



An EIP-Agri Pilot Programme for Farmer Health & Wellbeing

FINAL EVALUATION
2023



**Men's
Development
Network**

Better Lives for Men, Better Lives for All

AN EIP-AGRI PILOT PROGRAMME FOR FARMER HEALTH & WELLBEING



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Development
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Better Lives for Men, Better Lives for All



eip-agri
AGRICULTURE & INNOVATION



**An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara**
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



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Authors: Richardson, N., O'Donnell, S., van Doorn, D., & Holmes, A.

Research Assistant: Aoibhe Richardson

Operational Group:

Seán Cooke (Chair) - Men's Development Network

Alison Holmes - University of Limerick

Aoife Rooney - Agricultural Consultant

Billy Goodburn - ICOS Skillnet

Clare Thoma - Men's Development Network

Colm Kelly Ryan - Men's Development Network

Conor Hammersley - South East Technological University

John Costello - Agricultural Consultant

Dr. John McNamara - Teagasc

Dr. Noel Richardson - South East Technological University

Séamus Cusack - Agricultural Consultant

Fiona Colgan - Mental Health Ireland

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FOREWORD

On behalf of the Board and Staff of Men's Development Network, we wish to congratulate the Operational Group and the Co-Ordinator on the tremendous work completed on FarmConnect. The quality of the work in this pilot initiative funded under the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) in addressing the significant issue of farmer health, safety, and wellbeing (FHSWB) paves the way towards ensuring it remains at the forefront of our thoughts as a nation. The consultative approach amongst the partners and the creativity of the programme design and implementation portray the innovation established on engaging farmers in relation to FHSWB. The feedback from farmers attending the programme highlighted the relational approach to engaging farmers is a critical component to effect long-lasting behavioural change around their health and wellbeing and we are delighted by the positive response of farmers to the programme. The report gives considerable detail to the items mentioned above, which should have a major impact on policy and programme development in this area. We would also like to thank the European Union and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine for their support to the programme.

Noel Synnott
Chairperson



Sean Cooke
CEO



SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Brief overview of FarmConnect programme

The FarmConnect programme is a European Innovation Partnership (EIP-Agri) project, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine. The aim of the pilot project was to support farmers in addressing some of the challenges that impact on their health and wellbeing as well as overall farm safety. The FarmConnect pilot programme focused directly on the physical and mental effects that contemporary farming challenges are having on farmer health and wellbeing in Ireland. It adopted a relational methodology and a strengths-based and capacity-building approach and was focused on early intervention and equipping farmers with the skills and competencies to manage their own health. The overall goal was to develop a sustainable, coherent, replicable, and nationwide programme by focusing on farm safety through the lens of farmer health and wellbeing, within a Knowledge Transfer (KT) model. The project was overseen by an experienced Operational Group and aimed to engage a total of 128 participants across the two pilot delivery areas of County Roscommon and County Waterford.

1.2. Outline of FarmConnect evaluation

A comprehensive independent evaluation was commissioned as part of the FarmConnect programme with a view to capturing key learnings that would inform the roll-out of a scalable, national, capacity-building health and wellbeing programme for farmers throughout Ireland (see evaluation methodology, section 3). This evaluation comprised three phases with each phase being guided by a number of research questions:

Development, design and roll-out of the Train the Trainer programme

- What was the background/rationale and what were the key momentum factors underpinning the FarmConnect programme?
- What key principles and philosophical approach informed the design, content, and methodology of the Train the Trainer (TtT) programme?
- How effective was the TtT programme in meeting the objectives of the programme?
- What were the key learnings and implications for future delivery of the TtT component of the programme?

Roll-out of the FarmConnect programme

- Was the roll-out of the FarmConnect programme effective in meeting the programme objectives?
- How effective was the programme in terms of adherence and retention of participants?
- How effective was the programme in terms of programme fidelity?

Implications for future roll-out and scale-up of FarmConnect programme

- What were the key learnings in relation to the process of delivering the FarmConnect programme?
- What are the implications for future roll-out and scale-up of the programme?
- Is there scope to translate the model to other sectors beyond farming?

The report is structured under a number of sections: following the Introduction (section 1), section 2 outlines the key aspects of the evaluation design and methodologies used; section 3 explores the key principles and philosophical approach that informed the design, content, and methodology of the FarmConnect programme; section 4 assesses how effective the Train the Trainer (TtT) programme was in meeting the objectives of the TtT element; section 5 considers how effective the roll-out of the FarmConnect programme was in meeting the objectives of the programme; section 6 elicits participants' key reflections on the pilot delivery and draws out the key learnings that might optimise and sustain engagement in the future delivery of the programme; and section 7 provides a conclusion and key recommendations for future delivery.

1.3. Why farmers' health?

Farmers' health' has traditionally been conceptualised as an occupational health and safety (OHS) issue, where the focus has tended to be on safety as opposed to health. This is not without justification: farming, in Ireland and worldwide, has the highest rate of workplace accidents and fatalities compared to any other occupation (Whelan et al. 2009; Griffin, 2013; Health and Safety Authority, 2021). For example, during the period 2011-2020, there were 208 farming fatalities in Ireland. The highest number of farm fatalities (47%) occurred in the age group ≥ 65 years (Health and Safety Authority, 2021). Indeed, increasing age is associated with an increased farming fatality risk in Ireland. Although there are Irish regulations in place regarding the requirement to report both fatal and non-fatal farm accidents, non-fatal farm accidents are highly underreported and consequently there is a lack of accurate data in relation to this (McNamara et al. 2021).

The increased focus on farmers' health in recent years has arisen against a backdrop of the negative impact that ill-health has on farm business and income (Whelan et al., 2009). Irish research published in 2013 showed that, during the period 2000-2006, farmers were seven times more likely to die from heart disease, five times from all cause of death, and three times from cancer compared to salaried employees (Smyth et al., 2013). Similarly, more recent Irish research from the ESRI into inequalities in adult mortality between 2000 – 2012 (≥ 15 years) found that farmers and agricultural workers had 2.4- and 2.5-times higher mortality respectively from cardiovascular disease (CVD) compared to the reference group of employees and managers (Duffy et al. 2022). This research also showed that both farmers and agricultural workers were, on average, twice as likely to die from cancers, with agricultural workers almost three times more likely to die from respiratory and all other causes of death compared to the reference group. In Ireland, CVD in particular has been found to be one of the main health issues causing disability among farm operators (Whelan et al. 2009), has been linked to absenteeism or an inability to work and loss of productivity (Burton et al. 2005; Grossmeier et al. 2015), and can directly impact farm productivity and, consequently, farm income. Farmers with poor self-reported general health are 1.75 times more likely to experience occupational stress and are at 2.01 times higher risk of injury (Jadhav et al., 2015).

The high levels of mortality among farmers can at least in part be explained by poor lifestyles and health behaviours. A study investigating the dietary habits of male farmers (van Doorn et al., 2020) found that three-quarters (72.1%; $n=619$) reported consuming salty and/or sugary snacks on a daily basis; one in seven (14.7%; $n=126$) reported drinking fizzy drinks daily, half (49.4%; $n=423$) reported eating poultry or meat twice or more times a day; one in five farmers (21.9%; $n=188$) reported consuming deep fried food three or more times a week; whilst the majority (79.3%; $n=652$) reported not meeting the recommended daily intake of ≥ 5 portions of fruit and vegetables. The 'Farmers Have Hearts – Cardiovascular Health Programme' found that 74% of farmers had four or more risk factors for CVD, putting them at a three times higher risk of developing heart disease (van Doorn et al, 2020). The study found that rates of overweight and obesity were particularly high among farmers (85.9%) compared to the 68% national average for Irish males (Department of Health, 2019). This is of particular concern, as it is known that overweight/obesity can impose not only a health risk for farmers but has also

been linked to a higher incidence of injury in farming, (King et al. 2016) as well as to reduced farming productivity and profitability (Pickett et al. 2015). Obesity was found to triple the likelihood of acquiring a new injury and to quadruple the likelihood of experiencing a re-occurrence of an injury among American farmers (Hunsucker and Reed, 2021). Donham et al. (2019) reported that the clustering of high blood pressure, high total cholesterol and BMI was associated with a 5.5 times higher odds of incurring an injury. Sleep deprivation is also associated with increased injury risk. Farmers who reported experiencing 'trouble staying awake during daytime in the last month' had a 2.2 times higher odds of incurring an injury (Heaton et al., 2010).

Farmers also experience a disproportionate incidence of musculoskeletal disorders (MSD). One study showed that more than one in two (56%) farmers in Ireland experienced lower back pain and musculoskeletal disorders (Osborne et al., 2010), whilst another found that farmers self-reported a three times higher incidence of rheumatoid arthritis compared to the national average for Irish males (van Doorn et al., 2018). Canadian research showed that 'more serious pain' as a result of MSD prevented 27.9% of respondents from performing regular work activities (McMillan et al., 2015). Arthritis has been found to impact job productivity and work discontinuation (Bertin et al., 2016), and has been associated with 1.9 higher odds for injury risk among older (>50 years) farmers (Heaton et al., 2010).

Concerns have also been raised about farmers' mental health. Farmers have been identified as a 'priority group' in relation to suicide risk (O'Donnell and Richardson, 2018). A preliminary analysis of data from Russell et al. (2022) revealed that between 2014 and 2020, farmers in Ireland had higher mortality rates from suicide than from farm accidents, which the authors attributed to an increase in occupation-related stress among farmers. This was borne out by a recent survey of farmers' mental health (n=241) conducted by the same team of researchers in UCD, which found that almost a quarter (23.4%) of farmers surveyed were considered at risk for suicide (Stapleton et al., 2022). An earlier study found that three in four farmers (75.3%) reported experiencing some degree of stress - 'to some extent' (62.3%) or 'often / very often' (13.0%) (van Doorn et al., 2020). An important context to these findings is that agricultural policy and the governance of farming practices have changed in order to deliver on increasingly specific regulations related to societal issues such as climate, biodiversity, animal welfare, and air and water quality. These changes have posed significant challenges to farmers' identity and masculinity, with ripple effects on their mental health (Hammersley et al., 2022). It should also be noted that high or prolonged levels of stress are associated with increased farm accidents (Simpson et al. 2004; Elkind, 2008).

In summary, the increasing focus on farmers' health in Ireland in recent years, is underpinned by a growing body of evidence relating to the excess burden of physical and mental ill-health experienced by Irish farmers, by the knock-on effects of ill-health on injury and farm safety, as well as by the negative impact that ill-health has on farm productivity, farm business and farm income.

SECTION 2: EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2.0. Introduction

This evaluation was carried out by an independent evaluation team comprising Dr Noel Richardson, Dr Shane O'Donnell and Dr Diana van Doorn (National Centre for Men's Health, South East Technological University) and Alison Holmes (University of Limerick). The evaluation was conducted using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to explore the experiences of a variety of project stakeholder groups with the FarmConnect programme. This section outlines the key aspects of the evaluation design and objectives, participants, data collection methods, data analysis methods and limitations.

2.1. Evaluation design

The evaluation was conducted in four discrete phases:

Phase/Objective 1. To understand the key momentum factors, principles and philosophical approaches that informed the design and development of the FarmConnect Programme.

Phase/Objective 2. To explore facilitators' lived experiences of participating in the Train the Trainer programme and its impact on their capacity to deliver the FarmConnect programme to farmers.

Phase/Objective 3. To explore farmers' lived experience of engaging with the FarmConnect programme and its impact on their health and health-related knowledge.

Phase/Objective 4. To identify strategies that supported or hindered recruitment and engagement with the FarmConnect programme.

2.2. Participants

There were four different stakeholder groups that were eligible to participate in the FarmConnect evaluation which included:

- Operational Group – those with an oversight role for Train the Trainer and FarmConnect
- Programme Development Team – those who were responsible for the development and implementation of the Train the Trainer and FarmConnect
- Facilitators – those who were responsible for delivering FarmConnect
- Farmers – those who participated in FarmConnect.

2.3. Data collection

2.3.1. Phase 1 – Key momentum factors and underlying principles of programme development

- **Qualitative.** One focus group was conducted with the Programme Development Team (Nov

2022; n=3) and another with the Operational Group (Dec 2022, n=7) to explore the key principles and philosophical approach underpinning the design, content, and methodological approach of the FarmConnect programme. Participants were recruited through the FarmConnect coordinator. Participants received an information sheet and completed an online consent form in advance of the focus groups being conducted. A topic guide (see Appendix 1) was developed to guide the focus group discussion which explored the background, context, principles and philosophies that underpinned the development of the programme, as well as participants' lived experiences of developing and supporting the delivery of FarmConnect. Information that was discussed regarding health outcomes, recruitment and engagement in these focus groups was also included in Phase 4 during the data analysis processes.

2.3.2. Phase 2 – Experience of Train the Trainer

- **Qualitative.** Two focus groups were conducted with facilitators (Sep 2022, n=12) on the second last day of the Train the Trainer residential training weekend. All participants were given an information sheet and provided written informed consent before the focus groups were conducted. The topic guide (see Appendix 2) focused on facilitators' experiences of TtT more generally, key learning outcomes, perceived readiness to deliver and recommendations for improvement.
- **Quantitative.** A questionnaire (see Appendix 3) was administered to facilitators (n=12) following completion of the TtT modules: (i) Farm Context and Rationale (online webinar series); (ii) FarmConnect Developmental Approach and Methodology (regional training day); and (iii) FarmConnect Programme: Weekly Sessions and Evaluation (residential training weekend). In Section 1, facilitators were asked to rate the following items on a scale of 1-5: (i) clarity of aims; (ii) appropriateness to learning needs; (iii) fit of content with aims; (iv) opportunities for peer interaction; (v) adequacy of support and interaction with course providers; (vi) adequacy of time allowed for each phase; (viii) quality of course of materials; (ix) accessibility of venue. In Section 2, facilitators were asked to rate their facilitation skills, content knowledge, engagement skills in relation to farmers, and readiness to facilitate FarmConnect on a scale of 1-5. Finally, participants were asked to rate respond to general questions about the quality of TtT and open text boxes were provided for additional feedback and recommendations.

2.3.3. Phase 3 – Health related outcomes of FarmConnect programme

- **Qualitative.** Interviews were conducted with farmers (n=10) to explore the impact of the FarmConnect programme on their health-related knowledge, health behaviours and farm safety. The FarmConnect coordinator shared the email addresses of the facilitators with the evaluation team with their permission for the purpose of recruitment. An information sheet was circulated to the facilitators toward the end of the FarmConnect programme. Facilitators were asked to share the information with the farmers and ask them to participate. Interested farmers shared their phone number or email address with the facilitators who passed them on to a member of the evaluation team, who subsequently organised a suitable time and date to conduct the interview. Written informed consent was obtain electronically before commencing the interviews. Although, it was originally intended to conduct a focus group, the busy schedule of farmers meant that this could not be organised. Alternatively, farmers were offered the option of participating in an interview via an online Zoom videocall or a phone call. The theoretical framework for acceptability (Sekhon et al., 2017) was used to frame the topic guide (see Appendix 4). Acceptability refers to the extent to which a person delivering or receiving a health focused programme consider it to be appropriate based on their experience of the programme (Sekhon et al., 2017). Therefore, participants were asked about how they felt

about the programme, perceived effort required to participate, perceived benefits, self-efficacy to engage, extent to which other things had to be given up to attend the programme, how easy the programme was to understand and the fit of the programme with their values/identity.

- **Quantitative.** A questionnaire was administered with farmers before (n=121) and after (n=115) the FarmConnect programme to examine its impact. The pre- (see Appendix 5) and post- (see Appendix 6) questionnaires asked farmers to rate their knowledge, confidence to make healthy choices, and perceived importance of health topics on a scale of 1-10 (readiness ruler; Miller and Rollnick, 2002). More specifically, farmers were asked to rate their knowledge, confidence and perceived importance in relation to: (i) physical activity; (ii) stress management; (iii) eating well; (iv) sleeping well; (v) awareness of thoughts and impact on wellbeing; and (vi) resilience to cope with challenges. Knowledge, confidence and perceived importance are important pre-requisites for health behaviour change (Rollnick et al., 2008). Therefore, an increase in these scores from before to after a programme is a good indicator of readiness to change or to adopt a particular behaviour, with higher scores indicating greater readiness to change (DiClemente et al., 2004; Hesse, 2006). Moreover, farmers were asked to rank themselves on a scale of 1-5 on the belief that decisions made about health impact farm safety practices. Information was also collected with regard to sociodemographic characteristics (age, education, main farming enterprise, and farm size in hectares) and expectations regarding learning outcomes in the pre-evaluation questionnaire while an open text box asking for suggestions to improve the programme was included in the post-evaluation questionnaire. Before the start of the first FarmConnect training session, a package containing the pre- and post-programme evaluation forms, a short instruction letter on how to use the evaluation forms, and two stamped addressed envelopes, were sent to the facilitators. Facilitators handed out the pre-programme evaluation forms and asked farmers to participate but reminded them that participation was voluntary. Participants' names were included as an identifier on both the pre- and post-evaluation questionnaires for data matching purposes and for the assumption of gender. To guarantee confidentiality, all names were then replaced by unique participant numbers and thus no names were used in the evaluation. The post-evaluation forms were filled in by participants after the final session was completed. The facilitators received a phone call, email and/or text message before the first and last session which acted as a reminder to handing out the evaluation forms. In total, 121 pre-questionnaires were collected from the 126 participants (response rate 96%) and 115 post-questionnaires were collected (response rate 91.3%).

2.3.4. Phase 4 – Experiences of recruitment and engagement with FarmConnect

- **Qualitative.** Two online focus groups were conducted following completion of the last phase of the FarmConnect programme (i) with the Programme Development Team (Feb 2023, n=2) and one with facilitators (Feb 2023, n=8). For the latter, the FarmConnect coordinator shared the email addresses of the facilitators with the evaluation team with their permission for the purpose of this phase of the evaluation. A member of the research team circulated an information sheet to the facilitators via email and asked them to participate in the evaluation. Facilitators indicated their interest to participate, and a suitable time and date was agreed to conduct the focus group via Zoom. Informed consent was obtained electronically before commencing the focus group. A topic guide (see Appendix 7) was developed to guide the conversation which explored their reflections on the content and co-facilitation experience of the programme, recruitment, strategies to sustain engagement and recommendations for future roll-out.

2.4. Data Analysis

2.4.1. Qualitative data analysis

Inductive thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The interviews and focus groups were videotaped or audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, anonymised and gleaned of any identifying information. Once the video and/or audio was transcribed the files were immediately deleted. Broad initial codes were generated to develop an emergent coding framework. Multiple coding techniques were then utilised wherein members of the research team coded a portion of transcripts to cross check coding strategies, negotiate interpretation of the data, collapse codes and agree on a coding framework. Codes were sorted into potential themes, aligned with the associated data extract and cross-checked by the research team. The research team worked with drafted sections for each code to further identify and refine thematic labels. Through the writing up of this report, consensus was reached about theme names and content upon which analysis was finalized. Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of participants. In some instances, participants occupied a dual role in relation to FarmConnect (e.g., Operational Group member and facilitator); the role designated to particular quotations has therefore been assigned in accordance with the particular context in which a quotation was taken. Moreover, in some phases participants were discussing a topic that was more relevant to another phase. For example, in Phase 3 farmers discussed strategies that the facilitators used to sustain their engagement which is information more appropriate for Phase 4. Therefore, data was presented in the section of the results that is had the best fit in relation to the evaluation objectives.

2.4.2. Quantitative data analysis

Frequencies of responses were provided for all available responses. This was the evaluation method used with the TtT component as the questionnaire was only administered post training. With regard to the FarmConnect quantitative evaluation, all data collected were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Both evaluation questionnaires consisted of single measurement variables and repeated measurement variables. Single measurement variables included socio-demographic and farming information and learning expectations (pre); experience of the programme; key learnings, and likelihood of recommending the programme to others (post). The results from these variables were based on all available responses and presented in frequencies. The repeated measurements included: self-rated importance, knowledge and confidence in relation to making healthy choices; and the repeated statement 'I believe that the decisions I make about my health impact my farming safety practices'. The data from these variables were matched, based on the number of participants taking part at both time points. Matched pre-and post-evaluation data were available from n=106 (84.1%) participants. As the results were calculated on the available responses for each question, this meant that the n numbers vary throughout the presentation of results. Statistical analysis included frequencies and Wilcoxon signed-rank test to examine the mean difference on matched pre-and post-data. This non-parametric test is used to compare paired samples in data which is not normally distributed (Corder and Foreman, 2014) and examines differences in mean by comparing the distribution of paired variables. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test analysis provides insight into negative differences, positive differences, ties, and total comparisons. A positive programme impact is demonstrated when the sum of the positive difference ranks is larger than the sum of the negative difference (and vice versa) whilst statistical differences were demonstrated by $p \leq 0.005$.

2.5. Limitations of evaluation methodology

In relation to the qualitative elements of this evaluation, peer leaders within the agricultural community were used in one-to-one recruitment of farmers to the programme. This may have resulted in the recruitment of participants with a particular interest in the area of farmers' health and potentially exposing our findings to a range of biases. A further limitation may lie in the transferability of the research findings from the interviews with farmers (n=10) to the wider cohort of farmers who participated in the programme. Additionally, while all research participants were assured of confidentiality and invited to speak openly, some may have been guarded in sharing their experiences, particularly in the focus group environment. With regard to the quantitative elements of this study, the sample size was small and not representative of the entire farming population. Caution needs to be exercised therefore with drawing conclusions from the evaluation findings. The evaluation was based on convenience sampling and therefore the results may not be generalisable to the population as a whole. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to conduct a follow-up survey with farmers who participated in the programme. Although the response rate to the programme evaluation was high, there was a large amount of missing data and incomplete evaluation questionnaires. It is likely that those participants feeling most strongly about the programme completed their evaluation questionnaires. In addition, the rating scale measurements could have been testing for some of the participants, leading to non-response bias. Finally, self-report measures relied on participants providing honest and reliable responses and these measures should therefore be treated with caution.

The results of this evaluation will now be presented in Sections 3-6. Each phase of the evaluation corresponds with a section in this evaluation report. Therefore, Section 3 corresponds with Phase 1, Section 4 corresponds with Phase 2, Section 5 corresponds with Phase 3, and Section 6 corresponds with Phase 4.

SECTION 3: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS, PRINCIPLES AND METHODOLOGIES UNDERPINNING PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this phase of the evaluation was to explore the key principles and philosophical approach that informed the design, content, and methodology of the FarmConnect programme. Findings are based on two focus groups conducted with the Programme Development team (n=3) and the Operational Group (n=7). This is an important phase of the overall evaluation for several reasons; (i) it captures the positioning of the FarmConnect programme within the context of more recent momentum factors in the areas of farmers' health and farm safety in Ireland ('Building upon solid foundations'); (ii) it charts the evolution of, and rationale behind, the programme methodology ('Breaking new ground: innovation in programme methodology'); and it tracks the key decision-making in the revamping and streamlining of the programme content in preparation for delivery ('Taking stock: re-calibrating programme content for delivery').

