

SUCCESS STORIES

## Vojtěch's support network

Vojtěch Pýcha is a Czech young farmer that co-owns a 150-hectare arable farm operating as a limited liability company. He manages the day-to-day operations, cultivating crops like cereals, sugar beets, and soybeans. Working alongside his father, they hire seasonal workers during the harvest. However, Vojtěch faces mental health challenges due to a heavy workload, balancing farm responsibilities, studying and external representation of farmers' roles. Recently, the company suffered a €50,000 loss due to declining wheat prices, causing stress and uncertainty. Additionally he has found it difficult to share his struggles as others cannot relate to his unique circumstances.



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Name of the interviewed	Vojtěch Pýcha
Type of farming activity	Arable farm on 150 hectares
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Anxiety due to immense workload and price uncertainty.

## What is your story?

Vojtěch Pýcha helped establish his family 150-hectare arable farm into a limited liability company during his studies in 2021. He has since then been responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations on the farm. The core focus of his farming activities revolves around cultivating cereals (wheat, barley sugar beets, peas and soybeans).

Working in collaboration with his father, Vojtěch actively oversees the operation of the farm. During the harvest period, they hire seasonal workers to assist with the increased workload. Vojtěch places great value on providing a positive working environment for his father. It is also important for him and to work together as a team. He explains that it is not possible to delegate a lot of the work on the farm.

Recently, Vojtěch has experienced high levels of anxiety, as there have been multiple challenges on his farm and in his life. This has had a major impact on his mental health. The substantial workload on his shoulders, managing his responsibilities as an external representation of young farmers in the Czech Republic, overseeing day-to-day operations on the farm, and simultaneously pursuing his studies, has placed a significant strain on him. The constant pressure to excel in multiple areas and the recent uncertainty of the markets has contributed to him experiencing high levels of anxiety. Recently, the company has faced a significant financial setback due to declining wheat prices, resulting in a loss of €50,000. This unexpected financial blow has caused additional stress and concerns. Facing this extensive loss overnight that could have been invested on the farm has been haunting him.

Vojtěch finds it difficult to share his struggles with others due to the uniqueness of his working situation. The demands and pressures he faces as a farmer managing day-to-day operations while also studying create a sense of isolation. The absence of shared experiences makes it challenging for Vojtěch to find understanding and support from those around him. His mental health issues persist for Vojtěch and the issue of the situation seemed to get worse with the extension of his Master Degree. This unexpected extension contributes to an already difficult situation while Vojtěch tries to find coping mechanisms.

## Handling the situation

In handling the challenging situation, Vojtěch Pýcha has adopted several coping mechanisms that helped him navigate his mental health struggles. One such outlet for him is playing basketball. As a former semi-professional basketball player, engaging in this sport allows him to find solace and release stress. The physical activity and camaraderie with his teammates provide a much-needed respite from the pressures he faces. While Vojtěch has chosen not to seek professional help at this point, he remains open to the idea if his situation were to worsen.

Regarding the delegation of tasks, Vojtěch considers the option of involving his father more on the farm. However, he prefers not to overburden his father, recognizing the importance of maintaining a balanced division of responsibilities. Considering administrative tasks and legal representation, Vojtěch could delegate part of his task to a Legal solutions provider, which decreased the amount of weight on his shoulders considerably.

When asked about the flexibility of his studies, Vojtěch explains the unfortunate reality that his university does not consider individual cases or personal situations. This lack of flexibility poses a challenge for him, particularly with the course for which he had to extend his studies. The strict approach of the University's course policies limit his ability to adapt his academic pursuits to his personal circumstances.

## Conclusion and tips

Through his challenging experience, Vojtěch Pýcha has derived meaningful conclusions that shape his outlook and will guide his actions in the future:

**Personal Strength and Resilience:** Vojtěch has come to realize the importance of relying on his own inner strength and resilience when faced with adversity. His engagement in basketball and the support he receives from his teammates have shown him the power of personal coping mechanisms. He understands that he possesses the capability to overcome obstacles and manage his mental well-being. He also explains that he would be mindful of not putting himself under so much strain in the future and not overload himself with too many commitments.

**Recognizing the need for Support:** Although he has not sought professional help for his situation yet, Vojtěch has learned that there may come a point when external assistance may become necessary. He understands the value of acknowledging when his mental health may worsen and being open to seeking appropriate support.

**Navigating Institutional Constraints:** Vojtěch has learned firsthand the limitations imposed by his University's inflexible policies. He has experienced the disappointment of personal situations being disregarded and his individual needs not being considered. Vojtěch would welcome a more individual oriented approach toward students in his situation.

### Tips to other farmers

To fellow farmers, Vojtěch's advice is simple yet crucial: avoid overwhelming yourself by trying to juggle too many things at once. It's all too easy to get caught up in the never-ending demands of farm life and neglect your own well-being. Remember that your life and mental health are just as important as the work you do. If you find yourself struggling and things start to take a toll, don't hesitate to seek professional help. There's no shame in reaching out to experts who can provide guidance and support. Prioritize self-care, set realistic goals, and remember that taking care of yourself ultimately enhances your ability to manage your farm effectively. By focusing on your well-being and seeking help when needed, you can cultivate a healthier and more sustainable farming journey.

Vojtěch's experience offers valuable lessons for us to learn. Firstly, it emphasizes the importance of prioritizing mental health, even in demanding circumstances like in farming. His message to other farmers is clear and sharing his situation offers a stepstone for other to be open about the struggles they face in their daily work. Secondly, seeking support from others can provide understanding and encouragement during challenging times. While Vojtěch did not have many people to share his situation with, meeting with friends to play basketball helped him get out of his anxiety and shows the importance to not isolate when facing issues. Thirdly, finding a balance in responsibilities is crucial for sustaining well-being. Vojtech was mindful about sharing responsibilities and delegating the tasks when he can. While the situation causing his anxiety continued, he is consistently putting in place coping mechanisms.

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