

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 9th April 2021

Dealing with Stress in Farming

Stress is normal and part and parcel of our daily lives. In fact, a certain amount of stress is a positive thing – it can help to make us more focused and more productive in our work and in caring for our families.

Major life events such as the death of a loved one, divorce and marital separation have been identified as highly likely to result in stress. Concern over financial issues also rates quite highly in terms of stress. At the lower end of the scale might be attending to paperwork or handling cattle at the mart! A combination of major life events on top of everyday stresses within a short period of time will significantly increase the risk of stress symptoms.

The main problem with stress is when we feel overwhelmed by too many demands – be they work, family, financial etc. – and lose confidence in our ability to cope. For some of us, we may not be aware or fully recognise what is causing us to be stressed. This makes it more difficult to deal with the problem. Others might feel embarrassed or afraid to talk about being stressed. However you should be assured that the brave and responsible thing to do is just that – to talk, to try to get to the bottom of the problem and, when we need to, to have the confidence to seek help from a friend or a health professional.

If we do not learn to deal effectively with stress, over time it can impact in a very negative way on our health. Most of us have experienced feelings such as being worried, being tense or feeling unable to cope. The good news is that there are things you can do to manage stress at home and on the farm, with support from those around you. Talking to someone and sharing your concerns can have almost immediate benefits.

Stress signals?

A relentless build-up of pressure, without the opportunity to recover, can lead to harmful stress. The important thing is to recognise the warning signs while you can do something about it. Common warning signs are:

- Eating more or less than normal.
- Mood swings.
- Not being able to concentrate.
- Feeling tense.
- Feeling useless.
- Headaches.
- Feeling worried or nervous.
- Not looking after yourself.
- Not sleeping properly.
- Being tired.
- Being forgetful.
- Excessive drinking.

Why bother?

Stress can trigger anxiety and depression which can be difficult to recover from and you can experience physical symptoms such as:

- Back pain.
- Indigestion.
- Irritable bowel syndrome.
- Migraine.

- Heart and artery disorders.
- Rashes, allergies.

Positive Strategies to minimise Stress:

Social Involvement is crucial

This is made more difficult currently because of the COVID restrictions but there are things you can do:

1. Talk to trusted family members, neighbour and friends.
2. Pick up the phone and call your local agricultural adviser to discuss farming problems
3. Farm discussion groups have a valuable social dimension as well as a practical farm one which is positive to solving problems & managing stress. While groups are not meeting face to face right now, groups are still meeting remotely via the phone and online.

Health related goals

1. Have a regular health check-up with a G.P. Forming this habit is crucial in the long-term.
2. Exercise regularly; being physically active is a key approach to stress management. Farm work activity, however, may lead to 'strength' but not to 'aerobic fitness' which is required for cardiovascular health. Exercise along with social contact for leisure purposes within CoVID-19 guidelines plays a crucial also in managing stresses."
3. Eat a balanced diet, including fruit and vegetables. Some foods in excess such as alcohol, chocolate, coffee and soft drink cause increased tension.

Farming

1. Examine your farm for hazards and remove them.
2. Work organisation is crucial to avoid long hours, rushing and injury.
3. Examine the profitability of your farm-complete a profit monitor. Numerous studies indicate that efficiency beats scale in terms of profitability.
4. Check the length of your working day as excessively long working days can lead to isolation.

Leisure

1. Take time out every day for relaxation.
2. Take regular breaks and hopefully this summer we will all get the chance to take a holiday.