3.1 Building upon solid foundations

A number of important contextual factors underpinned the development of the programme. In the first instance, it was acknowledged that the issue of farmers' health had become more visible and prominent in recent years, not least in terms of being named as a key Government priority. This was seen as having prompted increased funding for and an exponential increase in farmers' health programmes. An important development in this regard also was the broader reframing of 'farm safety' as being more inclusive of health and wellbeing. This was seen as being instrumental in the upsurge of activity in 'farmers' health' initiatives, albeit in the context of farm safety, but that nevertheless paved the way and laid solid foundations upon which the current programme could build and indeed 'add to this lineage'.

"There has been Government commitment to this - to mental health and well-being being recognised as a farm safety issue... and for the success of programmes like this, we need continued Government support for farm safety that is inclusive of health and well-being... and having a ministerial brief on farm safety around the cabinet table". Fran, Programme Development team

"The other thing that was heartening for us was that partner organisations have been doing work with farmers over the past few years... and have been engaging farmers in health and well-being, albeit through the Trojan horse of farm safety". Alex, Programme Development team

Secondly, it was apparent that programme partners were bound together by a shared ethos and common purpose to improve farmers' health. There was broad consensus among Operational Group members that the programme was both important and a good fit with their respective organisations' priorities and that it represented a strategic alignment with organisational values and programmes of work.

“For us it aligned to what we were doing strategically...it fitted with what we were doing in the cooperative sector, it made sense for us to get involved... we felt it would reap benefits”.

Harry, Operational Group

It was felt that the timing of the programme delivery [post-Covid] was very apt; coming as it did at a time when rural communities were struggling to overcome a deep sense of isolation and disconnection due to the pandemic. For that same reason, the programme content and methodology were seen as being a good fit with this identified need.

“... isolation and [particularly post Covid] that sense of not being part of a community is a really important issue and the way we are tackling it seems to be gaining traction”.

Alex, Programme Development team

Some participants remarked on the inherent challenge of reaching a so-called ‘hard-to-reach’ (HTR) cohort (farmers) – widely regarded as being reserved, cautious and adhering to more traditional constructions of masculinity. Nevertheless, others expressed a more optimistic view, that because of the momentum generated through previous farmers’ [mental] health work, that farmers were now more open to engaging around mental health.

“I think there is a reluctance in the farming community to be signing up for anything that you don’t know what it is about...it’s a generally conservative sector of society...there’s a caginess there ‘what’s all that about’ or ‘never heard of that before’ or “I wonder who else is doing that”, the not knowing piece...or that you might have to speak in the room...I think in rural communities generally, there is a higher degree of reserve”. **Fran, Programme Development team**

“And I do think that farmers are now more open to talking about mental health because they have a better insight into what mental health is...that it is about their overall well-being as opposed to poor mental health or mental illness”. **Frances, Operational Group**

Building on these solid foundations not only set the programme up for success, but ultimately led to a stimulating and rewarding experience for participants involved in the pre-development stage. More specifically, participants agreed that their engagement was a very positive experience and they enjoyed working with like-minded people who were committed to farmers’ health and wellbeing; being exposed to opportunities for knowledge exchange and peer-learning; being part of the evolution of the programme from conception through to design of content; and witnessing the materialisation of these ideas into quality tangible outputs

3.2 Breaking new ground: innovation in programme methodology

There was a clear sense that the programme was novel, innovative and focused on breaking new ground, particularly in the context of the methodologies used. The programme development team was very conscious of the historical differences – ideological philosophical and practical – between what were seen as the more traditional knowledge transfer (KT) approaches to engaging and working with farmers, compared to the psychosocial and developmental approach used by the programme lead (Men’s Development Network; MDN). For example, the key principles of the KT approach relies on imparting knowledge, providing key take home messages each week, and recapping at the beginning of each session on information covered in the previous session. Conversely, at the heart of the experiential methodology was a focus on groupwork, creating a sense of safety and confidentiality in the group, working incrementally at participants’ own pace, normalising and demystifying conversations about health, and building a sense of peer support and community within the group. Therefore, a key success for the programme development team was finding common ground to seamlessly and incrementally work towards a blended model with these two distinct methodological approaches.

“The programme has been designed using the KT model and it’s very non-threatening... and there is something new every week...even the way we designed the programme that split up some themed sessions to straddle two weeks... you go in, present information, and then you pick up the following week where you left off, you review and recap... there is nothing nebulous about it... and I think there is an appetite among farmers for working in this way and coming together to discuss issues and challenges that are facing them.” Alex, Programme Development team

“We wanted to embrace the MDN philosophical and methodological approach and find ways of integrating that into a programme that had relevance for farmers...and that we could use what I might call the Trojan horse approach...in a way we have hijacked a KT model and presented it in a different way to farmers, without frightening them off”. Fran, Programme Development team

“...yes there would be a focus on knowledge transfer and on having key takeaway messages each night but we wanted to bring it in from a conversational, relational, reflective and developmental approach...so, working more in circles, drawing on the reflective nature and the experience of people in the room...in a way that would normalise health and well-being for farmers and get them talking about things they normally wouldn’t talk about...as well as linking them up to other services and programmes”. Ger, Programme Development team

The sharing of individual experiences within the safety of the group was highlighted as having a wider therapeutic value beyond that individual that transgressed traditional masculine ideologies. The approach normalised sensitive topics and provided reciprocal peer support, fostering a sense of togetherness, and bringing group members out of isolation and into a ‘community’ of peer support.

“I have seen it a thousand times, where a man shares something in the safety of the group, and you see everybody else’s shoulders drop, and they are thinking ‘oh I thought I was the only one who was feeling this stuff’, so it does work – creating safety, having that incremental approach – only sharing the small bits until you get to a place where the centre can hold you, normalising health conversations... and the hub of it is going back to that word ‘meitheal’, what happens is that people lean towards community [and away from isolation], and they learn things together...something happens that is powerful, gentle and restorative”. Fran, Programme Development team

This idea of meitheal was reinforced by adopting a strengths-based or ‘salutogenic’ approach that revolved using strong, positive messages that encouraged and reassured participants rather than amplifying shame or blame, and that encouraged participants to be open and to access support.

“...it’s also about [using] strengths-based approaches...and salutogenesis is at the heart of what we have been about... and when you look at farm masculinities, you see this cultural privacy whereby people keep things in... we are getting people to share their experiences which otherwise they might bottle up and keep in’... so I think that contextualises why this psychosocial approach is being used within the farming context”. Fran, Programme Development team

Similarly, among members of the Operational Group, the programme methodology was seen as having the potential to fill a vacuum within existing KT programmes by addressing issues relating to farmer stress and by enhancing farmers’ wellbeing. There was also the tacit acknowledgement that in order to engage farmers, particularly in the area of mental health, that a different approach was needed.

“...as a farmer...if I look at my own rural area at home and the different stresses and strains that farmers come up against, I felt this [farmer wellbeing] was an area that wasn’t being touched

upon...I got involved to try and fill vacuum for my farmers in the KT programme... and I could see the benefits to it". **Bob Operational Group**

"I just think it is such an important issue... and if we want to address mental health and well-being among farmers that the approach has to be different...otherwise a big sector of our community is going to be excluded". **Frances, Operational Group**

It was also clear that the chosen methodology, whilst reflecting the ethos and core values of Men's Development Network overall, was also underpinned by considerable reference to and reflection upon national and international best practice. This strengthened the resolve and confidence of the programme development team that the application of a community development approach to engaging farmers was underpinned by a strong rationale.

"In the pre-development stage we conducted desk-based research in relation to community engagement with farmers, health promotion with farmers, cultural masculinity and the farming community, we looked at various pilot projects...and the indicators were there that a community development approach could work with farmers, I fully believed it would work".

Fran, Programme Development team

The designation of Men's Development Network as programme lead was also seen as bringing a fresh and independent methodological approach to tackling farmers health ('with no baggage') and was credited with building stronger synergies between operational group members.

"The network that has been built and the stronger synergies among us... that has been a huge positive". **Harry, Operational Group**

"It's [Men's Development Network] an independent organisation with a key focus on men's health... so there is no division there". **Frances, Operational Group**

3.3 Taking stock: re-calibrating programme content for delivery

The Programme Development team took the view that, as a pilot programme, it was both prudent and practical to adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach in terms of adapting and finalising the programme content prior to delivery. In that sense, the terms of reference of the original application were seen not as rigid or fixed, but rather as a flexible template that needed fine-tuning in order to be made fit for purpose within the real-world context of the farming community. It was clear that the duration and scope of the original programme, including the timeframe for delivery, was overly ambitious and un-realistic, and a source of considerable stress to members of the Programme Development team who were tasked with revising it. Thus, the programme duration was changed from 20 weeks to 6 weeks. The content was reduced and streamlined accordingly, built around six clear concepts 'with a clear, incremental and developmental focus over the 6 weeks.' This more common-sense approach revolved around a realistic approach to farmer availability and targeted a minimum of 20 weeks of engagement overall comprising multiple cohorts of farmers. These changes were made in the spirit of adhering to the goals and focus of the original proposal.

"We [programme development team] sat with the application as a starting point, assessed it, considered what it intended to do, the scope of the engagement with the farmers, and from an early stage we felt that a 20-week engagement with anybody, particularly farmers, was a near impossible ask". **Fran, Programme Development team**

"I was surprised by how undoable the original application was... I would have liked to have seen it earlier to be able to say 'that won't fly', and until I knew that it was okay that we could change it, I found that quite stressful, to be part of something that needed to be extensively remade".

Ger, Programme Development team

"...even the ask of 6 weeks [in the context of KT] was seen as ambitious... [but] the spirit of the original application was adhered to throughout...we reshaped it but it certainly has addressed all the elements that we identified in the original application". **Alex, Programme Development team.**

All changes were made in accordance with what was deemed realistic and with having a clear rationale, with clear programme objectives, learning outcomes and a set of programme resources to enhance the integrity and overall professionalism of the programme. The language also evolved in terms of how the programme was pitched, from an initial focus on physical fitness and mental health, to a more explicit focus on overall health and wellbeing. The Programme Development team expressed a high level of confidence that by investing time and careful planning in building a standardised, robust and methodical training resource, that this would result in a smooth delivery and enjoyable programme. As such, there was high degree of satisfaction and confidence in the final product; that the learnings and experience garnered from past endeavours had been put to good use in producing a high-quality training resource and a solid methodological approach.

"... all changes that were made were based on a good sense of what would work or what wouldn't work...and having a clear rationale". **Ger, Programme Development team**

"...the fact that we had full slide sets, along with various back-up materials that they [facilitators] gave out at each session along with additional workbooks ... all these takeaways that are consistent with the content of our programme. I think this is one of the best quality programmes that we have ever created... it captures our methodologies and approaches...it does so in a way that is so clear that any facilitator could pick up that manual and, with a little bit of training, they would know how to go out and facilitate that space".

Fran, Programme Development team.

Notably, this pre-development process was undertaken in a spirit of co-design and co-production with agricultural partners and in consultation with the Operational Group and funders, with all changes being subject to approval by the Operational Group. This included consultation with experts from within the farming community. There were some calls for more direct and targeted consultation with farmers in terms of honing and fine-tuning the programme content.

"All decisions were taken in consultation with the Operational Group and with the farming community to ensure that that farmer focus was part and parcel of the delivery, so everything we did was in co-production and co-design with members of the agricultural community, and that was the key value that underpinned the programme and the process".

Fran, Programme Development team

"If we wanted to have a farmer focus on what we developed, it was really important that we brought in subject matter experts from within the farming community to help focus, sharpen and critique the content". **Alex, Programme Development team**

*"Maybe we could have piloted the programme content to farmers in advance, in terms of literacy levels... the feedback from the facilitators was that some of the content was a bit heavy, not as relevant, while some of it was really good... it might have helped to hone the final content a bit more." **Jill Operational Group***

There were mixed views about having farmer representation on the Operational Group. One member felt that the 'absence' of a full-time farmer and direct representation from the target group on the Operational Group was a missed opportunity to get better buy-in from farmers in terms of programme participation. Conversely, another felt that implicit in the programme design, was giving a voice to farmers, and their experiences of and reflections on the pilot programme, through this pilot evaluation. It should also be noted that some Operational Group members were part time farmers.

"I think we have set our expectations very high for this project and we have to remember that it is a pilot with a really short time turnaround...I think we have learnt a lot, and from getting farmers involved in the evaluation process, we are going to do a lot of that farmer engagement piece."

Jill Operational Group

Some Operational Group members felt that whilst there were opportunities to contribute and input to this pre-development work, most of the work fell to the coordinator and more could have been done in terms of sharing the workload and tapping into the vast skillsets and experiences of the Operational Group.

"For me, the experience has been very good, but I also feel the majority of the work has fallen on the programme coordinator...and maybe we could have done better in terms of supporting the programme in more tangible ways". **Harry, Operational Group**

SECTION 4: TRAIN THE TRAINER FARMCONNECT

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this phase of the evaluation was to assess how effective the Train the Trainer (TtT) programme was in meeting the objectives of the programme. This comprised two discrete components; (i) a quantitative component, encompassing pre- and post- programme questionnaires to examine knowledge/ skills/ competencies under core thematic areas of the TtT programme; and (ii) a qualitative component, involving two focus groups with Facilitators to capture their experiences of the TtT process. There was a key focus on seeking to establish the key learnings and implications for future delivery of the TtT component of the programme.

4.1 Quantitative

All facilitators (n=12) completed evaluation questionnaires post training (Appendix 3). The questionnaire was designed to evaluate the TtT programme under three distinct headings; Training Syllabus and Delivery, Learning and Skill Acquisition and General Evaluation.

4.1.1 Training syllabus and delivery

Facilitators were asked to respond to a series of statements in order to evaluate the three training modules involved in the TtT programme.

Module 1: Farm Context and Rationale - Online Webinar Series

The webinar series appears to have received the most feedback in regard to an area of training requiring modification and improvement. Although many reported that overall, they found the content quite valuable and useful in hindsight, most felt it was too content heavy and required an extensive time commitment that could have been better utilised. Others felt the webinars were of significant value but would have been more worthwhile if delivered later in the TtT programme to allow for improved contextualisation.

Table 4.1: Module 1 TtT Evaluation Survey Responses

	Strongly Agree % (n)	Agree % (n)	Neither agree or disagree % (n)	Disagree % (n)	Strongly Disagree % (n)
The learning aims of the training were clearly outlined	33% (4)	33% (4)	25% (3)		9% (1)
The online webinars were useful in providing background information and context for the program	8.5% (1)	25% (3)	25% (3)	41.5% (5)	
The webinars were easily accessible	8.5% (1)	50% (6)	33% (4)	8.5% (1)	
Adequate time was spent on this phase of training	25% (3)	25% (3)	25% (3)	16.5% (2)	8.5% (1)

The course materials provided were beneficial and aided my learning and participation	25% (3)	25% (3)	25% (3)	16.5% (2)	8.5% (1)
Adequate support and interaction with the course providers was facilitated at this stage of training	33% (4)	17% (2)	25% (3)	25% (3)	
My personal learning aims and objectives were met	25% (3)	25% (3)	25% (3)	25% (3)	

Module 2: FarmConnect the Methodological Approach - Regional Training Days

The responses from facilitators in respect of Module 2 was overwhelmingly positive. The majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the content of the module was very appropriate, met the identified learning needs and aims and objectives of the module as laid out initially. In relation to opportunity for peer interaction and learning, 83% of facilitators responded that they strongly agreed this was adequate, with 75% in strong agreement that support and interaction with course providers was also adequate for this module. In response to open ended questioning, additional comments were provided by facilitators in respect to the Regional Training days as outlined below in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Module 2 TtT Evaluation Survey Responses

	Strongly Agree % (n)	Agree % (n)	Neither agree or disagree % (n)	Disagree % (n)	Strongly Disagree % (n)
The learning aims of the training were clearly outlined	58.5% (7)	25% (3)	16.5% (2)		
The content covered was appropriate to my learning needs	41.5% (5)	50% (6)	8.5% (1)		
The content delivered met the aims of the training	58.5% (7)	41.5% (5)			
My personal learning aims and objectives were met	58.5% (7)	41.5% (5)			
Adequate opportunity for peer interaction and learning was facilitated	83% (10)	17% (2)			
Adequate support and interaction with the course providers was facilitated at this stage of training	75% (9)	25% (3)			
Adequate time was spent on this phase of training	50% (6)	50% (6)			
The course materials provided were beneficial and aided my learning and participation	66% (8)	25% (3)	9% (1)		
The venue for this training was accessible and of an appropriate standard	66% (8)	34% (4)			

Table 4.3: Post Training Evaluation Surveys Facilitator Comments

Regional Training Day 1	Regional Training Day 2
<i>"Honestly a really enjoyable and motivating day, nothing needed to be improved upon."</i>	<i>"The synergy between the MDN staff was very good, nice flow during the day."</i>
<i>"The training was very professional, very clear information and clarity on outcome and aims of the course."</i>	<i>"I liked that the day was broken up into distinct pieces. It helped to keep momentum and energy."</i>
<i>"A very professional day, I wouldn't suggest it could be improved."</i>	<i>"I think it was very well run. Presenters were well prepared, easy to talk to and listened very attentively."</i>
<i>"These days should have come before the webinars to allow more clarity and insight on the program."</i>	<i>"I can see the integrity of MDN and I really appreciated your approach."</i>
	<i>"I would have enjoyed hearing or reading more explicitly the role that farmers and those involved in working with farmers played in the roots of this program."</i>
	<i>"One of the best training courses I have been on in a long time. Maybe some more videos of real-life situations would have further enhanced the experience."</i>

Module 3: The FarmConnect Programme Weekly Sessions & Evaluation, Residential Training Weekend

The residential training weekend was deemed very successful by the majority of facilitators with greater than 90% agreeing that their learning needs were met with the delivery of appropriate content. Many of the respondents expressed the opinion that they would have preferred additional in person training time as they found this very beneficial in gaining in depth insight into the programme content and preparing for delivering the programme.

Table 4.4: Module 3; TtT Evaluation Survey Responses

	Strongly Agree % (n)	Agree % (n)	Neither agree or disagree % (n)	Disagree % (n)	Strongly Disagree % (n)
The learning aims of the training were clearly outlined	83% (10)	8.5% (1)			8.5% (1)
The content covered was appropriate to my learning needs	75% (9)	16.5% (2)		8.5% (1)	
The content delivered met the aims of the training	83% (10)	8.5% (1)	8.5% (1)		
My personal learning aims and objectives were met	83% (10)	8.5% (1)	8.5% (1)		
Adequate opportunity for peer interaction and learning was facilitated	83% (10)	17% (2)			
Adequate support and interaction with the course providers was facilitated at this stage of training	83% (10)	17% (2)			
Adequate time was spent on this phase of training	50% (6)	33% (4)	17% (2)		
The course materials provided were beneficial and aided my learning and participation	75% (9)	25% (3)			
The venue for this training was accessible and of an appropriate standard	75% (9)	16.5% (2)	8.5% (1)		

4.1.2 Learning and skill acquisition

Facilitation Skills

Following participation in the TtT programme, facilitators were asked to rate their current level of confidence and competence with respect to engaging farmers utilising facilitation skills identified in Table 4.5 below. As outlined in Table 4.6, the majority of facilitators reported to have exceptional or strong confidence and competence in the facilitation skills. However, some suggestions for improvement were made by facilitators. These mostly referred to the potential benefits of having additional time to put these skills into practice over the duration of the TtT programme or through additional training workshops held prior to the FarmConnect Programme commencing.

Table 4.5: Facilitation Skills

	Exceptional % (n)	Strong % (n)	Moderate % (n)	Low % (n)	Very Low % (n)
General presentation skills	50% (6)	41.5% (5)	8.5% (1)		
Listening skills	58.5% (7)	41.5% (5)			
Group facilitation skills	75% (9)	25% (3)			
Co-facilitation skills	66% (8)	17% (2)	17% (2)		
Facilitating farmer capacity-building programmes		100% (12)			
Working with groups in circles	33% (4)	58.5% (7)	8.5% (1)		
Questioning and probing skills	58.5% (7)	41.5% (5)			
Handling questions from group	50% (6)	41.5% (5)	8.5% (1)		
Ability to interpret and present concepts in a clear, concise manner	33% (4)	50% (6)	17% (2)		
Ability to summarise key points of learning	42% (5)	50% (6)	25% (3)		
Use of visual aids (slides, flipcharts, graphics etc.)	16.5% (2)	58.5% (7)	25% (3)		
General IT Skills	41.5% (5)	25% (4)	16.5% (2)	8.5% (1)	

Knowledge in Engagement Techniques and Methods

Facilitators were asked to rate their current level of confidence and competence with respect to engaging farmers in relation to the engagement techniques identified in Table 4.6 below. The majority of facilitators reported to have exceptional or strong confidence and competence in these techniques. Some participants expressed their appreciation of the MDN ethos and reported to find the methodology very appropriate to the FarmConnect aims and objectives as outlined. However, some suggestions for improvement were made by facilitators. These mostly referred to the availability of the programme manual prior to the face to face training to allow for more in depth familiarisation with programme content. It was also noted that using a central repository was preferable to multiple emails for sharing of content. Facilitators indicated a preference for more time to be spent on modelling and roleplaying the co-facilitation of sessions. Others reported that having opportunity for peer learning and feedback was of huge benefit in skills acquisition in these techniques.

Table 4.6: Knowledge In Engagement

	Exceptional % (n)	Strong % (n)	Moderate % (n)	Low % (n)	Very Low % (n)
Different Learning Styles	25% (3)	58.5% (7)	8.5% (1)		8.5% (1)
Experiential Learning	16.5% (2)	75% (9)	8.5% (1)		
Developmental learning	17% (2)	66% (8)	8.5% (1)		8.5% (1)
Strengths Based	33% (4)	58.5% (7)	8.5% (1)		
Learning Assessment	25% (3)	58.5% (7)	16.5% (2)		
Learning Evaluation	33% (4)	50% (6)	17% (2)		

Engagement of Participants in Education and Positive Behaviours

Facilitators were asked to rate their current level of confidence and competence with respect to engaging farmers in positive behaviours in the areas identified in Table 4.7 below. Given the mixed level of experience and skillset amongst the facilitator group, the TtT programme appears to have facilitated the development of strong competency levels across most areas.

