reins of her family farm in 2008. At that time, she didn't feel she was at all equipped in terms of knowledge, skills or how to run a farm. But the fact that it was a family farm, something her parents had put so much effort into for so many years, it was important for her to take over and help them, so she felt all that pressure. At the same time, her parents ran the farm in a way that was not business-oriented; it was mostly a family property, where they didn't need her to survive (her parents had their own professions).

So, first of all, she felt two great burdens: on the one hand, that she had to take care of the farm and felt a great responsibility towards her parents; on the other hand, the pressure to make this farm financially stable and viable as she was leaving her job to take care of it, so she had to make it her livelihood.

Secondly, another big problem she went through in those years was that, at the age of 23, she was living in Rome, and so were all her friends and all her social life; and in those circumstances, she left Rome to move to the countryside, where she found herself alone and isolated. And while she was going through all that, Diana felt that her friends in the capital could not understand what she was

going through. She felt misunderstood, she was living in totally different situations than her friends in the city. It was in this loneliness that the farming community came to her "rescue", with a large community of people in her area and throughout Italy, where other young people were doing the same as Diana and going through the same situations as her, creating a sense of accompaniment.

At this time, she felt as if she was in a "jar" and someone was pouring water into it, and more and more and more and more, to a point where it was not possible to breathe, a feeling of being lost, and of not being able to find a solution to any of this, that all she could do was move faster and look for the surface, a feeling of oppression and loneliness.

### Handling the situation

For many years she didn't even realise she needed outside help, she just kept going and pushing herself, even though she had been surrounded all her life by many people who understood a lot about mental health: her father was Psychiatrist, her sister a Psychoanalyst and her other sister a Family Therapist. However, when she really understood that she needed professional help (for her the one that really helps you to overcome these problems) was when her twins were born, because this added a whole list of anxiety, pressure, feeling lonely, not knowing how to manage the farm and being a mother at the same time. For Diana it all ended up in a very bad depression.

When she went from crying once every few months to crying every day, she realised that something was going wrong, and she understood that she had to get help. From then on it took her 3 years to recover, because once you start with this help, you put everything into perspective: all the pressure, all the anxiety that she was feeling for the last 10 years. Having someone for those three years who helped her to understand her way of life and to understand that pressure and responsibility that she felt, made her not fall, and understanding that, in order to do things well, you have to be well too.

### Conclusion and tips

Today she feels more rational, she allows herself to be sad or afraid, and at the same time she understands that being sad or afraid is only a part of it and she looks for the part of her that is happy and hopeful. Moreover, she tries to understand better what it is that makes her sad or afraid (if it is related to finances, to a coworker, to nature,), and establishes what it is she needs to do to resolve the situation..

For example, remembering some summers where it never rains, and because of that, there are no grapes, which causes financial losses for the whole year. Such circumstances naturally create anxiety which Diana experiences every night. However when it is an anxiety created by circumstances beyond personal control, it is important not to let the situation or anxiety control the person.

### Tips to other farmers

First, start by seeking help from people who share your work, in the same way that her friends in Rome would never fully understand what she was going through, but her farmer friends would. Talk to people who work in the same field, because they are probably also going through the same problems, will understand, so lean on them to create a first level of support.

Secondly, there is no shame in seeking professional help. These professionals are people who have been trained and studied, and who dedicate their lives to helping these people who are struggling, and they are there for us, but we also have to allow them to help us. Seeking their help does not mean that you are going to be sick all your life. Recovery is possible with the right support. It does not even mean that you are sick, it means that you are going through a difficult period, which is sometimes shorter and sometimes longer. It is important to be decisive and to look for a person who will help you in those moments of worry and anxiety to alleviate the stress of it all, or stress.

As can be read in Diana's story, the main factors she mentions that affect her mental health coincide with those observed in the FARMRes Summary Report (SR) such as financial uncertainties and loneliness. However, there are also additional factors noted in the SR such as family responsibilities, climate change and an increase in psychological symptoms such as those experienced in recent years by Diana like anxiety and depression.

Going back to our SR, we understand how comprehensive farm business management is, therefore an important factor in preventing financial uncertainties. Such circumstances can lead to situations that can affect farmers' mental health. Also in relation to this report, we see how Diana is among several of the most vulnerable groups when she started to experience these mental health problems: young, female, inexperienced,

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