



## The Farmhouse Fact Sheet 2



# Mental Health, Wellbeing and Diabetes on the Farm

We know that people in farming communities are often doing it tough. A reliance on the environment and nature cooperating to ensure best outcomes for production, coupled with the lack of control we have as humans over these things, make farming one of the most critically important, but difficult jobs. Farming is also now impacted by globalisation, economic downturns, ageing population and political debates. Farmers are often in isolated settings with reduced contact with others from their community. There are many issues that are often outside of the control of the individual farmer. Big business is able to undercut the economy of farming, leading to increased competition and less financial return direct to the farm.

## Off your Quad bike!

In terms of diabetes and chronic disease, the way we farm has changed with the motorisation” of farming – meaning people often spend large amounts of time on and in vehicles and less time walking and doing physical work. Getting off the Quad Bike and walking for an hour or so a day can really help with prevention and management of diabetes and weight problems in particular. Physical activity also does wonders for our mental health as it uses up excess adrenalin created by chronic stress and gives us the “feel good” chemicals – Endorphins - that are released in our brain via exercise and activity.

## Support and family

Family breakdown can occur under these pressures and there can be conflict when children can't or do not want to stay on the farm, with a great deal of grief and loss for parents who remain on the farm when their children leave for the town or city. Some farmers have generations staying together on the farm, but there are many who lack this kind of support. In addition, many people on the land have grown up with a “toughness” about them in response to dealing with the difficulties of waiting for nature to deal a good or bad hand each season and in becoming so tough, have forgotten the need to reach out and ask for help sometimes. No person can survive without the support and care of others.





## The Farmhouse – support for farming families affected by diabetes

### Talk about it

Keeping worries, stresses and anxieties to yourself can have a deep impact on your wellbeing and physical health. Many people who develop diabetes say they were under a great deal of stress prior to their diagnosis. We certainly know that stress increases insulin resistance, making it harder for your pancreas to produce and use insulin, so keeping stress under control is just as important as a healthy lifestyle in management and prevention of type 2 diabetes in particular. Sharing and talking with other people who understand both your farming issues and personal reactions to these things, is very important

### Diabetes is more than sugar!

Throw diabetes into the mix and things get even harder. Diabetes brings its own pressures, stresses and daily management tasks. This may feel like an almost impossible ask to add in to the mix when you are on a farm. If you have been diagnosed with diabetes you may experience shock, anger, denial and withdraw from family and friends. If you don't know other people living with diabetes this can also add to the sense of isolation.

We know that people with diabetes experience twice the rates of depression. It is very important to be in tune with your mental health and that of your loved ones, so you can do something if you notice a downwards spiral. Diabetes can be a confusing and unpredictable disease. It is best managed in a routine and a farm life can be anything but routine! In this instance, having the right education and support can help you to best manage your health whilst still managing your farm and business. Access to mental health services is limited in rural areas and people can feel a sense of distress about seeking counselling support within small rural communities where people often know each other's business.



If you or your child has type 1 diabetes in particular you may feel very isolated as only about 15 % of all cases of diabetes are type 1, meaning it is likely there are very limited numbers of people with type 1 diabetes in your local area. In this case seeking support from creative sources such as online, can be vital to overall management, health and wellbeing. Families also need support.

At Diabetes Counselling Online you can access free, confidential email counselling, which can support you to work through some of the issues that may be worrying you. Talking through issues with people who understand can be very powerful. You can also share on our forums and in our chat rooms and join us on Facebook and Twitter.