Table 4.7: Engagement of participants

	Exceptional % (n)	Strong % (n)	Moderate % (n)	Low % (n)	Very Low % (n)
Wellbeing	50% (6)	50% (6)			
Lifestyle & Physical Health	25% (3)	75% (9)			
Lifestyle & Nutrition	17% (2)	66% (8)	17% (2)		
Gender Conditioning	8.5% (1)	58.5% (7)	8.5% (1)	16.5% (2)	
Mental Health	25% (3)	58.5% (7)	16.5% (2)		
Stress Management	33% (4)	58.5% (7)	8.5% (1)		
Self Awareness	50% (6)	50% (6)			
Emotional Resilience	58.5% (7)	33% (4)	8.5% (1)		
Support Services	41.5% (5)	41.5% (5)	17% (2)		
Meitheal	41.5% (5)	50% (6)	8.5% (1)		

Readiness to Facilitate and Deliver the Farm Connect Programme

Ahead of the programme, the majority identified as having appropriate skills and knowledge to facilitate such a process in this population group as outlined in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Readiness to Facilitate and Deliver the FarmConnect Programme

	Exceptional % (n)	Strong % (n)	Moderate % (n)	Low % (n)	Very Low % (n)
Program Retention	25 (3)	58.5% (7)	16.5% (2)		
Program Delivery	66% (8)	25 (3)	9% (1)		

4.1.3 General Evaluation

In response to evaluating the TtT programme as a complete entity, facilitators were again very positive. Of note, all of the facilitators agreed that participating in the training was worthwhile, with >90% (n=11) also in agreement that they would recommend the training to others and that participation had aided professional development and positively impacted on their professional practice. These responses are outlined in Table 4.9 below.

Table 4.9: Overall reflections on the TtT programme

	Strongly Agree % (n)	Agree % (n)	Neither agree or disagree % (n)	Disagree % (n)	Strongly Disagree % (n)
Participating in the training was worthwhile	91% (11)	9% (1)			
I would participate in similar training again	66% (8)	9% (1)	25% (3)		
I would recommend this training to others	75% (9)	16.5% (2)	8.5% (1)		
The standard of the training provided was satisfactory	91% (11)			9% (1)	
Participation in this training has aided my professional development	75% (9)	16.5% (2)		8.5% (1)	
Participation in this training has positively impacted on my professional practice	83% (10)	8.5% (1)	8.5% (1)		

4.2 Qualitative TtT evaluation

To ensure a more rounded evaluation of the TtT programme, qualitative data was collected from both the programme development team and the facilitators using focus group methods as previously described. Findings are presented under four themes; (i) Evolution of the Train the Trainer model; (ii) Rationale for participation; (iii) Engaging farmers in a developmental approach; and (iv) The importance of peer learning and support.

4.2.1 Evolution of the TtT model

The programme development team applied a systematic and incremental three-stage approach to the Train the Trainer (TtT) programme. Stage 1 comprised a series of webinars around contemporary issues pertaining to farmers' health; stage 2 was made up of regional training days, where the focus was on programme methodology; and stage 3 was a residential training weekend which focused on programme delivery and practicing of facilitation skills, as well as team building.

We had a choreography to it; the webinars [stage 1] were designed to give a theoretical background and a wider contextual piece and knowledge base around farmers and farming masculinities, all of which were key elements for us in terms of what would be delivered and how it would be delivered; we also had regional training days [stage 2] where facilitators could come together to focus on programme methodology; and then in the residential weekend [stage 3] we had a detailed focus and the delivery of programme content and practice time for the facilitators, as well as giving us the opportunity to reflect on how facilitators worked together in the room.

Alex, Programme Development Team.

The rationale underpinning Stage 1 was to equip participants with a core level of knowledge in relation to the challenges that farmers face as a societal group who are vulnerable to isolation and exposure to multiple social, environmental, and economic stressors. Whilst feedback from the facilitators indicated a lack of clarity or coherence overall in terms of the overarching purpose of the webinars or how they linked to the subsequent stages, the programme co-ordinator felt that this was something that could easily be addressed in any future roll-out and urged the retention of this stage of the TtT programme.

The first tier of engagement [online training] ensured that a common baseline level of contextual knowledge was developed in the group... and that was a critical first engagement in the training programme as a whole. Fran, Programme Development Team.

... so a change that I would make would be to have a stronger introductory piece about how those pieces of the jigsaw fit together and a clearer map for them...I personally feel they need the context and the understanding and then you roll out the training from there.

Alex, Programme Development Team.

There was an explicit focus in Phase 2 on modelling effective facilitation skills that would reflect the ethos and principles underpinning the overall methodological approach.

One really important thing in the regional training was the modelling of good facilitation skills for the facilitators... while at the same time encouraging facilitators to be themselves and to bring themselves to the table. Fran, Programme Development Team.

In addition to fostering a greater sense of teamwork within the group, Stage 3 of the TtT focused on facilitators having practice runs at facilitating specific components of the programme, and finetuning their facilitation skills. It was felt that more time could have been afforded to this.

...to provide an opportunity for facilitators to really get to know each other and to potentially see who they might facilitate with, both from the coordinator's perspective and the facilitators perspective. Fran, Programme Development Team.

It gave facilitators the opportunity to engage with the programme in a very tangible way by practicing their own facilitation skills. Alex, Programme Development Team.

I would have liked to have had the opportunity to see them facilitate more or to see them facilitate with other facilitators. Fran, Programme Development Team.

Whilst the TtT programme covered key principles and approaches to effective facilitation, the approach taken was not rigid or didactic; rather facilitators were encouraged to bring their own individual strengths and talents into the room.

People felt they had permission to be themselves in the way that they would go about facilitating the programme... and I could see people really getting it, that the best thing they could bring into the room was to be themselves...and I could see people blossoming in that... they were very much themselves. Harry, Programme Development Team.

It wasn't about training to make you go out and do this; it was actually training to allow yourself to be yourself and to work with the materials in the room. Harry, Programme Development Team.

Particular reference was made to the co-ordinator's role in designing and overseeing the TtT element of the programme and how important this transpired to be in ensuring a successful roll-out of the programme.

*It wasn't envisioned in the original proposal that there would be online training followed by regional training followed by residential training... but that has been really important in terms of the success of the programme... and that is largely down to some important decisions taken by the co-ordinator **Fran, Programme Development team.***

4.2.2 Rationale for participation

When facilitators were asked why they had made the decision to participate in the programme responses centred around having personal experience of dealing with farmers whose health and wellbeing was negatively impacted by high levels of stress and having previous experience of delivering similar programmes to more marginalised groups. There was a clear recognition among participants of the need for interventions such as FarmConnect for the farming community. It was felt that, as a societal group, farmers were particularly vulnerable to isolation and exposure to multiple social, environmental and economical stressors. As such, participants felt that they had a duty of care to address farmers' health and to support farmers to deal with these stressors:

*I've grown up on a farm and farm myself on a small holding. I saw it in my dad and his father before him, the stresses are there, they're very real. To be involved in a programme like this.....that encourages farmers to open up a little bit and acknowledge these stresses is important. If this programme only helped one person out of this whole programme well that would be a help for farmers. **Betty, Facilitator***

*I'm a mental health trainer. I've seen how similar programmes have worked to improve mental health in other groups and communities and I've seen what a six-week programme can do in terms of dealing with stress and depression and how it works! I think it will be very powerful for farmers, it takes a very safe space to be able to challenge your own views and your own thinking without anyone asking you to share or got to a counsellor, as a community they need this. **Jean, Facilitator***

*I did a post grad on workplace wellness. I had to do a group project on marginalised groups. The more I delved into the stats and figures on farming the more passionate I became about it. **Jerome, Facilitator***

*I'm involved in the MDN for many years and really appreciated how it works ... this programme makes the farmer central; it's really listening to where they're at, it's really supporting them, it's not telling them what to do, it's kinda where they're at, how they are and maybe seeing one small thing they might do. **James, Facilitator***

*Farming is a caring profession, the care we sometimes give to the animals and the land, we forget to give to ourselves. It's just to remind them that it's a very caring profession, and sometimes it's hammered in the media and the caring side doesn't come across enough. **James, Facilitator***

*For me, wellbeing has to be addressed in a social context. Very often suffering happens because of a social issue ... emotional, social, emotional and spiritual health must all be addressed. Mental health services are failing us. Human relationships are so important. There is a lot of generational trauma in farming. **Triona, Facilitator***

4.2.3 Engaging farmers in a developmental approach

There was general consensus among participants that, given the varied skill set and experience level amongst facilitators, the TtT programme content and approach was suitable and met the aims of the programme. Although some facilitators felt that the programme was taking a “lighthearted” and “small step” approach that was somewhat constrictive to engaging farmers in a true developmental approach, there was broad support for adopting a developmental approach that addressed farmers’ needs at whatever stage they happened to be:

*It’s very key what I’ve learned here this weekend, you’ve to be careful of the language you use, as to where you pitch your language. It’s about taking people where they’re at and supporting them. It’s not about where I want them to be or the words I want them to use. It’s using their language and their examples and being really respectful. **James, Facilitator***

*I would like to see more of a focus on social health. I feel mental health is a term that’s easy use but means very little. When people are socially, psychologically and financially safe they have good wellbeing. This programme isn’t there yet but it’s heading in the right direction. **Mary, Facilitator***

Others felt that the programme was effective in allowing introductory exposure to these methods, nurturing self-awareness and allowing for sign posting to appropriate services as needed, in line with the aims of the FarmConnect programme.

*It’s about opening a window to a conversation that they have probably never had before. It has to be in gentle steps given the culture. **Sean, Facilitator***

*You’re hoping someone that needs it, comes away from this and goes “I’ve a lot going on, I’m going to get help”. That it helps create that awareness. Maybe they end up seeing someone individually or maybe they end up in a support group in another organisation as the support groups exist out there. I would see this programme as aiming to spark that “AHA” moment. **Jean, Facilitator***

4.2.4 The Importance of peer learning and support

The importance of being exposed to opportunities for peer learning and support was referenced throughout the focus groups. Many expressed the opinion that this was one of the most positive and worthwhile aspects of the TtT programme. There was strong recommendation that future programmes would include an additional residential weekend to allow further opportunity for and development of peer support and learning amongst facilitators.

*Those supports are now in my life, I feel I have an interconnected group now. If I’m able to get support, I’m able to give support. This programme has put the light on, and it’s put it on in lots of different places. **Sean, Facilitator.***

It was felt that the residential weekend and training programme in particular provided an excellent, safe and supportive environment for the development of a peer network and support system.

*I think it’s that reassurance that you’re not front-line workers, and not having to overstep your abilities and comfort zone. The programme is there, the content is there as security. **Sam, Facilitator***

Facilitators expressed a preference to have had the modules initially delivered by those who designed them to give insight into the vision for delivery, prior to delivering them themselves, but also appreciated the scope to make the programme delivery one's own.

*I learnt so much from watching people facilitate and support over the weekend, you take so much from that. **James, Facilitator***

All facilitators agreed that participating in the training had positively influenced and improved their professional practice.

*It will give them the forum, platform and support to deal with whatever they have to in a safe environment. **Trish, Facilitator***

SECTION 5: FARMCONNECT PROGRAMME DELIVERY AND OUTCOMES

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this phase of the evaluation was to assess how effective the roll-out of the FarmConnect programme was in meeting the objectives of the programme. This comprised two discrete components; (i) a quantitative component, encompassing pre and post programme questionnaires that explored expected learning outcomes, programme impact, and participants' overall experiences of the programme; and (ii) a qualitative component, involving semi-structured interviews with participants (n=10) and focus groups with Facilitators (n=2), the Programme Development team (n=1), and the Operational Group (n=1) that explored the key learnings in relation to the process of delivering the FarmConnect programme. This phase of the evaluation sought to establish how effective the FarmConnect programme was in meeting the programme objectives, in terms of adherence and retention of participants, and in terms of programme fidelity. It also considered what changes/adaptations warranted for future roll-out of the programme.

5.1 Quantitative: pre and post questionnaires

5.1.1 Socio-demographic and farming characteristics

The mean age of participants was 59.7 years (range 23-80; Table A8.1; Figure 5.1) which is marginally older compared to the (not gender specified) average age of farmers in Ireland (57 years; CSO, 2020). Most participants (58.8%; n=70) were between 45-64 years of age, whilst 31.1% (n=37) were ≥ 65 years. Only 10.1% (n=12) of participants were < 45 years. The predominantly older age profile of the FarmConnect programme participants was in line with farming age averages from 2020 (CSO, 2021), which showed that 32% of farm holders were ≥ 65 years, 47% were 45-65 years and 21% were < 45 years.

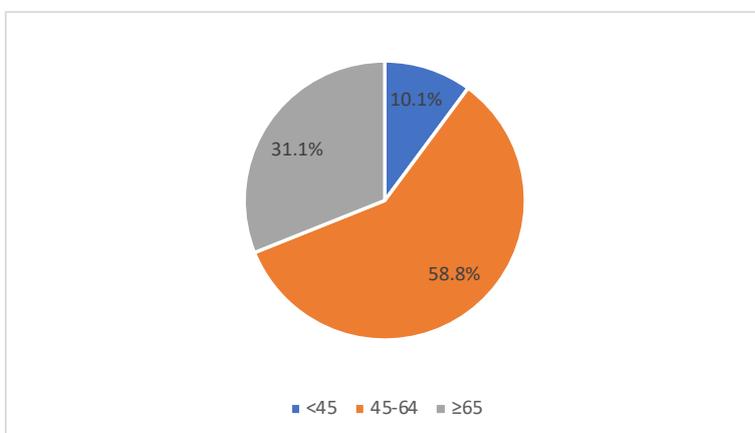


Figure 5.1 Age profile (n=119) FarmConnect programme participants

The majority of the participants (79.8%; n=99) identified as male whilst 20.2% (n=25) identified as female (Table A8; Figure 5.2). This is in line with national data which shows a higher number of male farmer holders (86.6%) compared to female farm holders (13.4%) as well as higher male (79.9%) than female (20.1%) labour units (CSO, 2021).

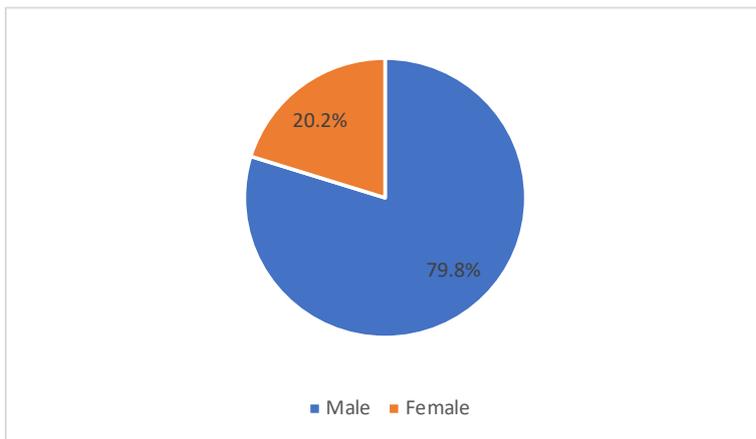


Figure 5.2 Gender profile (n=124) FarmConnect programme participants

Three in seven participants (42.5%; n=51) reported having lower educational attainment either 'primary or below' (9.2%; n=11) or 'some secondary' education (33.3%; n=40; Table A8.1). Almost one in three participants (31.7%; n=38) reported having completed their leaving cert whilst one in four participants (25.8%; n=31) reported having third level educational attainment. This is comparable to the average educational attainment in agriculture which showed 44.1% of farmers having lower educational attainment, 30.2% having completed secondary level and 25.7% third level (CSO, 2016).

Most participants (55.7%; n=64) reported farming full-time (Table AXX). This was slightly higher compared to the 53.3% documented in the Census of Agriculture 2020 (CSO, 2021).

In relation to the main farming enterprise (Table A8.2), specialist cattle (suckler or drystock) was reported by most participants (57.5%; n=69), followed by dairy (17.5%; n=21) and mixed livestock (13.3%; n=16). In terms of farm size, more than one in three participants (37.8%; n=45) reported farming <30 Hectares (Ha; Table A8.2), 36.1% (n=43) reported farming 30-49 Hectares and 26.1% (n=31) reported farming ≥50 Ha. The average farm size in Ireland is 33.4 Ha (CSO, 2021).

5.1.2 Expected learning outcomes

Participants were asked about their expectations for taking part in the FarmConnect programme (Table A8-3), which elicited responses from 84 participants. Responses were categorised under broad themes. These included learning more about 'coping strategies for personal mental health and wellbeing issues (including stress, anxiety and grief'; 30.9%; n=26), 'mental health and wellbeing' more generally (30.9%; n=26), 'work-life balance' (17.8%; n=15), 'improving health awareness' (14.3%; n=12), 'connecting with other farmers' (13.1%; n=11), and 'learning about farm safety, farm organisation and/or changes in farming' 13.1%; n=11).

5.1.3 Pre-and post-evaluation outcomes

This section presents the key findings in relation to the observed changes in self-rated perception (importance) and capability (knowledge and confidence) of making healthy choices in relation to the programme themes, as well as changes in awareness of the link between health and farm safety before (pre-evaluation) and after (post-evaluation) taking part in the FarmConnect programme.

The results are based on matched datasets between these two time points and available responses per variable. The pre-post-evaluation findings are reported based on counts (frequencies) whilst the statistical significance of the changes is reported in accordance with the results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

Participants' self-rated importance of making healthy decisions

The pre-evaluation showed that the importance of 'understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked' (n=92) was rated by 69.5% (n=64) of participants as an eight out of ten or higher, whilst 18.5% (n=17) of participants rated it as a six or seven out of ten (Figure 5.3; Table A7-4). The number of participants rating it as an eight out of ten or higher had significantly ($p < 0.001$) increased to 83.6% (n=77) after completing the programme (Table A8-4). The proportion of participants who rated it a six or seven out of ten had decreased to 14.1% (n=13).

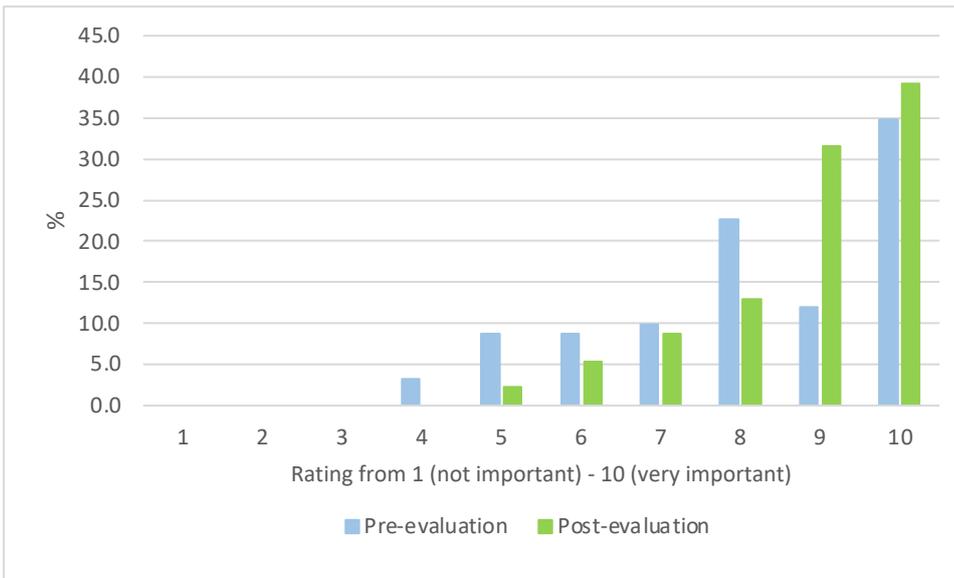


Figure 5.3 Self-rated importance of 'understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked' (n=92)

The importance of 'being physically active for health and wellbeing' was rated by n=93 participants (Figure 5.4; Table A8-4). Pre-evaluation, most participants (72.0%; n=67) rated this as an eight out of ten or higher, whereas 16.1% (n=15) rated it as a six or seven out of ten and 11.9% (n=11) rated it as five out of ten or lower. After completing the programme, the proportion of participants rating this as an eight out of ten or higher had increased to 83.6% (n=77), which was significant ($p < 0.001$; Table A8-5). Post-evaluation showed that 9.7% (n=9) of participants rated it as seven out of ten or lower.

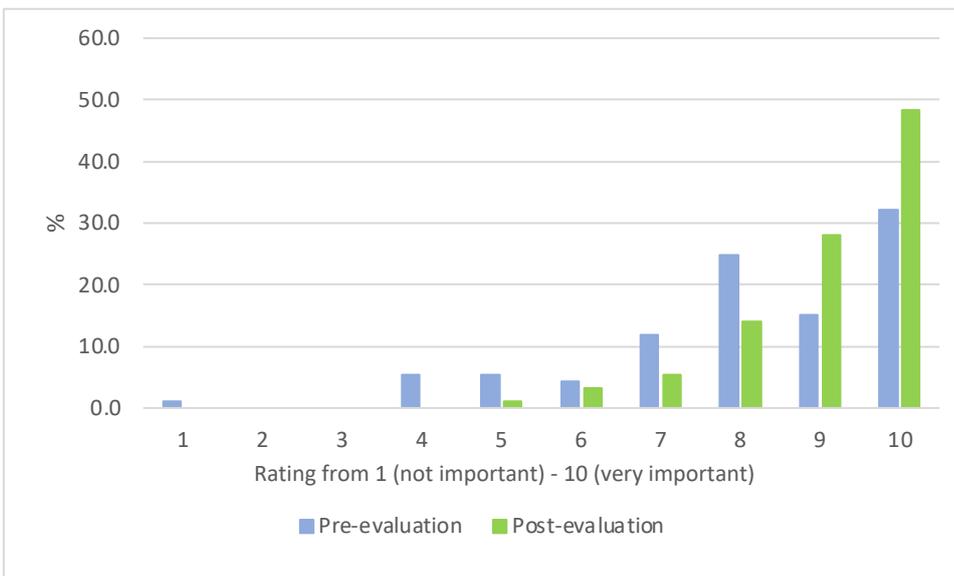


Figure 5.4 Self-rated importance of 'being physically active for health and wellbeing' (n=93)

The importance of 'managing stress to stay healthy' was rated by n=92 participants (Figure 5.5; Table A8-4). The

pre-evaluation showed that three in four participants (74.9%; n=69) rated this as an eight out of ten or higher, whilst 11.9% (n=11) rated this as five out of ten or lower. The post-evaluation saw a significant (p 0.004) increase in the number of participants (90.2%; n=83) rating the importance as an eight out of ten or higher (Table A8-5). Only a small number (9.8%; n=9) of participants rated this as a seven out of ten or lower.

