

# **Cornwall's Farming Health Hub offers vital support to farmers struggling to cope with impact of COVID-19 pandemic.**

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As people in farming and those living and working in rural communities struggle to cope with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their physical, mental and business health, Cornwall's Farming Health Hub has produced a new leaflet aimed at signposting people to where they can go for help and advice.

Originally set up just over 12 months ago in partnership with organisations from the private, public and voluntary sectors, the Farming Health Hub offers a single source of business, physical and mental health support for farmers and their families.

With the lockdown restrictions already reported to have had a significant impact on the sale and distribution of local produce, including milk, and the availability of farm workers to pick seasonal crops, the decision to extend the restrictions for at least a further three weeks, has led to growing fears for the physical and mental health and wellbeing of people in farming and rural communities.

**"While people working in the agricultural sector can access some of the business support measures already announced by the Government, we know that many are struggling to understand and access the ever changing advice and guidance about what might be available to them "** said Jon James, Chief Executive of the Farming Health Hub. **"This is adding to the stress and pressures farmers and their families are under which is, in turn, affecting their physical and mental health and wellbeing.**

**"With so many people in rural communities across Cornwall dependent on farming for their income, it is vital that organisations pull together to support and guide the farming community. We have worked with people across the private, public and voluntary sector to develop this document which contains the latest information about the support which is currently available, as well as practical advice on how people can protect their physical and mental health.**

**"We hope that this goes some way in providing the farming community with the help and support they need to help them through these challenging and uncertain times and to prepare them for the times ahead. We recognise that a number of organisations are currently calling on the Government to increase the level of support for rural and farming communities and will provide further updates highlighting any changes. "**

Membership of the Hub includes a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations, including the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution; the Prince's Countryside Fund; the National Farmers Union; Cornwall Young Farmers; Exeter University; Cornwall's Public Health team, NHS Kernow and

GP's; Cornwall Development Company; auctioneers, banks and insurance companies and local churches.

Welcoming the publication of the new leaflet Ruth Goldstein, Chair of the Farming Health Hub and Cornwall Council's Public Health Consultant said **"Our key concern is that the farming community are able to access any support they need during this current situation and we are aware that getting this type of information to the right people is a challenge."**

**"We hope that by providing the information directly to people working in the farming sector, those in need of any type of support for their physical health, mental health or business health, will find it easier to access what is available."**

Local farmer and past Chairman of the Cornwall Branch of the NFU and RABI Martin Howlett said **"The resilience of farmers over the years is well documented; whether it be through continuous low incomes, animal disease challenge or weather extremes. However, it is the combined impact of shortages of farm supplies, lack of cash flow and the uncertainty of market trade, that creates the greatest damage to farm business, mostly family run on their financial, physical and mental health and wellbeing. The knock-on effect is inevitably felt by the wider rural communities during these most unprecedented times."**

**"As acknowledged 'key workers', it is reassuring to the farming community to know that both the Farming Health Hub (FHH) and the organisations which support it- such as the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI) - are there to offer and signpost farming help and rebuild, both during and, equally important, after this pandemic. Together with the genuine support of our Great British Public in recognising the value of our farm produce, buying local and now reconnecting with nature and its countryside, each give us renewed hope for the future."**

One of the organisations involved in the creation of the leaflet is the Farming Community Network . Cornwall FCN co-ordinator Sue Gillbard says the network is still taking cases which are being managed over the phone during the crisis.

**"We recognise that this is a very difficult time for the farming community"** she said. **"There is lots of useful information on the [Farmwell page](#) of our website and we also have a Helpline which is open from 7am until 11pm if farmers want someone to talk to. The number is 03000 111 999. "**

Kelly Evans represents Cornwall Young Farmers Clubs **"Many of our clubs are supporting the elderly and those isolating in their local communities by helping with shopping and daily requirements"** she said. **"We are very conscious of the impact the current situation will be having on isolated people living in the rural environment, so we are trying to keep in touch with members who require some help or just a listening ear."**

**“Our MyMindMatters campaign remains at the forefront of our minds and we are still working closely with FCN to ensure members receive the support they require. ”**

Ends

### **Notes to editors**

The Farming Health Hub was set up in March 2019 to create a network where farming communities can access Physical Health, Mental Health and Business Health advice, support and guidance in local venues such as livestock markets and pop up venues rather than farmers and their families having to visit more formal environments.

It includes representatives from a wide range of organisations, including the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution; the National Farmers Union; Cornwall Young Farmers; Exeter University; Public Health and other health and wellbeing specialists; auctioneers, banks and local churches.

The aim is to offer a range of support within the three main areas. These include general physical health checks, such as eye and hearing tests, diabetes, cholesterol and dental health checks and mental health support, including managing stress, anxiety and depression and coping with rural isolation and loneliness. The Hub also works with organisations such as Cornwall Young Farmers, Public Health and health partners, and employers to deliver mental health campaigns.

Farmers are also offered support in developing their businesses, including financial and legal health checks and advice; support with education and training and applications for grant funding and welfare support. Future plans include providing support for specific groups such as young farmers and women.