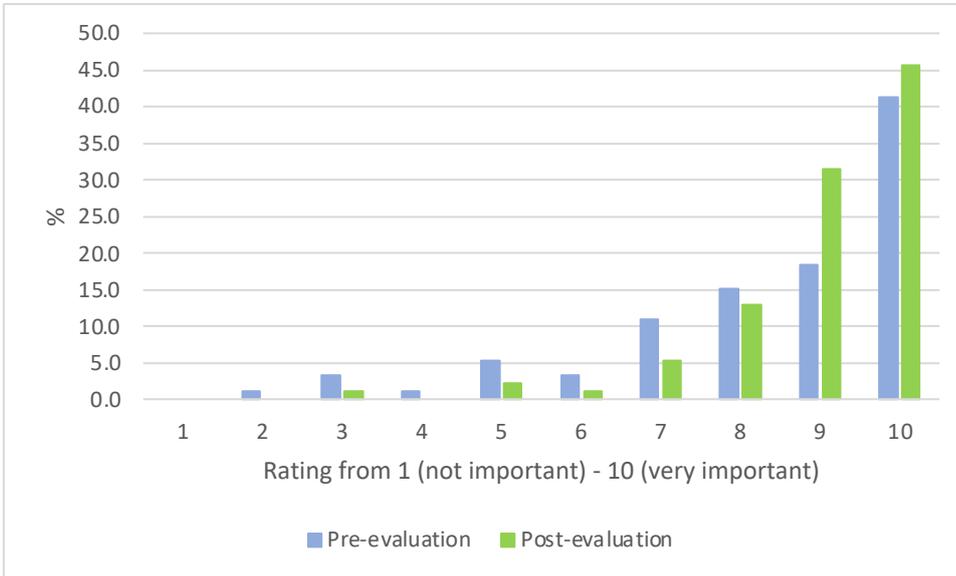


Figure 5.5. Self-rated importance of 'managing stress to stay healthy' (n=92)

The importance of 'eating well for good health' was rated by n=88 participants (Figure 5.6; Table A8-4). The pre-evaluation showed that almost three in four participants (72.9%; n=64) rated this as an eight out of ten or higher, 17.0% (n=15) as a six or seven out of ten, and 10.1% (n=9) as a five out of ten or lower. After completing the programme, most participants (89.8%; n=79) rated it an eight out of ten or higher, which was significant p <0.001; Table A8-5). The proportion of participants rating this as six or seven out of ten had decreased to 10.2% (n=9) and no participants rated it lower than six out of ten.

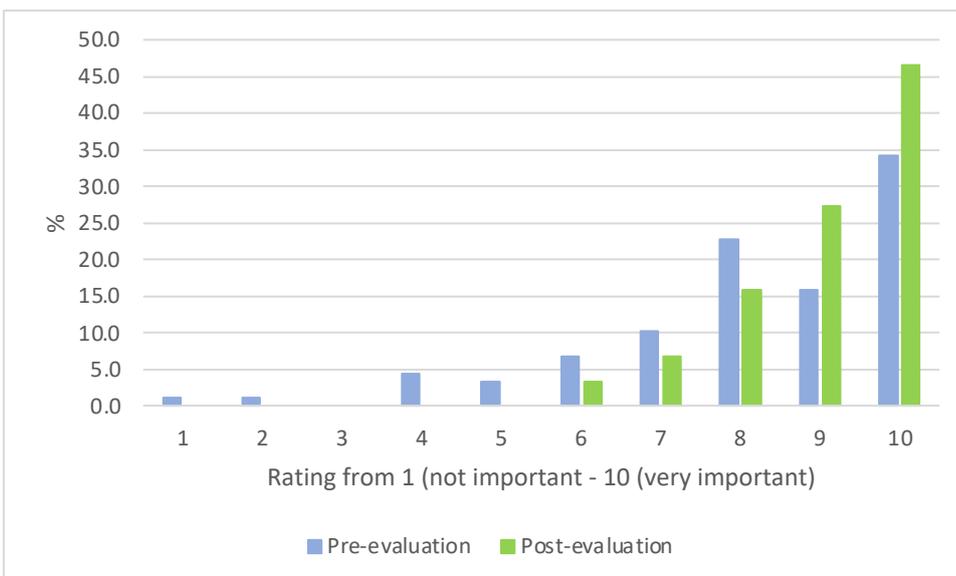


Figure 5.6 Self-rated importance of 'eating well for good health'(n=88)

The pre-evaluation showed that the importance of 'getting enough sleep to stay healthy' (n=92) was rated as an eight out of ten or higher by 76.0% (n=70) of participants, a six or seven out of ten by 17.4% (n=16), and a five out of ten or lower by 6.6% (n=6; Figure 5.7; Table A8-4). After completing the programme, there was a significantly (p 0.001) higher number of participants (89.1%; n=82) rating it as an eight out of ten or higher (Table A8-5). The number of participants rating this as lower than seven out of ten had decreased to 10.9% (n=10).

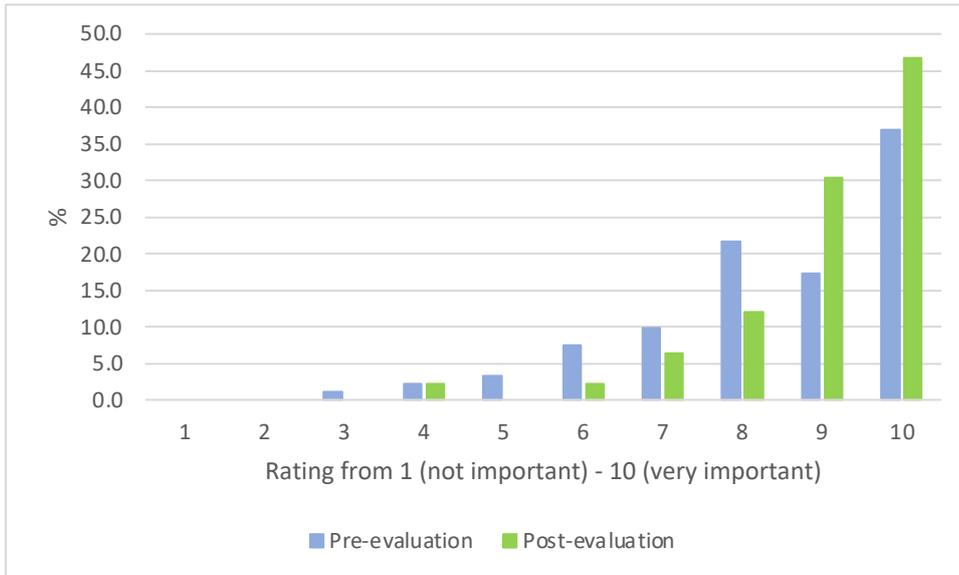


Figure 5.7 Self-rated importance of 'getting enough sleep to stay healthy' (n=92)

The importance of 'being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing' (n=91) showed, at pre-evaluation, that 70.3% (n=64) of participants rated this as an eight out of ten or higher, 18.7% (n=17) as a six or seven out of ten, and 11.0% (n=11) as a five out of ten or lower (Figure 5.8; Table A8-4). The post-evaluation showed that the rating of eight out of ten or higher significantly ($p < 0.001$) increased to 91.3% (n=83) of participants (Table A8-5).

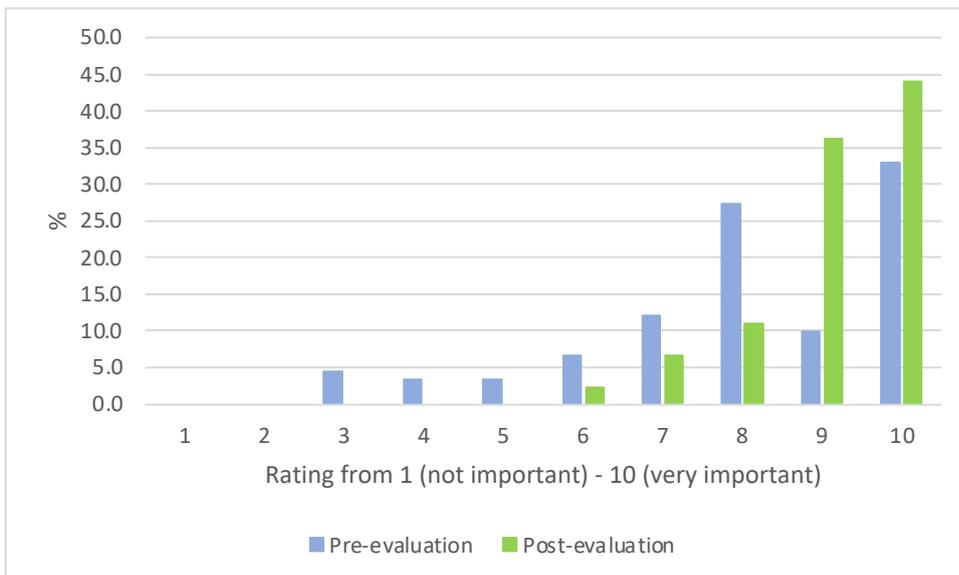


Figure 5.8 Self-rated importance of 'being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing' (n=91)

The pre-evaluation showed that the importance of 'having the resilience to cope with challenging situations' (n=92) was rated as an eight out of ten or higher by 79.3% (n=73) of participants, a six or seven out of ten by 13.1% (n=12), and a five out of ten or lower by 7.6% (n=7; Figure 5.9; Table A8-4). The post-evaluation showed that 89.1% (n=82) of participants rated this an eight out of ten or higher, which was significant ($p < 0.001$; Table A8-5). The proportion of participant rating this as a seven out of ten or lower had decreased to 10.9% (n=10).

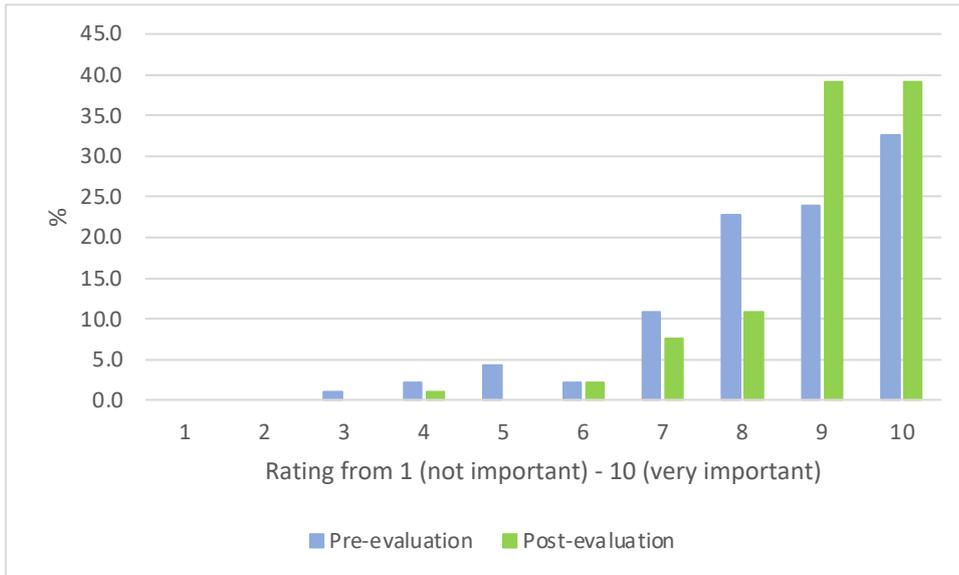


Figure 5.9 Self-rated importance of 'having the resilience to cope with challenging situations' (n=92)

A total of n=111 participants rated the importance of the statement 'minding my health can lead to better farm safety' (Table A8-4). Findings showed that four in five participants (81.1%; n=90) rated this as an eight or higher out of ten, whilst 6.3% (n= 7) rated it as five out of ten or lower. This rating statement was not repeated as part of the post-evaluation.

These findings indicate that, as a result of taking part in the programme, participants place a higher importance on making healthy choices to improve health, wellbeing and farm safety. This is important as a shift upwards in importance rating is associated with a greater likelihood of making behaviour change (Miller, 2002).

Participants' self-rated knowledge of how to make healthy decisions

The pre-evaluation knowledge of 'understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked' (n=90) was rated by 41.1% (n=37) of participants as an eight out of ten or higher, by 35.6% (n=32) as a six or seven out of ten, and by 23.3% (n=21) as a five out of ten or lower (Figure 5.10; Table A8-6). The post-evaluation showed a significant ($p < 0.001$) increase in the number of participants (74.5%; n=67) rating it an eight out of ten or higher (Table A8-7). The number of participants rating this as a seven out of ten or lower had also decreased to 25.5% (n=23).

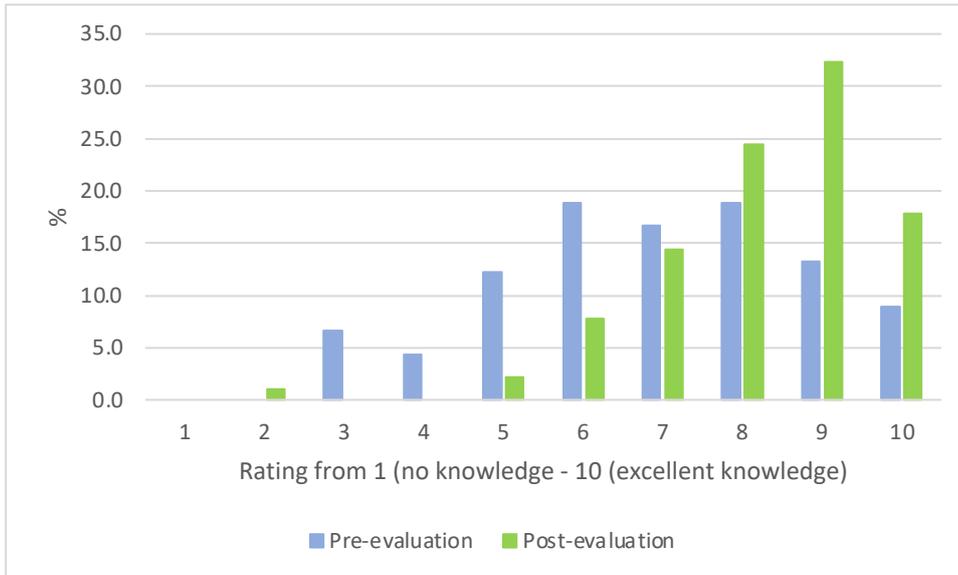


Figure 5.10 Self-rated knowledge of 'understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked' (n=90)

The pre-evaluation showed that self-rated knowledge of 'being physically active for health and wellbeing' (n=92) was rated as an eight out of ten or higher by 43.5% (n=40) of participants, with 30.4% (n=28) rating it as a six or seven out of ten, and 26.1% (n=24) rating it as a five out of ten or lower (Figure 5.11; Table A8-6). After completing the programme, the rating of eight or higher out of ten significantly ($p < 0.001$) increased to 85.8% (n=79) of participants (Table A8-7). A smaller number of participants (14.2%; n=13) rated it a seven out of ten or lower.

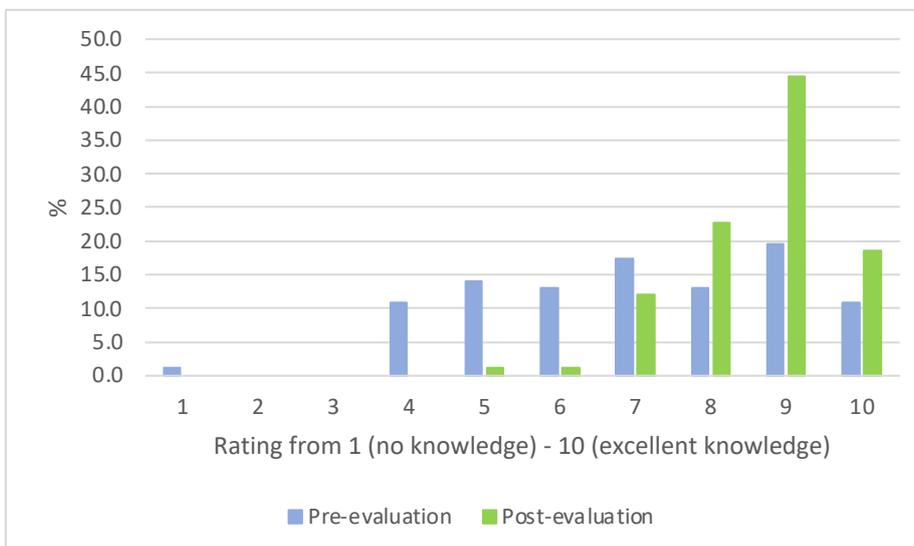


Figure 5.11 Self-rated knowledge of 'being physically active for health and wellbeing' (n=92)

The self-rated knowledge on 'managing stress to stay healthy' was rated by n=92 participants (Figure 5.12; Table A8-6). Pre-evaluation showed that one in three participants (37.9%; n=34) rated this an eight out of ten or higher, 33.3% (n=30) as a six or seven out of ten, and 28.8% (n=26) of participants a five out of ten or lower. The post-evaluation showed that the number of participants (75.6%; n=68) rating their knowledge as an eight out of ten or higher had significantly ($p < 0.001$) increased (Table A8-7). The proportion of participants rating it a seven out of ten or lower had decreased to 24.4% (n=22).

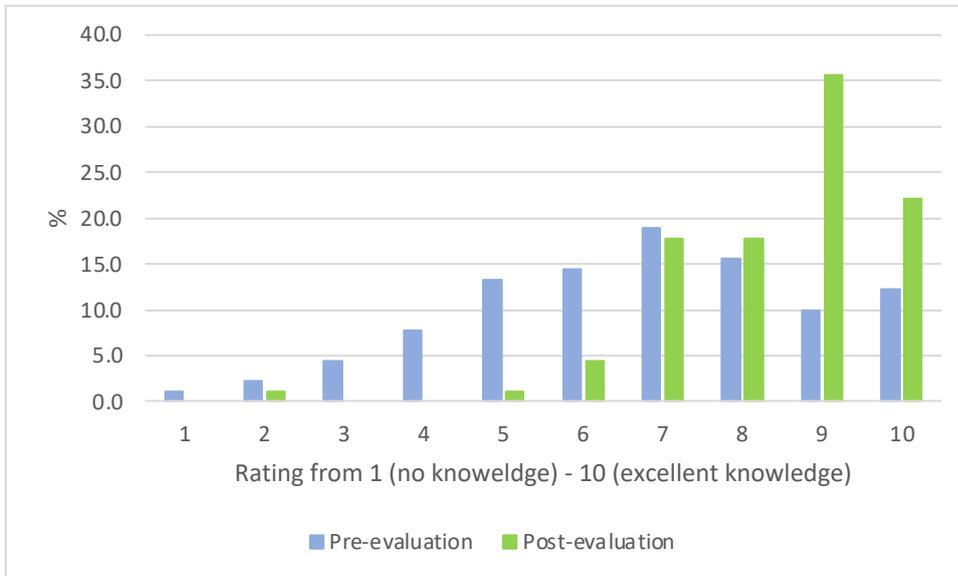


Figure 5.12 Self-rated knowledge on ‘managing stress to stay healthy’ (n=92)

Self-rated knowledge on ‘eating well for good health’ (n=89) at pre-evaluation was rated by 57.3% (n=51) of participants as an eight out of ten or higher, by 18.0% (n=16) as a six or seven out of ten, and by 24.7% (n=22) as a five out of ten or lower (Figure 5.13; Table A8-6). After completing the programme, most participants (86.5%; n=77) rated this as an eight out of ten or higher which was significant ($p < 0.001$; Table A8-7). A smaller group, 13.5% (n=12) of participants rated this as a seven out of ten or lower.

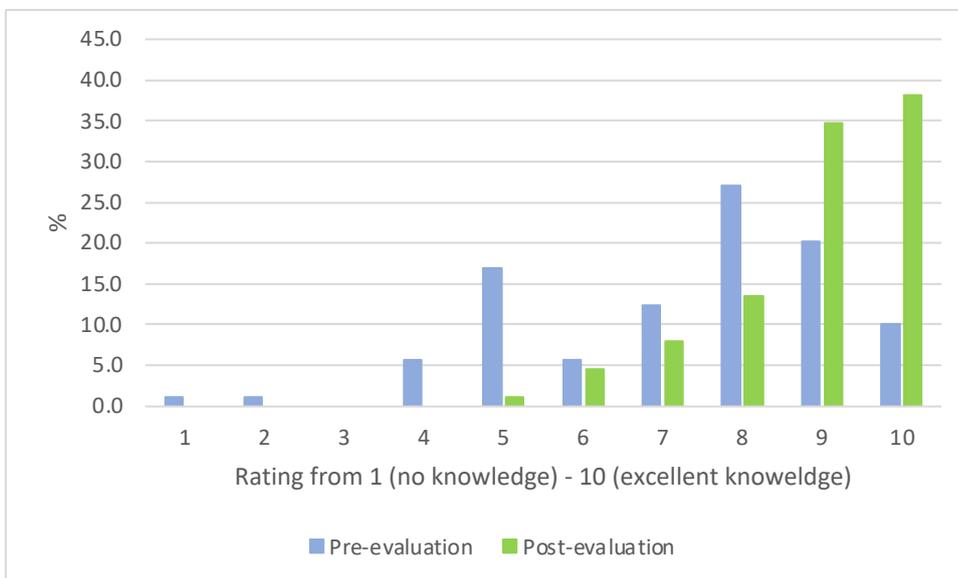


Figure 5.13 Self-rated knowledge on ‘eating well for good health’ (n=89)

The pre-evaluation showed that knowledge of ‘getting enough sleep to stay healthy’ (n=93) was rated by 48.2% (n=45) of participants as an eight out of ten or higher, by 33.4% (n=31) as a six or seven out of ten, and by 18.4% (n=17) as a five out of ten or lower (Figure 5.14; Table A8-6). The post-evaluation showed a significant ($p < 0.001$) increase in the proportion of participants (84.9%; n=79) rating this as an eight out of ten or higher (Table A8-7). There was a decrease in the number of participants (15.1%; n=14) rating this as a seven out of ten or lower.

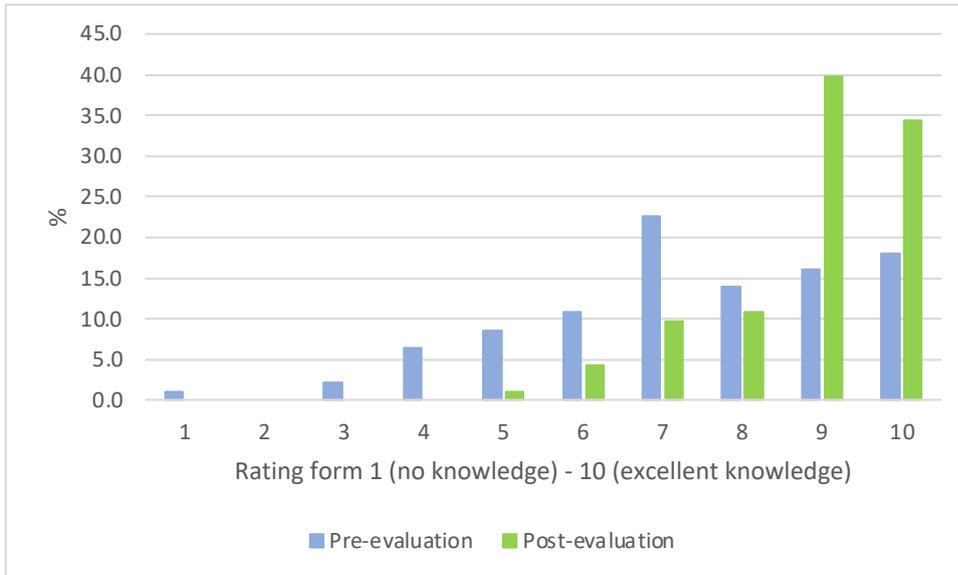


Figure 5.14 Self-rated knowledge of 'getting enough sleep to stay healthy' (n=93)

Knowledge of 'being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing' (n=92) was at pre-evaluation rated by 44.4% (n=31) of participants as an eight out of ten or higher, by 26.1% (n= 24) as a six or seven out of ten, and by 29.5% (n=27) as a five out of ten or lower (Figure 5.15; Table A8-6). Post-evaluation showed that a significantly ($p < 0.001$) higher number of participants (79.3%; n=73) rated their knowledge as an eight out of ten or higher (Table A8-7). A smaller proportion of participants (20.7%; n=19) rated it as seven out of ten or lower.

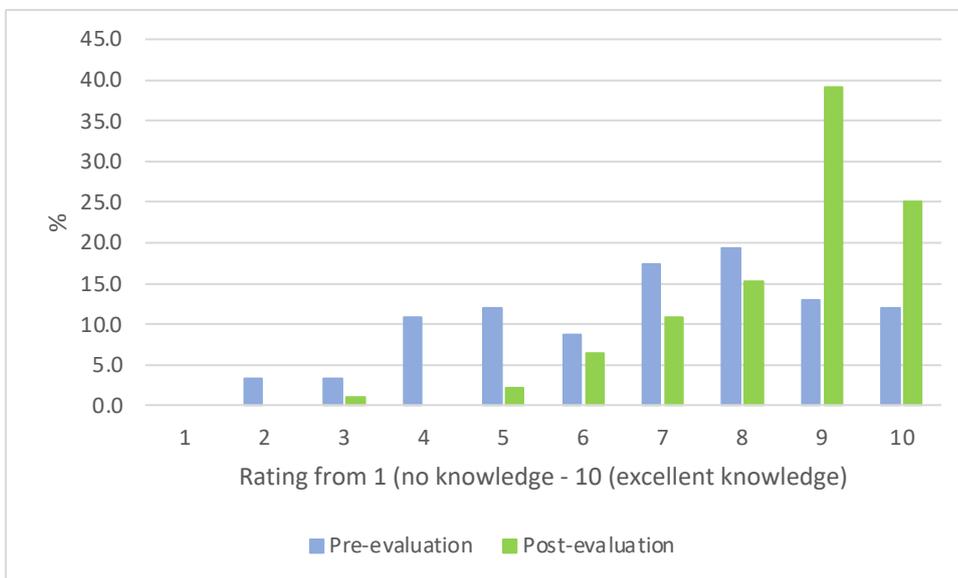


Figure 5.15 Self-rated knowledge of 'being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing' (n=92)

The pre-evaluation showed that knowledge of 'having the resilience to cope with challenging situations' (n=92) was rated as an eight out of ten or higher by 49.0% (n=45) of participants, as a six or seven out of ten by 27.1% (n=25) of participants, and as a five out of ten or lower by 23.9% (n=22) of participants (Figure 5.16; Table A8-6). The post-evaluation showed that significantly ($p < 0.001$) more participants (79.3%; n=73) rated it as an eight out of ten or higher (Table A8-7). There was a decrease in the proportion of participants scoring it as a six or seven out of ten (16.3%; n=15), or as a five out of ten or lower (4.4%; n=4).



Figure 5.16 Self-rated knowledge of 'having the resilience to cope with challenging situations' (n=92)

Most participants rated their knowledge of making healthy choices significantly higher after completing the programme compared to the start of the programme. Health knowledge is an integral part of health literacy (Nutbeam and Muscat, 2020) and is associated with higher levels of self-efficacy. This is important as people with increased health knowledge tend to utilise their new understanding and skills to enact positive behaviour change. Higher levels of health knowledge are also associated with increased confidence in one's ability to live a healthier lifestyle use (Larsen et al., 2022).

These findings indicate that, as a result of taking part in the programme, participants are more knowledgeable about making healthy choices to improve health, wellbeing and farm safety. This is important as increased health knowledge is associated with a greater likelihood of making behaviour change (Miller, 2002).

Participants' self-rated confidence in their ability to make healthy decisions

Participants' confidence in their ability to make healthy decisions in relation to 'understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked' (n=92) was rated by 35.8% (n=33) as an eight out of ten or higher, by 37.0% (n=34) as a six or seven out of ten, and by 27.2% (n=25) as a five out of ten or lower (Figure 5.17; Table A8-8). The post-evaluation showed a significant ($p < 0.001$) increase in the number of participants (75.0%; n=69) rating it an eight out of ten or higher (Table A8-9). A smaller number (17.4%; n=16) of participants rated it as a six or seven out of ten, with just 7.6% (n=7) rating it as a five out of ten or lower after completing the programme.

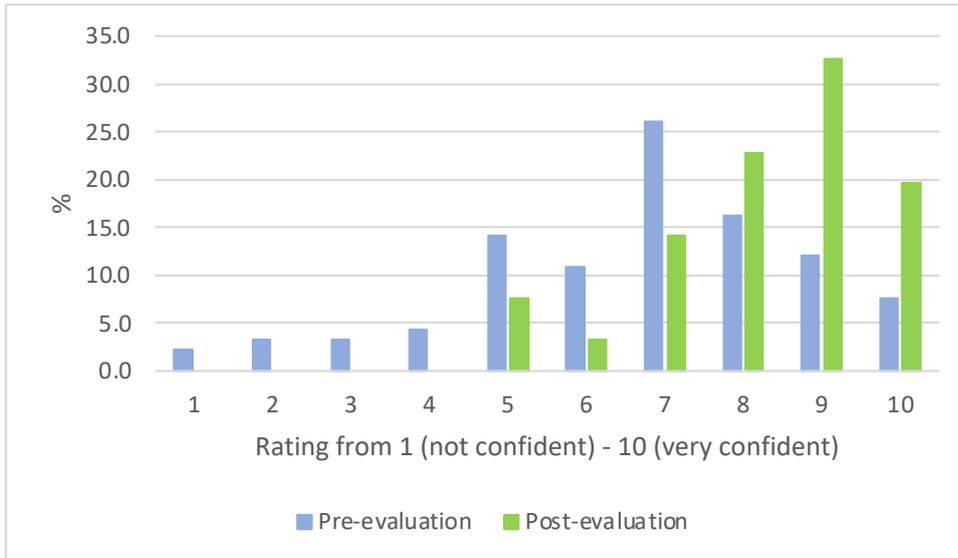


Figure 5.17 Self-rated confidence in the ability in 'understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked' (n=92)

The pre-evaluation showed that participants' confidence in their ability to 'be physically active for health and wellbeing' (n=91) was rated by 47.2% (n=43) as an eight out of ten or higher, by 25.3% (n=23) as a six or seven out of ten, and by 27.5% (n=25) as five out of ten or lower (Figure 5.18; Table A8-8). The post-evaluation demonstrated a significantly ($p < 0.001$) larger group of participants (78.0%; n=71) rating it as an eight or higher out of ten (Table A8-9). It also showed a decrease in participants (15.4%; n=14) rating it as a six or seven out of ten or as a five out of ten or lower (6.6%; n=6).

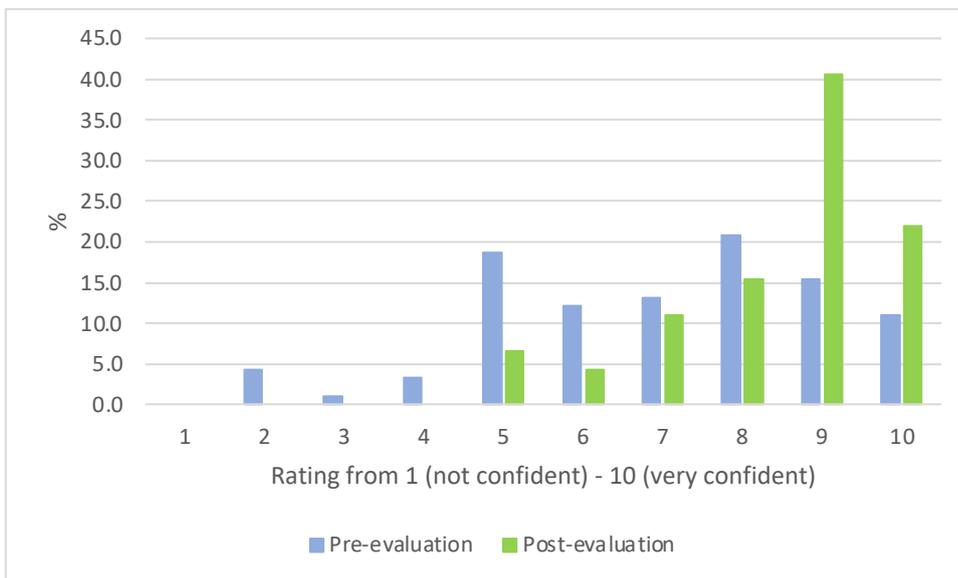


Figure 5.18 Self-rated confidence in the ability to 'be physically active for health and wellbeing' (n=91)

Participants' confidence in their ability to 'manage stress to stay healthy' (n=88) was, at pre-evaluation, rated by 39.9% (n=35) of participants as an eight out of ten or higher, 29.5% (n=26) as a six or seven out of ten and 30.6% (n=27) as a five out of ten or lower (Figure 5.19; Table A8-8). The post-evaluation showed an increased number of participants (75.1%; n=66) rating it as an eight out of ten or higher, which was significant ($p < 0.001$; Table A8-9). A smaller number of participants (19.3%; n=17) rated it as a six or seven out of ten, whilst a handful (5.6%; n=5) rated it as a five out of ten.

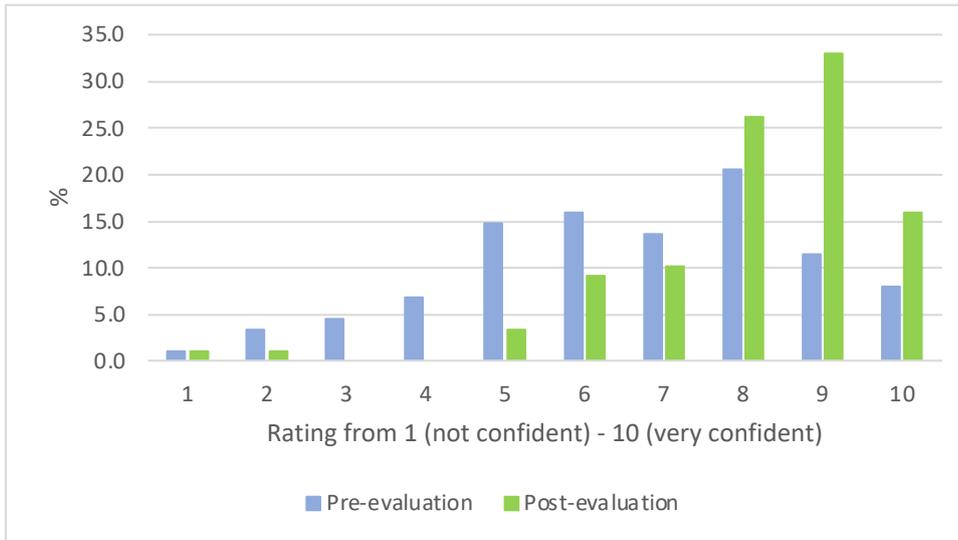


Figure 5.19 Self-rated confidence in the ability to 'manage stress to stay healthy' (n=88)

Participants' confidence in their ability to 'eat well for good health' (n=83) was, at pre-evaluation, rated by 47.0% (n=39) of participants as an eight out of ten or higher, by 27.7% (n=23) as a six or seven out of ten, and by 25.3% (n=21) as a five out of ten or lower (Figure 5.20; Table A8-8). After completing the programme, a significant ($p < 0.001$) increase was observed in the number of participants (77.4%; n=64) rating this as an eight out of ten or higher (Table A8-9). There was a decrease in the proportion of participants rating it as a six or seven out of ten (15.6%; n=13), and as a five out of ten or lower (7.0%; n=6).

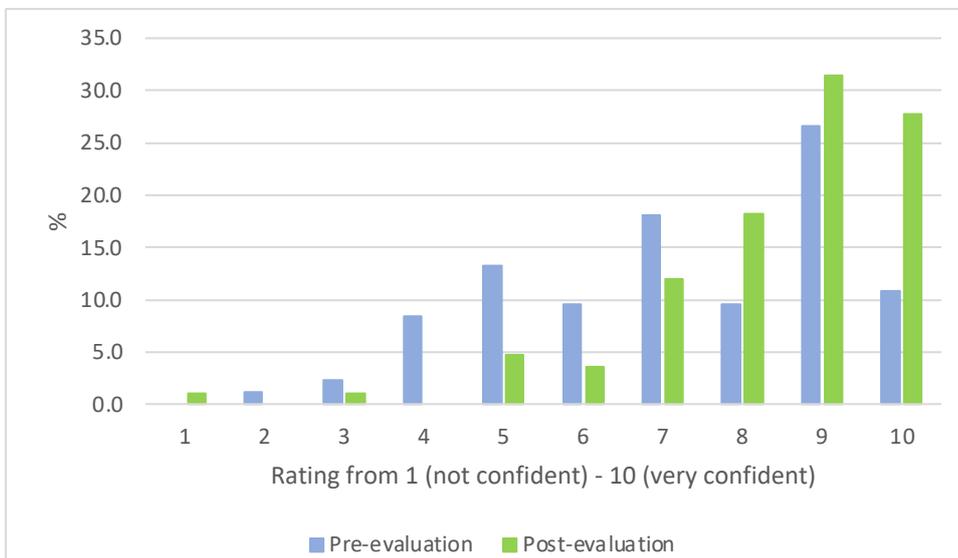


Figure 5.20 Self-rated confidence in the ability to 'eat well for good health' (n=83)

The pre-evaluation showed that participants' confidence in their ability to 'get enough sleep to stay healthy' (n=90) was rated by 51.2% (n=46) as an eight out of ten or higher, by 24.4% (n=22) as a six or seven out of ten, and by 24.4% (n=22) as a five out of ten or lower (Figure 5.21; Table A8-8). The post-evaluation showed that the number of participants (81.2%; n=73) rating it as an eight out of ten or higher had significantly ($p < 0.001$) increased (Table A8-9). A decrease was observed in the number of participants (13.3%; n=12) rating it a six or seven out of ten or a five out of ten or lower (5.4%; n=5).

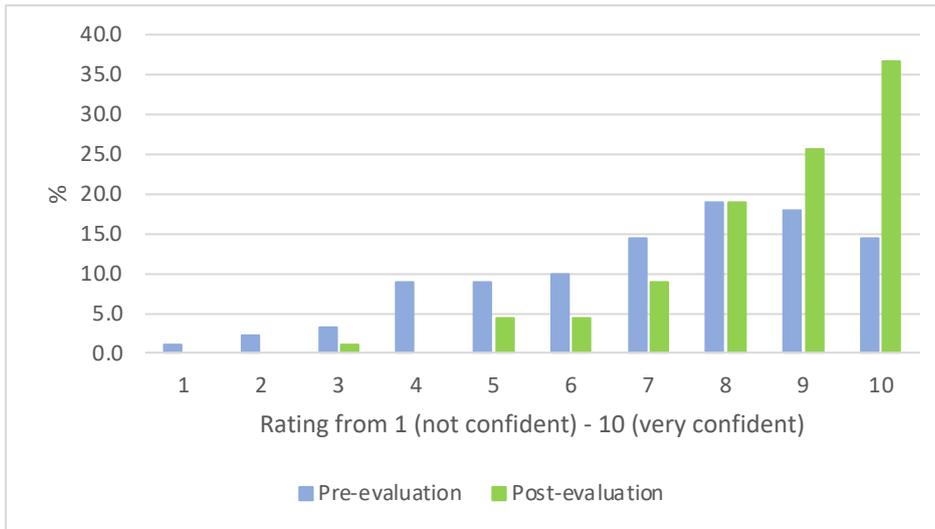


Figure 5.21 Self-rated confidence in the ability to 'get enough sleep to stay healthy' (n=90)

Participants' pre-evaluation confidence in their ability in 'being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing' (n=88) was rated as an eight out of ten or higher by 49.0% (n=43) of participants, as a six or seven out of ten by 23.8% (n=21), and as a five out of ten or lower by 27.2% (n=24; Figure 5.22; Table A8-8). Post-evaluation showed a significant ($p < 0.001$) increase in the number of participants rating their knowledge as an eight out of ten or higher (77.3%; n=68; Table A8-9). It also showed a smaller proportion of participants (22.7%; n=20) rating it as a seven out of ten or lower.

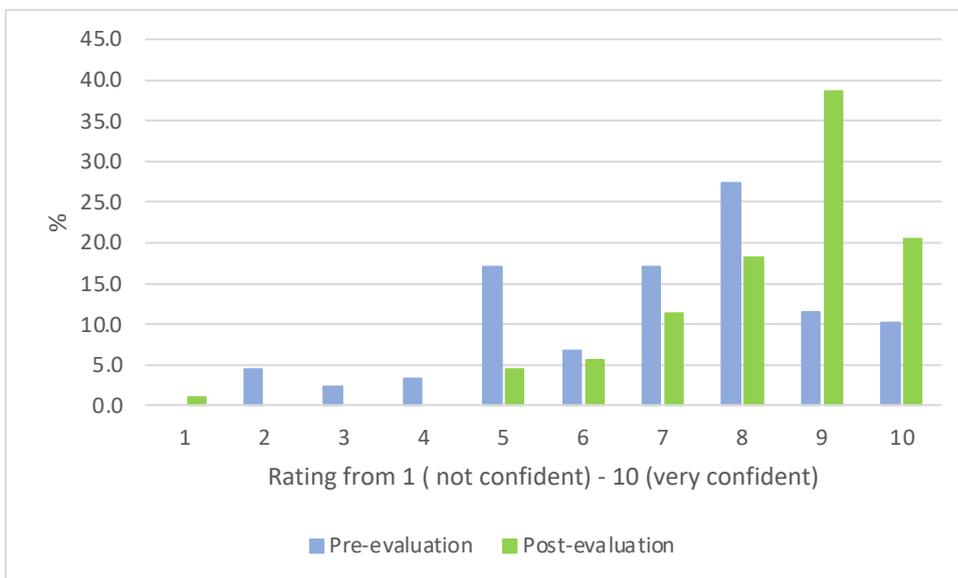


Figure 5.22 Self-rated confidence in the ability in 'being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing' (n=88)

The pre-evaluation showed that participants' confidence in their ability to 'have the resilience to cope with challenging situations' (n=90) was rated as an eight out of ten or higher by 45.5% (n=41), as a six or seven out of ten by 27.8% (n=25), and as a five out of ten or lower by 26.7% (n=24; Figure 5.23; Table A8-8). The post-evaluation showed a significantly ($p < 0.001$) higher proportion of participants (77.8%; n=70) rating it as an eight out of ten or higher (Table A8-9). A smaller proportion of participants (22.2%; n=19) rated it as a seven out of ten or lower.

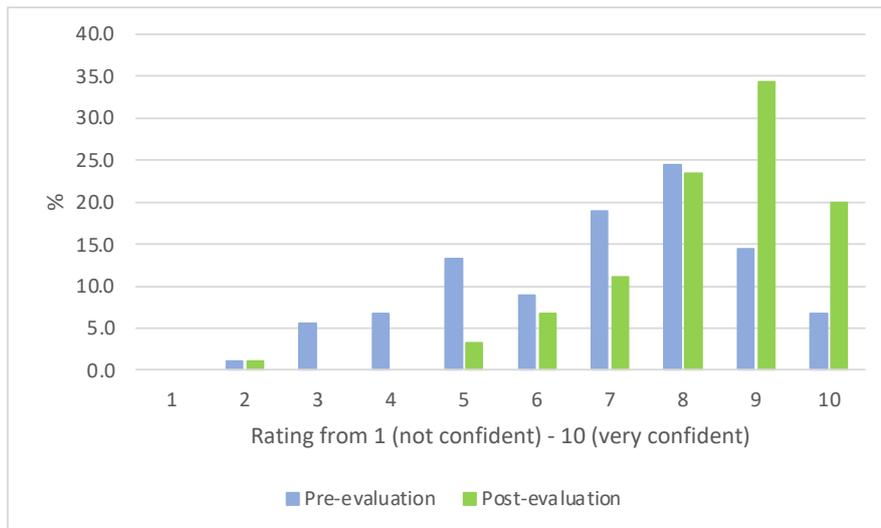


Figure 5.23 Self-rated confidence in the ability to 'have the resilience to cope with challenging situations' (n=90)

These findings demonstrate that participants' confidence in their ability to make healthy choices was significantly higher post-programme compared to pre-programme. This is important as higher levels of confidence are associated with improved self-belief in relation to one's ability to take control over personal health choices and health behaviours as well as increased self-belief about achieving positive outcomes as a result of behaviour change (Bandura, 1998).

Overall, the results of these three motivational rating scales show that taking part in the FarmConnect programme resulted in participants having significantly increased motivation for change, based on increased importance, knowledge and confidence. This is a very positive finding as people who rate both perceived importance of and confidence in behaviour change highly, are more likely to take concrete actions to bring about behaviour change (Van Leer et al., 2008). People with higher levels of motivation and confidence also tend to use their increased health knowledge and skillsets to be more proactive in self-care, and in maintaining and improving personal health (Latchford and Duff, 2010; Smith et al., 2013).

5.1.4 Participants' awareness of the link between health and farm safety

Most participants (87.3%; n=82) 'agreed/strongly agreed' with the statement 'I believe that the decisions I make about my health impact my farming safety practices' (n=94), (Table 5.1). Post-evaluation showed a significant (Z=2.746, p <0.001) increase in the proportion of participants (94.7%; n=89) who 'agreed/strongly agreed' with this statement.

Table 5.1: I believe that the decisions I make about my health impact my farming safety practices (n=94) n (%)

	Strongly Agree % (n)	Agree % (n)	Neither agree or disagree % (n)	Disagree % (n)	Strongly Disagree % (n)
Pre-evaluation	1 (1.1)	1 (1.1)	10 (10.5)	48 (51.1)	34 (36.2)
Post-evaluation	2 (2.1)	0 (0.0)	3 (3.2)	38 (40.4)	51 (54.3)

There is a strong link between poor general health stress and safety behaviours (Jadhav et al., 2015), and consequently increased risk for farming injury (Glasscock et al., 2006). Participants in the FarmConnect programme indicated having significantly greater awareness that farmer health and safety are interlinked constructs and impact individual safety behaviours. This increased awareness can prompt a positive change in attitudes towards farm safety behaviours and injury prevention.

5.1.5 Post-programme evaluation: participants' rating of the FarmConnect programme Overall programme rating

Participants were highly positive about their experience of the programme with 91.2% (n=104) of participants rating it as an eight out of ten or higher (Table 5.2). A smaller number (8.8%; n=10) of participants rated it as a seven out of ten or lower.

Table 5.2 On a scale of 1 -10, how do you rate your experience of the FarmConnect programme? (n=114)

Not Good					Excellent				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	4 (3.5)	5 (4.4)	17 (14.9)	26 (22.8)	61 (53.5)

Likelihood of recommending the programme to other farmers

Participants unanimously (100%; n=110) agreed that they would recommend the FarmConnect programme to other farmers (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Would you recommend the FarmConnect programme to other farmers? (n=110)

Yes	110 (100.00)
No	0 (0.00)

Rating of delivery and content of the FarmConnect programme

Most participants (81.4%; n=92) 'agreed/strongly' agreed that the number of sessions in the FarmConnect programme was sufficient (Table 5.4). The majority of participants (98.2%; n= 110) 'agreed/ strongly agreed' that the content of the FarmConnect programme was easy to understand. Most participants (93.8%; n=105) 'agreed/strongly agreed' that the content was applicable to them. A large majority (86.5%; n=96) 'agreed/ strongly agreed' with the statement that 'the FarmConnect programme addressed specific challenges in relation to farming'. The majority of participants (98.2%; n=109) 'agreed/ strongly agreed' with the statement 'I enjoyed the FarmConnect programme'.

Table 5.4 In relation to the delivery and content of the FarmConnect programme, please rank each of the following:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The number of sessions in the FarmConnect programme was sufficient (n=113)	1 (0.9)	9 (8.0)	11 (9.7)	60 (53.1)	32 (28.3)
The content of the FarmConnect programme was easy to understand (n=112)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.8)	0 (0.0)	53 (47.3)	57 (50.9)
The content of the FarmConnect programme was applicable to me (n=112)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	6 (5.3)	60 (53.6)	45 (40.2)
The FarmConnect programme addressed specific challenges in relation to farming (n=111)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	14 (12.6)	56 (50.5)	40 (36.0)
I enjoyed the FarmConnect programme (n=111)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.8)	18 (16.2)	91 (82.0)

5.1.6 Programme impact

The vast majority of participants (94.6%; n=105) 'agreed/strongly agreed' that, as a result of taking part in the FarmConnect programme, they contemplated making changes to the way that they take care of their mental health and wellbeing (Table 5.5). Most participants (88.2%; n=97) 'agreed/strongly agreed' that, as a result of taking part in the programme, they felt more at ease in discussing their health and wellbeing with others. Most participants (89.2%; n=99) also 'agreed/strongly agreed' that they knew where to look for other supports and services.

Table 5.5 Please answer what describes you best. As a result of taking part in the FarmConnect programme:

Please tick the box which describes you best.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I am thinking of making changes in the way I take care of my mental health and wellbeing (n=111)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (5.4)	67 (60.4)	38 (34.2)
I am more at ease in discussing my health and wellbeing with others (n=110)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.9)	12 (10.9)	59 (53.7)	38 (34.5)
I know where to look for other supports and services (n=111)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.8)	10 (9.0)	58 (52.3)	41 (36.9)

Most participants rated their experience of the programme delivery and content highly. Whilst health education can increase health knowledge and act as a catalyst for behaviour change, evidence shows that this is more likely to occur if the programme is relevant to participants and addresses a clear health need (Flint et al., 2020). In addition, in order for health education to be effective in bringing about behaviour change, educational programmes need to be engaging and culturally competent (Arlinghaus and Johnston, 2018; Flint et al., 2020). In the context of FarmConnect, the high programme rating, satisfaction with delivery and impact, and the increased levels of importance, knowledge and confidence in relation to making healthy choices, indicate high programme effectiveness.

5.1.7 Key learnings

In total n=94 participants responded to an open question about what participants' key learnings from the programme (Table 5.6) were. The top six key learnings reported were 'mental health and wellbeing, including mindfulness' (38.3%; n=36); the 'importance of connecting with others' (36.2%; n=34); the 'importance of positive thinking' (34.0%; n=32); 'life-work balance' (including taking time for myself; 29.8%; n=28), 'diet' (26.6%; n=25), and 'health awareness' (23.4%; n=22).

Table 5.6 Key learnings from the programme? (n=94) *

Learning themes	n (%)
Mental health and wellbeing (incl. mindfulness)	36 (38.3)
Importance of connecting with others	34 (36.2)
Importance of positive thinking	32 (34.0)
Life-work balance (incl. taking time for yourself)	28 (29.8)
Diet	25 (26.6)
Health awareness	22 (23.4)
Importance of sleep	16 (17.0)
Asking for help	13 (13.8)

Physical activity	13 (13.8)
Stress management	13 (13.8)
Others have similar issues	12 (12.8)
Importance of community	10 (10.6)
Farm safety	4 (4.2)
Other	18 (19.1)

5.1.8 Programme suggestions

In total n=57 participants responded to an open question inviting suggestions for future programme roll-out (Table 5.7). Suggestions included: 'having follow-up sessions' (19.3%; n=11); 'selecting better and clearer recruitment strategies' (14.8%; n=8); 'targeting those farmers most in need of courses like this' (11.1%; n=6); 'providing more information about farm issues such as safety, independence, CAP' (11.1%; n=6); having a 'nationwide roll-out' (11.1%; n=6), and 'bringing in external speakers such as peer mentors, advisors' (11.1%; n=6).

Table 5.7 Have you any suggestions or recommendations for future roll-out of the programme? (n=57)*

Themes	n (%)
Organise follow-up sessions	11 (19.3)
Better and clearer recruitment strategies	8 (14.8)
Target those farmers most in need of courses like this	6 (11.1)
More information about farm issues (safety, independence, CAP)	6 (11.1)
Nationwide roll-out	6 (11.1)
Bring in external speakers (peer mentors, advisors)	6 (11.1)
Link in with local sport- and support organisations	4 (7.4)
Alter course introduction (expectations, name tags, rationale for people to attend)	4 (7.4)
Timing more farmer-friendly	3 (5.5)
More group conversations	3 (5.5)
Other	13 (24.1)

*Multiple answers possible

5.1.9 Quantitative: Pre and Post Questionnaires - Conclusion

The FarmConnect pilot evaluation findings show that, across all programme themes, there were significant improvements in how participants rated the importance of, their knowledge of, and their confidence in their ability to make healthy choices after completing the programme. Evidence shows that those who rate perceived importance, confidence and motivation highly, are more likely to engage in health behaviour change (Arlinghaus and Johnston, 2018; Miller and Moyers, 2015; van Leer, 2008). These findings signal programme effectiveness in raising motivation for change among participants and consequently paving the way for increasing the likelihood of behaviour change. Increasing confidence, in particular, is associated with improved self-belief in relation to one's ability to take control over personal health choices and health behaviours as well as increased self-belief about achieving positive outcomes as a result of behaviour change (Bandura, 1998). These promising programme outcomes can, at least in part, be attributed to the high positive participant rating in relation to programme delivery and programme applicability, highlighting programme relevance (Arlinghaus and Johnston, 2018). Participants also indicated that participation in the programme contributed

to increased awareness of mental health and wellbeing, and most participants agreed to 'feeling more at ease discussing their health and wellbeing with others' as a result of the programme. This raised awareness and increased sense of autonomy in relation to health and wellbeing, was reinforced by the top four key learnings cited by participants, which included mental health and wellbeing awareness (including mindfulness), the importance of connecting with others, the impact of positive thinking processes, and work-life balance (including making time for oneself). This is an important programme outcome in light of previous findings which highlight the importance of stigma reduction in improving help-seeking behaviours for mental health issues among farmers (Roy, 2018). Finally, a notable finding was participants' increased awareness that farmer health and safety are interlinked constructs and impact individual safety behaviours. This increased awareness can prompt a positive change in attitudes towards farm safety behaviours and injury prevention.

5.2. Qualitative findings: key programme outcomes and behaviour change

Qualitative findings revealed that a pragmatic approach was warranted in terms of expectations regarding programme outcomes and behaviour change ("...very small behavioural changes were a big success for us and that's how we looked at it..." This was operationalised by facilitators by threading the core messages throughout the programme and providing small, action-orientated, pieces of 'homework' to encourage small lifestyle behaviour changes.

"We sort of threaded them (core messages) right throughout the programme rather than a big reveal - we introduced them bit by bit. I think people were encouraged by that because there was something they could take away each week and try it out, sort of like homework".

Owen, Facilitator

Nevertheless, there was ample evidence of 'small' but nevertheless significant behaviour changes that were rooted in experiential learning and that were at the 'heart and soul' of the programme. This included going for daily walks; counting steps; reducing caffeine, sugar, salt and fatty food intake; getting a new mattress to improve sleep; drinking more water; and eating more fruit which appeared to translate into many feeling 'better in themselves' and improved physical health more generally.

"I've started to keep on top of my diet a bit better, I'm eating more fruit and drinking water. I learned that its small things that make the difference, you don't have to go and change your whole life". **Conor, Farmer.**

"I started walking 2-3 nights a week and eating better food. I'm still doing it and I've nearly lost a stone weight which has done me the world of good". **James, Farmer.**

"It made me think about my lifestyle and I said to myself I'm going to put this into practice. I used to drink a lot of coffee but I have reduced that 50%. I went off the sweets, I don't take any salt now and I go for a walk in the evening. I find it absolutely wonderful; I can see a huge change in myself. I feel great!" **Ronan, Farmer.**

The programme development team noted that whilst these might not, at face value, appear like significant changes, in the context of farmers, they represented 'a huge leap in level of awareness and taking personal responsibility [for health].' (Alex, Programme Development team). Farmers reported that they were constantly busy, their minds were often on the next job before completing the task at hand and perceived they had no time to be thinking about their own health. However, they found that FarmConnect highlighted that this busy lifestyle and a decline in physical functioning with older age can often reduce productivity and efficiency on the farm in the long-term. Therefore, a key learning outcome for many participants was the need to slow down

in order to look after their health which they felt would, in the long run, enable them to more effectively look after their farm. This unique approach of reframing a healthy lifestyle within the context of a healthy farm was particularly useful in spreading health promotion messages among this cohort:

“It made me realise the older you get, you are not able to do what you used to. The farmer is so good at looking after his animals, but he is forgetting about himself. Who is going to look after him? So, it made me realise that I need to slow down and look after myself. The most important thing is to look after yourself, because you won’t be able to look after the farm”. **Eamon, Farmer.**

“You can end up being the hamster in the wheel, keep running faster but not going anywhere. In fact, your efficiency and productivity on the farm drops. I sort of realised through the programme that I needed to be a bit nicer to myself. Just to slow down, to take more time”. **Chris, Farmer.**

Perhaps more importantly, farmers felt that slowing down and prioritising their health would also reduce incidences of accidents on the farm. They noted that they were more present and conscious during more mundane tasks whilst also having a greater awareness of dangerous activities.

“It taught me not to be rushing through things. With farming you are doing one job but thinking of the next one. Especially during the mundane tasks. So, I’m more present now with what I’m doing, and I think that will help me to be safer on the farm”. **Pat, Farmer.**

“The farms are so bloody dangerous; something could happen in a second. Now when I go to do something stupid, I’d think what the hell am I doing. That would be more or less down to the course where I wouldn’t have thought about it beforehand”. **Fred, Farmer.**

Whilst the concept of farm safety is not new, it was the unique framing of farm safety around the health of the farmer which resonated with many farmers and facilitators alike.

*“I had a good comment from one guy that came in who’d be one of those guys with arms folded, not letting this [information] get into me type. He said he to me at the tea-break I’m glad I came here tonight. I thought this was going to be more health and safety s***. This programme was different. It wasn’t more health and safety which has kind of been bandied around for the last 10 years. It took a totally different point of view and I think the farmers were very happy with that.”* **Paul, Facilitator**

Beyond slowing down and improved farm safety, almost all farmers reported the positive benefit that the programme had on their mental health. More specifically, it helped to address social isolation, normalise mental health difficulties and reduce stigma through the reciprocal sharing of life difficulties and coping strategies, acted as a ‘safe space’ to address sensitive issues such as suicide and the impact of bereavement, and enhanced their overall self-efficacy to recognise symptoms, seek timely support and signpost others to available services.

“You realised, through the programme, that a lot of people experience these things [mental health difficulties]. It taught us to be aware that there could be problems and how to recognise them. I would be better able to help someone else now if they were having difficulties as well as myself”. **Chris, Farmer.**

“You would discuss problems and someone else might say they had the same problem and give you a few pointers. There was no stigma. It made the whole subject [mental health] more approachable. You would think I’m not the only one, it’s not all doom and gloom. I find it certainly easier to discuss those things now and the programme brought that about. I wouldn’t have been a great man for talking about those things before”. **Frank, Farmer.**

It was felt that the benefits in terms of mental health could also extend to a participant being better placed following programme participation to support someone else in distress. For example, one of the facilitators recounted where a programme participant had remarked ‘that the programme was not really for me’ because of what he felt was a predominant focus on mental health. When reminded by the facilitator that he would at least be better placed in the future to support someone else who might be in distress, the participant readily acknowledged this as a positive outcome from the programme. There were also some indications of positive ripple effects on farmers’ openness to talking about mental health beyond the lifetime of the programme.

“The rooms well full at the end of the six weeks and farmers that I meet still talk about it... and by breaking the ice on it, conversations are now starting to happen”. **Bob, Facilitator**

The increased health literacy and habitual practice of healthy lifestyle behaviours was reported to increase farmers overall confidence to make decisions about their health. The programme was felt to be a catalyst in some way to make healthier decisions and increased self-efficacy to attend to the GP. This was indeed supported by the incentive that FarmConnect would pay for a GP visit made by Farmers if they presented the receipt.

“Just that bit more awareness, it made me feel more confident to make decisions about my health, if you needed help or anything. It gave us the tools to go and search for things that might help us or how we should approach difficulties that we might have. I’d be more confidence in looking after myself now, definitely”. **Chris, Farmer.**

“Last year I got this pain in my chest a couple of time, I was afraid it was cancer. They encouraged us to go and get a check-up during the course and they would cover the cost. So I went, and I did a few tests. They found nothing, it was an enlarged muscle or something. But the relief that gave me was something fantastic. I had a new lease of life. I won’t leave it so long in the future”. **Frank, Farmer.**

Finally, there were some positive knock-on effects to improving family life for those who were married and had children. The cookbook is particular was resource that brought families together to cook a healthy meal which appeared to pass on healthy messages to their children and reinforce the interest in a healthier lifestyle among farmers.

“I would have went home and talked about a few things with the family in the evenings. We ended up using the cookbook quite a bit and the young lad really took to that. We have made a few things from it since. It is great to see him interested in it and it makes you more interested as well”. **Conor, Farmer.**

A social group also was established following the completion of the programme in one location. Indeed, some farmers highlighted that facilitators could perhaps encourage and support the establishment of such groups at the end of each programme delivery.

SECTION 6: OPTIMISING AND SUSTAINING ENGAGEMENT

6.0 Introduction

The purpose of this phase of the evaluation was to elicit participants' key reflections on the pilot delivery and to draw out the key learnings that would optimise and sustain engagement in the future delivery of the programme. Theme 1 'Getting bums on seats: effectiveness of recruitment strategies and programme certification' explores the key lessons learned in relation to participant recruitment as well as potential avenues for integrating the programme within existing farming and KT structures. Theme 2 'Striking the right chord: reflections on programme content and resources' encompasses key reflections on both the programme content and methods of delivery, including suggestions for future adaptations. Theme 3 'Sustaining engagement - co-facilitation style and programme features' examines the key strategies used to create a safe and enjoyable learning environment and to sustain participants' engagement over time.

6.1 Getting bums on seats: effectiveness of recruitment strategies and programme certification

The Programme Development team highlighted a range and comprehensive set of recruitment strategies that were adopted to promote the programme during Phase 1. These included a high-profile official launch and a budget allocation for promotion and advertising, local radio and newspaper ads, and targeted social media ads. However, these initial efforts to promote and advertise the programme were perceived to be largely ineffective in isolation. It soon became apparent that a strategy of one-to-one recruitment would also be necessary given that initial publicity and advertising efforts were not translating into registrations.

"That [one to one recruitment] was a huge learning curve for us, and, apart from a very small amount of social media advertising, we hardly spent any money on advertising for Phase 2".

Fran, Programme Development team.

"When you can network and promote locally...it always works much better, that personal contact makes such a difference. Alex, Programme Development team.

The facilitators highlighted that low registrations were likely due to farmers' unfamiliarity with engaging in health promoting programmes and their lack of presence on social media platforms, although WhatsApp was noted as a useful platform in this regard. The farmers reported that the two-pronged approach of local media and one-to-one contact with key gatekeepers was what moved them to engage in FarmConnect – traditional media building the credibility of the programme and one-to-one contact providing the additional encouragement to engage. It was noted that having the recruitment person present on the first night of the programme to welcome participants could provide reassurance.

"Use the genuine farmer that everyone can relate to, put him in the paper, that is how you will get people in. Take a photograph of the people who took part in the programme and put that in the paper. If those people in [location of course] went back and told the other farmers that it was worth doing there would be a bit of personal witness there as well!". Pat Farmer.

"It was a photograph in the local paper. I knew one the men in the photo, a fantastic man. Another man rang me then and recommended to do it. He went to the house of my brother as well. If it was in the paper and he was backing it, and this other man was doing the rounds then I thought it must be worthwhile". **Eamon, Farmer.**

"You need a designated person for recruitment, to contact farmers individually...and you need that local input...and to be there on the first night to welcome them and to assure them that they are in the right place." **Bob Advisory Group**

It was acknowledged that these recruitment strategies did not necessarily engage the most hard to reach farmers (e.g., single, older farmers living in more remote areas), and that additional resources and strategies – particularly the use of key gatekeepers - were needed to engage these farmers. These 'gatekeepers' included those with significant contact with farmers through their work such as agricultural advisors, farm planners, veterinarians and local role models. However, doubts were expressed about the sustainability of this one-to-one approach as part of any planned scale-up of the programme, particularly in larger counties where it was felt that multiple gatekeepers would be needed to replicate the pilot model of recruitment.

There was strong support for using pilot programme participants as future advocates or champions for the programme. Given how well the initial cohort of farmers bought into and embraced the programme (see section 6.4), farmers and facilitators recommended that testimonials and active encouragement from past participants could form an important pillar of recruiting future participants to the programme.

"I would have the farmers from the 1st programme to encourage farmers to join the programme. To have past participants act as ambassadors, to go out and to tell other people how good it was. That would be the best endorsement you could get for it". **Sam, Facilitator**

Each one of those farmers [pilot programme participants] is a walking advertisement for the programme." **Bob Operational Group**

Indeed, all farmers highlighted their intention to recommend the programme to their peers if future-scale up were to happen. Notably, the most commonly cited reasons for participation in FarmConnect were social connection with other farmers, for farmers to gain knowledge to support their own physical health, having an existing interest in mental health, convenient location of programme to home, and an altruistic desire to help other farmers by ensuring that enough people participated in the pilot so that it could scaled up. Framing the programme around these outcomes and male ideologies (i.e., altruism) in future advertisements might also be a useful approach to support recruitment.

"I thought it would be a good help to me seeing as I live on my own. It [reason for engagement] was 50/50 the social side of things and my interest in the topics relating to health". **Ronan, Farmer.**

There was strong support for scaling up and extending the reach of the programme to a wider audience. It was felt that the most effective, sustainable and strategic way to do this was to mainstream the programme within the Knowledge Transfer (KT) model. It was proposed that by integrating and accrediting the programme as a non-compulsory 'elective' KT programme, that this could also help to consolidate the link between farmer wellbeing and farm productivity.

"The way to upscale this is to integrate it into the standard KT requirements for farmers...and they get paid to do it as well." **Alex, Programme Development team.**

“By aligning the programme within the KT framework, it is sending out a clear message that farmer wellbeing is an integral part of farm productivity.” **Frances, Operational Group**

It is ideally suited to be incorporated into the KT model...we have shown that the developmental approach and group work with farmers works well, having the facilitators trained properly and the resources... that it is ideally suited to be deployed within future KT programmes to be launched by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine. **Fran Programme Development team**

This prompted some questions as to whether mainstreaming the programme within the context of KT and offering financial incentives to attend might change the dynamic in the room. Whilst it was agreed that trialling this approach was the only way to establish this, it was felt that by aligning the programme within the overall context of farm safety and based on the buy-in of participants to the pilot programme, that this approach was the best way to proceed. It was also felt that there was potential to scale up both as a stand-alone programme and by integrating and assimilating individual modules within existing agricultural education programmes.

I think it [future of the programme] is two-pronged; it can work as a stand-alone programme, but I also think that with the suite of resources we are after developing, that there is potential to go to the Department or Teagasc with these as ready-made modules to incorporate within existing education programmes, to try and leak it out to farmers in other ways...we need to think outside the box here...to infiltrate other educational avenues to get it out to a wider farmer audience.
Fran, Programme Development team

These are good modules that could be dropped into agricultural colleges. **Bob Operational Group**

The need for an increased focus on integration and assimilation also led to discussions on the need to consolidate learnings from different programmes. It was felt that whilst a number of innovative farmers' health initiatives had come to the fore in recent years, these tended to operate along competitive and territorial lines, resulting in a lack of co-operation or co-ordination between programmes. This tendency to operate in silos, although in large part due to the mechanism of funding calls, was nevertheless seen as stymieing the learning and potential growth in the field of farmers' health.

I would say there is a sense of territorialism here... a competitiveness between different stakeholders and I think there is a need for more unity, to say we are [all] trying to improve the lives of farmers... and as part of scaling up work in this field there is a need for greater coordination, it doesn't just happen by osmosis, that needs to be coordinated and managed.
Fran, Programme Development team

It was widely agreed that the reach and acceptability of FarmConnect could be enhanced by improving connections and synergies with existing farm organisations. It was also noted, however, that this was a potentially challenging task, given the intricate web of organisations aligned to different programmes.

...everyone [farm organisations] has their own initiative going in relation to farmer wellbeing...and it was beyond the scope of our pilot to engage with those bigger, very well developed organisations, with big budgets...and everybody is doing their own thing, and in that sense the agricultural world is divided into big players and an awful lot of smaller players.'
Alex, Programme Development team

One suggestion from an Operational Group member was for the development of a 'good practice directory' that would clearly signpost farmers to what programmes were available.

There are so many programmes targeting mental health awareness among farmers... and I do you think there is a need to join up what is happening across all programmes into a good practice directory of what is available for farmers... it's about supporting farmers to manage challenges and stressors and I think that can be one of the big learnings from this programme.

Frances Operational Group

Finally, whilst there was broad agreement that programme certification was an important next step for the programme, this was seen as being important not just in the context of the agricultural sector, but as having a potentially wider application to other sectors and occupational groups.

6.2. Striking the right chord: reflections on programme content and resources

After what was an extensive period of preparation, which included significant revisions and finetuning of the programme content and resources, there was an air of nervous anticipation and excitement about how programme delivery would unfold and 'how the content would perform in the room.' However, overall feedback from both the participants and facilitators was overwhelmingly positive. There was broad consensus from both groups that the FarmConnect was in-depth, comprehensive, clear, simple and easy to understand. This clear and simple approach enabled the facilitators to deliver the programme with relative ease, helped to promote greater inclusion ('leaving nobody behind') and was felt to appeal to a wider demographic of farmers by allowing greater scope to attach personal messages to the content.

"Its simplicity, that was the biggest strength of the programme. That appeal of it to opposite age groups and different sides of agriculture was very, very impressive, to get that mix right. Two completely different people of different generations could take different messages from it. Maybe it was because of the simplicity of the language used, they could attach their own message to it". Ian, Facilitator.

The incremental and developmental approach to structuring the content also served to gradually expose farmers to holding more vulnerable conversations (e.g. mental health) and subconsciously build their confidence to discuss such topics. Pat noted how he felt like he was taken on a gentle journey to discuss his health without feeling overly exposed or vulnerable.

"Talking about my health would have been an issue with me but they took us on a journey to talk about our health. They broke us in gently and didn't frighten us. It flowed very well and we didn't notice the things we were talking about the things we weren't used to talking about. When it came to talking about our mental health we were well settled, if they started off with that it wouldn't have worked". Pat, Farmer.

The mix of methods used to deliver content was also highlighted as a key strength of the programme. Facilitators and participants felt that using the different methods to deliver the content (e.g. PowerPoint, flip charts, discussion groups, videos) helped to keep the energy and interest high throughout the programme. It also allowed participants to engage with methods that they felt most comfortable with thus maximising participation.

"There was nice mix of methods to use and that really helped. You could keep them moving...a bit of a conversation, then on to the flip chart, show a video and then some group work. That was so key because no matter how interested people are, talking and talking about topics can get a little repetitive. Some people who were quiet during the discussion got great fun out of the scenario exercises so it also allows people to get involved in a way that they fell most comfortable".

Ian, Facilitator

"I intended not to stay past the first night, go down for a look kind of thing. But in fairness they held my attention for the six week. There was no waiting around, we were always going through something different and interesting. A video, mixing and chatting to different people. It was great". Fred, Farmer.

There were some instances where the lines between facilitator and advisor became somewhat blurred with some farmers seeing the programme as a means of availing of opportunistic agricultural advice. Some younger facilitators also found it occasionally challenging to engage older farmers.

"As advisors sitting in a room with farmers, it was hard sometimes to keep the conversation to what we were talking about"! Roisin, Facilitator

Although feedback on the content was overwhelming positive, facilitators had some concerns regarding the amount of content to be covered in six weeks with many noting that they were 'tight for time' in several sessions. This was particularly true when delivering the programme for the first time and when extra time was allowed to let important conversations flow. However, facilitators noted that as they became more familiar with the programme, they developed a greater capacity to be flexible with the delivery and to identify the key learning points of each session. Facilitators felt the instruction manual should highlight 2-3 core messages that need to be covered for each session. In order to allow greater flexibility and extended conversations for those delivering the programme for the first time.

"The way it's put together, there was probably enough for 8-9 or 10 weeks if you need it. So at times, it was a little tight for time with all of the information. I probably could have done with a little more time in a couple of sessions". Ian, Facilitator

"By the second time around we had understood the key messages that you need to hit on the night. If the conversation was going good, we could encourage that and let it go because we knew the 2 or 3 messages that we had to cover. So having the manual is great but I would recommend to have those 2 or 3 key messages that need to be covered in the manual as well". Sam, Facilitator

Farmers greatly appreciated the handouts and workbooks to refer back to information they may have missed or to further their education on particular topics ("the biggest positive was the books to refer back to...such fantastic information in them", Pat, Farmer). However, a few facilitators recommended a slight reduction in the number of handouts that were distributed. They felt that although well-intentioned, farmers might not get a chance to read the handout materials each week. Therefore, accruing a large pile of materials might impede participants from reading any of the materials compared to a more manageable amount:

"The content was fantastic but I'd reduce the amount of literature just a fraction. The handouts would go into the folders and they [farmers] might be thinking okay I'm going to open that folder some evening and look at the three bits. By the time they get around to it, there is now eleven bits. I'd say some people had great intentions to go through it all, but when they looked at it and saw how many handouts there were, I'd say that could have put them off reading it". Owen, Facilitator

Although the content was well received by almost all participants, one facilitator felt that the content around the resilience topic needed revisions to align with best practice in the field and to use more appropriate language.

"The content on resilience I had issues with. Some of the slides kind of suggested that if you're resilient, you wouldn't have anxiety and depression, and that's kind of dangerous territory to be in. There is a thing called negative resilience as well. You can become resilient to very difficult situations. So I'd look at the resilience slides again, I'd revisit them and maybe soften out the language". Angela, Facilitator

6.3. Sustaining engagement - co-facilitation style and programme features

The level of attendance was high across all pilot programmes (90.5%) with just one participant dropping out. Whilst this exceptional adherence underlines the appeal and popularity of the programme, it also raises an interesting paradox that, despite the challenges experienced in getting farmers to attend, once they did engage, their adherence and commitment to the programme was exemplary. This is elucidated by Pat's comments where he describes having concerns in advance about the programme being too long, but in the same vein, also indicating a desire for an extra week or two. Facilitators also shared the view that extending the programme beyond six weeks would likely impede participation.

"I thought at the beginning of the programme, that two hours per week for six weeks looked to be long, but when I got involved I saw they needed the time to cover the amount of material. By the end of it we could have done with an extra week or two". Pat, Farmer.

"It's trying to strike the right balance. There's probably ten weeks of content here but I don't think we would have held them for much longer than the six weeks or if they would have gotten involved if it was ten weeks long". Owen, Facilitator.

Nonetheless, there was a broad consensus that the success of FarmConnect was highly contingent on the co-facilitation methodology, the quality of the facilitation process, the composition of the group, the duration of the programme and the timing of its delivery. At the programme design stage, it was envisioned that co-facilitators would comprise a mix of community development and agricultural backgrounds paired together in order to add a richness to delivery. However, due to practicalities and recruitment issues, this did not transpire in practice. One Programme Development team participant felt that this was a missed opportunity in terms of establishing whether or not this approach might have reaped more dividends. Another Programme Development team participant felt that the key to successful delivery was good facilitation skills and being able to relate to and have empathy with the target group. Whether or not it was a missed opportunity, facilitators highlighted that the co-facilitation methodology allowed different life experiences and facilitation styles to be deployed in the room, thus appealing to different demographics of farmers and providing a 'rich delivery' regardless. This approach also shared the workload among co-facilitators which helped them to remain energetic in their delivery throughout the programme.

"I think there's a sort of a demographic piece going on, [co-facilitator] is younger than me, so we bring different experiences to it. We've different styles. [Co-facilitator] would have a much more relaxed style, I would want a little bit more structure and order, but I think the combination of the two of us meant that it felt easy. It also shared the load so you could keep the energy high throughout the session". Paul, Facilitator.

The Train the Trainer Programme and the additional supports provided to facilitators also helped to build connection and support among facilitators and with the Programme Development team. For example, the programme coordinator sent emails of support to all facilitators ahead of every weekly session, highlighting key messages for the week or sharing some feedback that might be useful in their practice. At the half-way stage, the programme coordinator also had telephone check-in conversations with each facilitator for feedback on their experience, comments on group traction and dynamic, response to materials, co-facilitation practice and any other issues that they wished to discuss.

"It comes from the couple of days in Carlow [Train the Trainer residential training weekend], we all became comfortable with each other and there was no kind of egos in the room. That's where that flow mechanism came from and how we got to work so well together. We all got to know each other and carried that into the room when we were facilitating". Paul, Facilitator

Many farmers described themselves as apprehensive and anxious on the first night of FarmConnect due to their unfamiliarity with health-orientated programmes. Some participants even noted that their intention was to attend only the first night just to 'have a look'. However, they highlighted their surprise at how comfortable and at ease they felt due to the quality of the facilitation upon initial engagement. Therefore, there was a general agreement on the importance of the 'winning over' farmers on the first night and establishing trust and connection over a longer period of time to 'lower the guard'. An informal, fun, structured and professional style whilst not bombarding participants with too much information was felt useful in this regard.

"They kind of had a humour but still very professional. They did a great job in making us feel welcome and the ice-breaker games were great... the ground rules and confidentiality agreement as well. I think because of all that, people worked very well together. You knew the boundaries, but it was also good fun. That was all so important because it was all going to be won or lost on the first night". Aine, Farmer.

"You need to build that trust so they can lower their guard somewhat". Sam, Facilitator

Facilitators attempted to establish a sense of connection by appropriately sharing life experiences, utilising familiar language, presenting themselves in plain clothes ("no suit and tie" Frank, Farmer) and engaging in casual conversations at the breaktimes. This subsequently struck a chord with farmers who commended the facilitators on being extremely relatable and approachable.

"I think not being afraid to bring in your own life experiences and share some of your own stories. That created a sort of equality in the room. It's that whole sense of do I feel a connection to this person at the top of the room. Do I feel safe with them or are they a similar person to me? Being honest with them about stuff that happens to you helps them to open up as well". Roisin, Facilitator.

"I thought it was going to be a case that we would be classed as children and them the teacher, dictating, but that wasn't the case at all. I just bought into them straight away. I was very comfortable with them, they were just there in their jeans and t-shirt, no suit and tie. They were just normal people like us and you could just go up and talk them about anything". Frank, Farmer.

Checking-in and checking-out with participants at the beginning and end of each session, greeting everyone individually by name and sending weekly reminder text messages about the programme also demonstrated an interest in participants' life experiences and feedback on the programme. This connection was augmented by using participants' comments and experiences to probe further into the learning materials, thereby giving them a sense of autonomy and ownership over the programme.

"Check-in first of all, how was your week and we checked-out at the very end as well. So keeping those two kind of two consistent things as well helped to build the relationship". Sam, Facilitator

"Using the examples that were shared by the farmers, throwing that out to the room, what do you all think of that? So giving them that sense of ownership by working with live material is always very good". Owen, Facilitator

The farmers highlighted how the facilitators did not let anyone dominate the conversation whilst also encouraging quieter people to speak. Despite this, participants never felt pressured to speak and were encouraged to participate in a way that was most comfortable to them. As such flexibility with participation was highlighted as a key strategy to sustain engagement along with different methods used to deliver content (e.g. videos, discussion groups, presentations) which was discussed previously.

“You could say as much or as little as you wanted, or you could stay silent. They put no pressure on us. It was a very safe group. I learned a lot but it wasn’t too deep or exposing. You didn’t have to go too personal with it”. **Chris, Farmer.**

Beyond the quality of the facilitation, farmers felt that the relatively small group numbers promoted a sense of collegiality and togetherness and allowed more time and space for quieter members of the group to open up. There was also a sense that the composition of males and females within one location was a positive thing that benefited recruitment (“wives bringing husbands along” Fran, Programme Development team) and participants’ experience of the programme from hearing the opinions of the opposite sex. Moreover, knowing other people in the group at the beginning of the programme also helped some farmers to settle in more quickly. All in all, these features of the group composition were felt to facilitate and sustain engagement.

“There were nice numbers and a small room. There was a fraternal aspect. I knew some of the other participants as well and that helps you settle in more”. **Pat, Farmer.**

“The group size was perfect – nobody was lost or nobody was too exposed either. We had a good mix of males and females. That probably helped as well by hearing the differences in what men and women had to say”. **Mary, Farmer.**

Based on the success of this chemistry which emerged from the in-person facilitation of the programme, the Programme Development team members were vehemently opposed to an online delivery of the programme. It was felt that to do so would be incompatible with the philosophical underpinnings and methodological approach to the programme, as well as accounting for the target group’s preference for in-person delivery.

“It was very clear to us early on that it would be absolutely impossible to deliver the FarmConnect programme as an online programme...the dynamic and underpinning philosophy that we have already spoken about absolutely demanded that it was an in-room, in-person delivery that enabled us to create the right dynamic using the MDN methodology...and you are looking at a ‘hard-to-reach’ cohort anyway, many of whom may not have had access to technology...”

Alex, Programme Development team

In particular, it was felt that the challenge of broaching potentially sensitive issues was difficult enough in the safety of the room, but to contemplate doing so online was seen as completely inappropriate.

“It’s difficult enough for people in a room, in a safe space with other human beings around them, people are much more likely to feel exposed online.” **Ger, Programme Development team**

It is important to note that the Programme Development team put in place a number of measures in relation to safeguarding when discussing mental health. The training also included the principle of confidentiality and the limits attached to confidentiality in relation to harm of self, harm of another or harm of a minor. There was an explicit focus on peer support and co-facilitation as part of the Train the Trainer. It was also made clear from the outset that if facilitators were affected by issues that cropped up during the programme, that they were offered follow-up support by way of counselling. A clear emphasis in facilitator training that their delivery followed a health promotion brief as opposed to a clinical health model. It was also made clear that supports and signposting had to be evidence-based Government funded programmes and initiatives.

The venues chosen for FarmConnect were community venues – with the exception of Phases 1 and 2 of delivery in Dungarvan, County Waterford, which added to the cost-effectiveness of programme delivery. Using the same

room at each venue each week was felt to build a sense familiarity and comfort among participants and their surroundings. Indeed, the only negative comment received by farmers on FarmConnect related to the hotel venue in Phase 1 and changing of the room that the programme was due to be delivered in. After this feedback, an alternative hotel venue was used in Phase 2, where this problem did not arise.

The potential to use other non-commercial venues (e.g. Teagasc) as part of any scale up was noted. However, community venues were seen as working best as they were not aligned or associated with any particular farming group and overcame the potential threat of bias in rural communities.

“Community venues are neutral, they are non-commercial, not aligned or associated with anything specific...there’s no Cumann this or Club that...you’d be amazed how that influences people’s decision making in rural areas.” **Fran, Programme Development team.**

Facilitators and farmers highlighted that engagement would likely be greatest if FarmConnect was delivered in winter and lowest during the spring and summer due to competing commitments with important farm work.

“If it started at the end of September and run through the winter it would have been better. When you come to spring or summer, I don’t think there would be a good turnout. There would be too much going on.” **Conor, Farmer.**

There was widespread consensus that programme co-ordination played a key role in the overall success of the programme. Much of the credit for this was attributed to the programme co-ordinator who, from the very start, assumed a key leadership, management, and operational role, developed excellent working relationships with project partners, and was meticulous in following through on governance issues and being a pillar of support to all.

“Co-ordination is that the heart of it [success of the programme] ... it’s just been incredible, any question that was asked was answered respectfully, everything around governance, safety and support was so thorough...that’s been superb.” **Ger, Programme Development team**

“That [success of the programme] comes down to the coordinator of the project providing the confidence and support to those facilitators to do this work; because it is difficult work... so that level of coordination has been a critical ingredient to the programme’s success.”
Fran, Programme Development team

There was also acknowledgement that the co-ordinator’s input to the pre-development work was particularly commendable against the backdrop and uncertainty of the pandemic.

“The co-ordinator took the [draft 1] programme, operationalised it and brought it to life...and did so in a context of really challenging times in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.”
Fran, Programme Development team

SECTION 7: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusion

The FarmConnect programme is a European Innovation Partnership (EIP-Agri) pilot project, funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine that aimed to raise individuals' awareness of farm safety through a focus on personal health and wellbeing. The pilot aimed to support farmers in addressing some of the challenges that impact on their health and wellbeing and consequently safe farming. The impetus for the programme arose from wider concerns about farmers' physical and mental health, and by the negative impact of ill-health on injury, farm safety and farm productivity. The programme was also timely against the recent backdrop of significant changes to agricultural policy and the governance of farming practices, which have been a considerable source of stress for farmers. This mixed-methods evaluation focused on four discrete phases of the programme (i) key stakeholders' reflections on the implications for future roll-out and scale-up of FarmConnect programme. (ii) the pre-development phase which focused on the development of the programme, revisions to and refinement of the programme content and methodology; (iii) the roll-out of the Train the Trainer programme to facilitators; and (iv) the roll-out of bespoke 6 week FarmConnect programme to farmers.

Findings point towards what can unequivocally be described as a highly innovative, impactful and effective programme that was underpinned by (i) a rigorous and extensive pre-development phase involving meaningful consultation and partnership working with industry partners; (ii) investment in capacity-building and sustainability through the development and delivery of a robust Train-the Trainer component; (iii) the development of a comprehensive set of resources, including a highly impressive resource manual; and (iv) excellent programme co-ordination and programme management. The roll-out of the FarmConnect pilot programme was met with exceptionally high levels of participant satisfaction and was highly effective in meeting the core programme objectives of increasing levels of importance, knowledge and confidence among participating farmers in relation to making positive health behaviour changes.

Development, design and roll-out of the Train the Trainer programme

The Programme Development team sought to build on the lineage of best-practice and evidence-based approaches to farmers' health in Ireland and to use these 'solid foundations' to deliver a programme that would break new ground by blending traditional Knowledge Transfer (KT) approaches with experiential, developmental and strength-based methodologies. This resulted in a bespoke programme with clear and tangible processes/outcomes, an experiential learning process that demystified conversations around health and facilitated reciprocal peer support, and where participants felt valued and not judged on perceived deficits. The programme development team felt it best re-calibrate some features and content of the original application to align with best-practice. More specifically, the duration and scope of the programme was reduced, co-design methods were used with key stakeholders to enhance the suitability of the content and programme implementation, and the programme outcomes, processes and resources were refined. Investing time in this pre-development stage was felt vital to ensuring the successful delivery of FarmConnect.

There were 12 facilitators trained as part of the FarmConnect TtT Programme. Facilitator experience of the TtT programme was reported as overwhelmingly positive, with 91% (n=11) of respondents strongly agreeing that they found the training worthwhile and would participate again. Ninety one percent of respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that they found the standard of training provided satisfactory and would recommend this training to others. When asked if participation had aided their professional development and impacted positively on their professional practice, more than 75% (n=8) strongly agreed with a further 18% agreeing that it had. Facilitators were very complimentary of the resources and supports provided over the duration of the TtT programme. The majority felt that all aims and objectives, as outlined, had been met to a very good standard. The approach to the programme development and its openness to adaptability and real time development was commended by facilitators. Overall, facilitators reported this to be a very worthwhile training programme to not only undertake but deliver. They identified a strong need for programmes such as FarmConnect to engage marginal groups and were very enthusiastic and positive about the prospect of being involved in same.

Roll-out of FarmConnect programme to farmers

Survey responses revealed overwhelming satisfaction with the programme delivery and impact, and that the programme delivery was highly effective in meeting the key programme objectives. After completing the programme, there were significant ($p < 0.001$) improvements in levels of (i) importance (ii) knowledge and (iii) confidence that participants attributed to key health statements aligned to the core programme content, including wellbeing and mental health, physical activity, stress, healthy eating, sleep, the impact of thought processes on wellbeing, and resilience. The vast majority of participants (>85%) 'agreed/strongly agreed' that, as a result of taking part in the FarmConnect programme, they contemplated making changes to the way that they take care of their mental health and wellbeing; that they felt more at ease in discussing their health and wellbeing with others; and that they knew where to look for other supports and services. These changes are important in the context of making and sustaining health behaviour change; specifically in terms of programme relevance, satisfying a need, and being culturally competent and engaging. There were also significant improvements in farmers' awareness of the links between health and farming safety practices, which could be important in prompting a change in attitudes and behaviours towards farm safety.

Qualitative findings revealed a range of 'small' but nevertheless significant health behaviour changes among farmers leading to an improved sense of physical health and increased confidence to make good decisions about their health. This resulted in many attending their GP for check-ups, continuing their engagement in healthy behaviours beyond the programme and taking up new health promoting activities with family. The programme was also attributed with having a positive impact on farmers' mental health, most notably in terms of addressing social isolation, reducing stigma, normalising mental health difficulties through the reciprocal sharing of life experiences, difficulties and coping strategies, acting as a 'safe space' to address sensitive issues such as suicide and the impact of bereavement, and enhancing self-efficacy to recognise mental-ill health symptoms, seek timely support and signpost others to available services. A key learning outcome for many farmers was the need to slow down and prioritise their health and wellbeing more and, that by doing so, recognising that this could have a positive impact on farm safety.

Implications for future roll-out and scale-up

Qualitative findings highlighted a number of important insights in terms of optimising and sustaining engagement and that can have an important bearing on future roll-out and scale-up. Integration and accreditation of the programme into standard KT requirements was seen as an important next step in

terms of sustainability and scale-up. A combination of local radio/newspapers ads, one-to-one contact, and the use of testimonials and encouragement from past participants was the preferred recruitment strategy among farmers. A key strength of the programme was that the content was clear, concise and easy to understand. This was felt to promote inclusion, appeal to a wider range of farmers, and provide a smooth delivery process. Applying a developmental approach to the structure of the content gradually built farmers' confidence over time to discuss more sensitive topics (e.g., mental health). The wide range of methods used to deliver the content was also felt to keep the energy and interest high. There was support for facilitators to use their discretion in finding the right balance between the amount of content to be covered whilst also allowing important conversations to flow. It was felt that there was a need for a consolidation of learnings from different programmes to overcome the current tendency to operate in silos, which was seen as stymieing the learning and potential growth in the field of farmers' health and wellbeing more broadly. There were also calls for policy makers to adopt more considered and sympathetic approaches in their dealings with advisors (and farmers) that took into consideration the potential consequences of their actions on stress levels within the farming community.

The co-facilitation methodology enabled facilitators to bring different life experiences and facilitation styles into the room. This supported engagement by reaching out to different demographics of farmers whilst also sharing the workload among facilitators. The importance of 'winning over' farmers on the first night was flagged by many along with establishing trust and connection over a longer period to facilitate an environment in which participants felt comfortable to 'lower their guard'. This was also enabled by facilitators adopting an informal and professional style; appropriately sharing life experiences; used familiar language; removing power imbalances; engaging in casual conversations at the breaktimes; regularly checking-in with participants during the sessions; greeting participants by name; and sending weekly reminder text message. Being relatable and approachable positively impacted farmers' rapport with the facilitators. Other key strategies adopted by facilitators included flexibility with participation, providing small action-orientated pieces of 'homework' to encourage small lifestyle behaviour changes; and utilizing peer-led approaches to build a sense of autonomy and ownership. Participants preferred the relatively small group numbers which they felt promoted a sense of collegiality and togetherness; community venues which were not aligned with any particular farming group; and that the programme was delivered in winter when farm work was less busy. It was felt that future programme roll-out should remain as in-person rather than on-line delivery. Programme co-ordination was deemed to be a critical success factor; specifically, the key leadership and management role assumed by the co-ordinator, which fostered excellent working relationships with project partners and programme participants.

7.2 Recommendations

Recommendations for policymakers

- Maximise reach by mainstreaming FarmConnect within the existing knowledge translation (KT) model and/or integrating individual modules into existing agricultural education programmes.
- Use the findings from this evaluation as additional leverage to reposition and reframe 'farm safety' as being more inclusive of health and wellbeing.
- Explore opportunities to assign programme certification for FarmConnect to extend the reach and build the credibility of the programme and consider adapting the FarmConnect model for delivery with other occupational groups and in other sectors.

Recommendations for future Train the Trainer programmes

- Make provision for increased opportunities for in-person training throughout the TtT programme, with an emphasis on modelling, roleplaying, peer support and feedback.
- Host the information webinar series later in the programme to allow for improved contextualisation of same.
- Host the training weekends in a more central location to allow for improved access logistically and the inclusion of further testimony and experiences of farmers and those currently working with farmer groups in this context.

Recommendations for FarmConnect coordination and recruitment

- Capitalise and expand on the existing FarmConnect strategic partnerships to gain traction, momentum and buy-in from key stakeholders to support future roll-out and expansion of the programme.
- Ensure that future programme delivery continues to be underpinned by the same highly professional level of programme co-ordination, governance, and leadership, that can facilitate the development of excellent working relationships with programme participants and project partners.
- Maintain existing vigilance in ensuring programme delivery is in neutral community venues that have no formal ties to other organisations to avoid bias in local communities.
- Make provision for additional strategies to recruit younger farmers and 'hard-to-reach' farmers.
- Garner support from past participants (including testimonials for advertising purposes) to encourage participation among peers for future programmes.

Recommendations for FarmConnect Delivery

- Consider including more farm-oriented topics in the programme and/or more explicitly aligning current modules with farm related topics. Alignment with the 'KT' Programme would support implementation of this recommendation.
- Deliver future iterations of the programme during the winter months to maximise participation.
- Include clear notes in the programme manual on the core messages to be covered in each session to support facilitators who may have more limited experience of delivering FarmConnect.
- Consider reviewing the content relating to resilience to align with best-practice and appropriate use of language in this field.

Recommendations for practitioners engaging in other health and wellbeing programmes with farmers

- Align programme content and implementation plan with evidence-based and best practice approaches to increase the likelihood that it will be effective in meeting the learning objectives.
- Be realistic in terms of programme duration, scope and breadth for future proposals relating to farmers' health. Be pragmatic and realistic in terms of setting targets for behaviour change in the context of a hard-to-reach group.
- Make provision in the predevelopment stage for sufficient time to consult with facilitators and

farmers in refinement of programme content and implementation plan to ensure that the programme is appropriate practical and realistic.

- Ensure processes, content and KT outcomes are clear and tangible. Adopt a modular approach where each session has a defined outcome which contributes to the overall learning objective.
- Utilise language in programme content and branding that fosters a sense of familiarity, community, and support. Avoid technical, medical and/or stigmatising language.
- Consider using a blended approach of knowledge transfer and experiential learning methodologies to engage farmers around their health and wellbeing.
- Adopt strengths-based approaches that emphasise and focus on farmers' existing strengths, capacities, and emotions.
- Adopt an incremental and developmental approach to the structuring of content to build farmers' confidence to engage with more sensitive topics (i.e., mental health).
- Ensure that future recruitment strategies align a 'healthy farmer with a healthy farm' by making explicit links between wellbeing and farm productivity and farm safety.

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APPENDIX 1: PHASE 1 TOPIC GUIDE

Key Momentum Factors and Underlying Principles of Programme Development

1. Can you describe the background/rationale and the key momentum factors that underpinned the conceptualisation and development of the FarmConnect programme?

(Prompts: challenges facing farmers; changing landscape of farming – changes in agri-governance and in the framing of farm health and safety); building upon previous farmers' health initiatives and partnerships (OFG, FHH, Fit Farmers...)

2. What key principles and philosophical approach informed the design, content, and methodological approach of the TtT programme?

Prompts Reference wider health policy context, developmental and experiential approaches, building on key learnings from other farmers' health work...)

3. Can you describe the process of how the FarmConnect programme evolved from proposal phase through to final programme content?

(Prompts: funder requirements, roles & responsibilities, challenges, links to previous programmes, key informants, delivery capabilities, role of Operational Group...)

4. What were the key learnings from the TtT programme?

(Prompts: from the three TtT phases)

5. What other considerations are important in terms of your future vision and scale up of the programme?

6. Any other comments or reflections?

APPENDIX 2: PHASE 2. TOPIC GUIDE

- Q1:** Why did you choose to participate in this training program?
(Prompt: Did you have much knowledge of what the program would be about? What did you envision the program to be like? Was clarity provided as to what the aims of the program were?)
- Q2:** What were your expectations / what were you hoping to achieve from participating in this training?
- Q3:** Did the training program meet these expectations /aims?
(Please refer to the themes and expectations that arise from earlier question.)
- Q4:** Did the training meet the overall aims as outlined by the training providers?
- Q5:** What did you find most useful about participating in the training?
1 - Webinars | 2 - Day Sessions | 3 - Residential session
- Q6:** What, if any, aspects of the training could be improved? Was there any further content you feel could have been included?
1 - Webinars | 2 - Day Sessions | 3 - Residential session
- Q7:** Do you feel the training has adequately prepared you to facilitate the FarmConnect program?
(Prompts: What areas do you feel well prepared for? What areas do you feel less well prepared for? Have you any fears/anxieties or do you identify any challenges about moving onto programme delivery? Do you envision any challenges with recruitment? Will there be groups of farmers who are more difficult to engage and how might this be addressed?)
- Q8:** How do you feel participating in this program will impact on your practice going forward in regard to your role working with farmers?
(Possible cues: Both in relation to FarmConnect and their general role, engagement, behaviour change and adoption, change in practice approach, how do you feel this will impact on the farmers you work with)
- Q9:** How do you feel the FarmConnect program will impact and potentially benefit farmers?
(Prompts: What are these potential benefits? Are there any farmers in particular that you feel will benefit most? How can these farmers be successfully recruited and engaged?)
- Q10:** Would you like to add anything else?

APPENDIX 3: PHASE 2 TTT QUESTIONNAIRE

FarmConnect Facilitator Training Programme

Evaluation: Post-Training Questionnaire

Your Name : _____

SECTION ONE: TRAINING SYLLABUS AND DELIVERY

1. Following participation in Module 1: Farm Context and Rationale; Online Webinar Series of this training, please rate the following statements (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree or disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

	1	2	3	4	5
The learning aims of the training were clearly outlined					
The online webinars were useful in providing background information and context for the program					
The webinars were easily accessible					
Adequate time was spent on this phase of training					
The course materials provided were beneficial and aided my learning and participation					
Adequate support and interaction with the course providers was facilitated at this stage of training					
My personal learning aims and objectives were met					

Any further comments

2. Methodology; Regional Training Day, please rate the following statements

(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree or disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

	1	2	3	4	5
The learning aims of the training were clearly outlined					
The content covered was appropriate to my learning needs					
The content delivered met the aims of the training					
My personal learning aims and objectives were met					
Adequate opportunity for peer interaction and learning was facilitated					
Adequate support and interaction with the course providers was facilitated at this stage of training					
Adequate time was spent on this phase of training					
The course materials provided were beneficial and aided my learning and participation					
The venue for this training was accessible and of an appropriate standard					

Any further comments

3. Following participation in Module 3: The FarmConnect Programme: Weekly Sessions & Evaluation; Residential Training Weekend, please rate the following statements

(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree or disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

	1	2	3	4	5
The learning aims of the training were clearly outlined					
The content covered was appropriate to my learning needs					
The content delivered met the aims of the training					
My personal learning aims and objectives were met					
Adequate opportunity for peer interaction and learning was facilitated					
Adequate support and interaction with the course providers was facilitated at this stage of training					
Adequate time was spent on this phase of training					
The course materials provided were beneficial and aided my learning and participation					
The venue for this training was accessible and of an appropriate standard					

Any further comments

SECTION TWO: LEARNING AND SKILL ACQUISITION

1. Facilitation Skills

Following participation in this training, how would you rate your current level of confidence and competence with respect to engaging farmers in each of the following areas (1 = Very Low, 2 = Low, 3 = Moderate, 4 = Strong, 5 = Exceptional):

	1	2	3	4	5
General presentation skills					
Listening skills					
Group facilitation skills					
Co-facilitation skills					
Facilitating farmer capacity-building programmes					
Working with groups in circles					
Creating an engaging and safe space for participants					
Questioning and probing skills					
Handling questions from group					
Ability to interpret and present concepts in a clear, concise manner					
Ability to summarise key points of learning					
Use of visual aids (slides, flipcharts, graphics etc.)					
General IT Skills					

2. Knowledge

Following participation in this training, how would you rate your current level of knowledge with respect to engaging farmers in each of the following areas (1 = Very Low, 2 = Low, 3 = Moderate, 4 = Strong, 5 = Exceptional):

	1	2	3	4	5
General presentation skills					
Listening skills					
Group facilitation skills					
Co-facilitation skills					
Facilitating farmer capacity-building programmes					
Working with groups in circles					
Creating an engaging and safe space for participants					
Questioning and probing skills					
Handling questions from group					
Ability to interpret and present concepts in a clear, concise manner					
Ability to summarise key points of learning					
Use of visual aids (slides, flipcharts, graphics etc.)					
General IT Skills					

3: Engagement

Following participation in this training, how would you rate your current level of knowledge, confidence and competence with respect to engaging farmers in each of the following areas

(1 = Very Low, 2 = Low, 3 = Moderate, 4 = Strong, 5 = Exceptional):

	1	2	3	4	5
Wellbeing					
Lifestyle & Physical Health					
Lifestyle & Nutrition					
Gender Conditioning					
Mental Health					
Stress Management					
Self-Awareness					
Emotional Resilience					
Support Services					
Meitheal					

4: Readiness to Facilitate and Deliver the Farm Connect Program

Following participation in this training, how would you rate your current level of confidence with respect to engaging farmers in each of the following areas

(1 = Very Low, 2 = Low, 3 = Moderate, 4 = Strong, 5 = Exceptional)

	1	2	3	4	5
Program Recruitment					
Program Retention					
Program Delivery					

Any further comments

SECTION THREE: GENERAL EVALUATION

Following participation in this training, please rate the following statements

(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree or disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

	1	2	3	4	5
Participating in the training was worthwhile					
I would participate in similar training again					
I would recommend this training to others					
The standard of the training provided was satisfactory					
Participation in this training has aided my professional development					
Participation in this training has positively impacted on my professional practice					

What elements of the training did you find most useful:

What elements of the training could be improved:

Any further comments

Thank you for your feedback

APPENDIX 4: PHASE 3 TOPIC GUIDE

Q1(a). What are your overall thoughts and feelings about the FarmConnect programme?	
Q1(b) What made you want to take part in FarmConnect?	Differences before and after programme
Q1(c). What did you like about FarmConnect?	
Q1(d). What did you not like about FarmConnect?	
Q2(a). Did the FarmConnect programme benefit you in anyway?	
Q2(b). Did FarmConnect benefit your health? How?	Health, Farm Safety, Family, Farm, Community Fitness; Awareness; Resilience; Meitheal
Q2(c). Did FarmConnect benefit your farm safety? How?	
Q2(d). Did FarmConnect have any unexpected benefits/ripple effects?	
Q2(e). Which session did you find the most helpful/unhelpful?	
Q3(a). Was the programme content easily understandable? Which parts were more/less easy to understand?	
Q3(b). How did you find the delivery of the programme?	
Q4. Would you feel more confident now to make decisions about your health/self-manage your own health?	
Q5. Were there any negatives to participating in the programme?	Effort required to participate; time away from farm; distance to travel
Q6. What changes would you recommend to make the programme more engaging or more impactful on farm safety/self-management of your health?	Content and delivery
Q7(b). Would you say this this programme fits with the values and beliefs of farmers in Ireland?	

APPENDIX 5: PHASE 3 PRE-TRAINING QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre-evaluation form - FarmConnect Programme

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this evaluation form. We are interested in learning more about whether the FarmConnect programme meets the outcomes we hope it will. We would therefore like to ask you some questions at the start and again at the end of the programme.

Filling in this form should not take longer than 5 minutes. Please note that your name will be replaced by a number and then deleted. All information will be anonymised. Please let us know if you have any questions or would like to receive help with filling in this form.

Your Name : _____ **Age :** _____

Q1 What did your education include?

Primary or below _____ ¹

Some secondary (not completed) _____ ²

Completed Leaving Cert _____ ³

Third Level _____ ⁴

Q2 What do you consider to be your MAIN enterprise based on farm income?

Dairy _____ ¹

Cattle rearing (Suckler) _____ ²

Cattle other (Drystock) _____ ³

Mixed livestock _____ ⁴

Mainly Sheep _____ ⁵

Mainly Tillage _____ ⁶

Other _____ ⁷

Q3 Do you farm full-time or part-time?

Full-time _____ ¹

Part-time _____ ²

Q4 How many hectares (Ha) do you farm?

< 10 Ha _____ ¹

10 - < 20Ha _____ ²

20 - < 30Ha _____ ³

30 - < 50Ha _____ ⁴

50 - < 100Ha _____ ⁵

100Ha _____ ⁶

Q5 What are you hoping to learn from the FarmConnect programme?

Q6 On a scale of 1 -10, how important are each of the following to you:

Please tick the box which describes you best.	NOT IMPORTANT										VERY IMPORTANT									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked																				
Being physically active for health and wellbeing																				
Managing stress to stay healthy																				
Eating well for good health																				
Getting enough sleep to stay healthy																				
Being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing																				
Having the resilience to cope with challenging situations																				
Minding my health can lead to better farm safety																				

Q7 On a scale of 1 -10, how would you rate your knowledge of how to make healthy decisions on each of the following:

Please tick the box which describes you best.	NO KNOWLEDGE					EXCELLENT KNOWLEDGE				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked										
Being physically active for health and wellbeing										
Managing stress to stay healthy										
Eating well for good health										
Getting enough sleep to stay healthy										
Being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing										
Having the resilience to cope with challenging situations										

Q8 On a scale of 1 -10, how confident are you in your ability to make healthy decisions in relation to each of the following?

Please tick the box which describes you best.	NO KNOWLEDGE					EXCELLENT KNOWLEDGE				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked										
Being physically active for health and wellbeing										
Managing stress to stay healthy										
Eating well for good health										
Getting enough sleep to stay healthy										
Being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing										
Having the resilience to cope with challenging situations										

Q9 Please answer what describes you best.

Please tick the box which describes you best.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe that the decisions I make about my health impact my farming safety practices					

APPENDIX 6: PHASE 3 POST-TRAINING QUESTIONNAIRE

Post-evaluation form - FarmConnect Programme

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this post-evaluation form. We are interested in hearing about how you rate different aspects of the FarmConnect programme. Your feedback will help us to understand whether the programme has been effective and where it can improve.

Filling in this form should not take longer than 5 minutes. Please note that your name will be changed to the number that corresponds to the FarmConnect pre-evaluation. Your name will then be deleted. All information will be anonymised. Please let us know if you have any questions or would like to receive help with filling in this form.

Your Name : _____

Q1 On a scale from 1-10 how do you rate your experience of the FarmConnect Programme?

Not Good					Excellent				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Q2 What were your key learnings from the Programme?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Q3 Would you recommend the FarmConnect Programme to other farmers?

Yes _____

No _____

Q4 In relation to the delivery and content of the FarmConnect Programme, please rank each of the following:

Please tick the box which describes you best.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
The number of sessions in the FarmConnect programme was sufficient					
The content of the FarmConnect programme was easy to understand					

The content of the FarmConnect programme was applicable to me					
The FarmConnect programme addressed specific challenges in relation to farming					
I enjoyed the FarmConnect programme					

Q5 Please answer what describes you best. As a result of taking part in the FarmConnect programme:

Please tick the box which describes you best.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am thinking of making changes in the way I take care of my mental health and wellbeing					
I am more at ease in discussing my health and wellbeing with others					
I know where to look for other supports and services					
The FarmConnect programme addressed specific challenges in relation to farming					
I enjoyed the FarmConnect programme					

Q6 On a scale of 1-10, how important are the following to you:

Please tick the box which describes you best.	NOT IMPORTANT					VERY IMPORTANT				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked										
Being physically active for health and wellbeing										
Managing stress to stay healthy										
Eating well for good health										
Getting enough sleep to stay healthy										
Being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing										
Having the resilience to cope with challenging situations										

Q7 On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your knowledge to make healthy decisions on:

Please tick the box which describes you best.	NO KNOWLEDGE					EXCELLENT KNOWLEDGE				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked										
Being physically active for health and wellbeing										

Managing stress to stay healthy										
Eating well for good health										
Getting enough sleep to stay healthy										
Being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing										
Having the resilience to cope with challenging situations										

Q8 On a scale of 1 -10, how confident are you in your ability to make healthy decisions in relation to each of the following?

Please tick the box which describes you best.	NO KNOWLEDGE					EXCELLENT KNOWLEDGE				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked										
Being physically active for health and wellbeing										
Managing stress to stay healthy										
Eating well for good health										
Getting enough sleep to stay healthy										
Being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing										
Having the resilience to cope with challenging situations										

Q9 Please answer what describes you best.

Please tick the box which describes you best.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe that the decisions I make about my health impact my farming safety practices					

Q10 Have you any suggestions or recommendations for future roll-out of the programme?

Thank you for your feedback

APPENDIX 7: PHASE 4 TOPIC GUIDE

FOCUS	PROMPTS
1. Reflections on delivery of programme content	What worked well/not so well; learnings from preparation to delivery; fidelity to programme content/changes made; suggestions for changes/improvements to programme content in future delivery
2. Reflections on co-facilitation experience	What worked well/not so well; aspects of facilitation that were particularly effective in engaging participants; effectiveness of the TtT in preparing facilitators to co-facilitate the programme
3. Reflections on effectiveness of the co-facilitation methodology in meeting programme objectives	Links to programme objectives; aspects of facilitation methodology that were particularly effective; level of participant engagement
4. Reflections on recruitment of programme participants	What worked well/not so well; key learnings for recruitment of future programme participants
5. Reflections on sustaining participation/ preventing drop-out	Lessons learned from those who did drop-out
6. Reflections on any other more general observations	Did the programme engage 'the worried well' or the hard to reach'; any unforeseen outcomes or benefits; appropriateness of venues; timing/duration of programme; any ripple effects...
7. Reflections on recommendations for future roll-out	

APPENDIX 8: PHASE 3 DETAILED RESULTS QUANTITATIVE PRE AND POST QUESTIONNAIRES

TABLE A8-1 SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Age	
Mean	59.76
Min-Max	23-80
St-Deviation	10.739
Age categories (n=119)	n (%)
<45	12 (10.1)
45-64	70 (58.8)
≥65	37 (31.1)
Gender (n=124)	n (%)
Male	99 (79.8)
Female	25 (20.2)
What did your education include? (n=120)	n (%)
Primary or below	11 (9.2)
Some secondary	40 (33.3)
Completed leaving cert	38 (31.7)
Third level	31 (25.8)

TABLE A8-2 FARMING CHARACTERISTICS

Is farming your full-time or part-time occupation? (n=115)	n (%)
Full-time	64 (55.7)
Part-time	51 (44.3)
What do you consider to be your MAIN farming enterprise based on farm income? (n=120)	n (%)
Dairy	21 (17.5)
Specialist cattle rearing (Suckler/Drystock)	69 (57.5)
Mainly sheep	7 (5.8)
Mixed livestock	16 (13.3)
Other, including mainly tillage	7 (5.9)
How many hectares (Ha) do you farm? (n=119)	n (%)
<10 Ha	7 (5.9)
10 - <20Ha	17 (14.4)
20 - <30Ha	21 (17.6)
30 - <50Ha	43 (36.1)
50 - <100Ha	21 (17.6)
>100Ha	10 (8.4)

TABLE A8-3 WHAT ARE YOU HOPING TO LEARN FROM THE FARMCONNECT PROGRAMME? (N=84)*

Learning themes	n (%)
Coping strategies for my mental health and wellbeing (stress, anxiety, grief)	26 (30.9)
To learn about mental health and wellbeing in general	26 (30.9)
Work-life balance	15 (17.8)
To improve health / health awareness	12 (14.3)
Connecting with other farmers	11 (13.1)
Farm safety; farm organisation and changes in farming	11 (13.1)
To help others	9 (10.7)
Other	6 (7.1)

*Multiple answers possible

TABLE A8-4 SELF-RATED IMPORTANCE OF MAKING HEALTHY DECISIONS

ON A SCALE OF 1 -10, HOW IMPORTANT ARE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING TO YOU:	NOT IMPORTANT					VERY IMPORTANT				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (3.3)	8 (8.7)	8 (8.7)	9 (9.8)	21 (22.7)	11 (12.0)	32 (34.8)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.2)	5 (5.4)	8 (8.7)	12 (13.0)	29 (31.6)	36 (39.1)
Being physically active for health and wellbeing (n=93) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (5.4)	5 (5.4)	4 (4.3)	11 (11.8)	23 (24.7)	14 (15.1)	30 (32.2)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	3 (3.2)	5 (5.4)	13 (14.0)	26 (28.0)	45 (48.3)
Managing stress to stay healthy (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	3 (3.3)	1 (1.1)	5 (5.4)	3 (3.3)	10 (10.9)	14 (15.2)	17 (18.5)	38 (41.2)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.2)	1 (1.1)	5 (5.4)	12 (13.0)	29 (31.5)	42 (45.7)
Eating well for good health (n=88) n(%)										
Pre-evaluation	1 (1.1)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	4 (4.5)	3 (3.4)	6 (6.8)	9 (10.2)	20 (22.8)	14 (15.9)	30 (34.2)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (3.4)	6 (6.8)	14 (15.9)	24 (27.3)	41 (46.6)
Getting enough sleep to stay healthy (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	2 (2.2)	3 (3.3)	7 (7.6)	9 (9.8)	20 (21.6)	16 (17.4)	34 (37.0)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.2)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.2)	6 (6.5)	11 (12.0)	28 (30.4)	43 (46.7)
Being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing (n=91) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (4.4)	3 (3.3)	3 (3.3)	6 (6.6)	11 (12.1)	25 (27.4)	9 (9.9)	30 (33.0)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.2)	6 (6.6)	10 (11.0)	33 (36.2)	40 (44.0)
Having the resilience to cope with challenging situations (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	2 (2.2)	4 (4.3)	2 (2.2)	10 (10.9)	21 (22.8)	22 (23.9)	30 (32.6)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.2)	7 (7.6)	10 (10.9)	36 (39.1)	36 (39.1)
Minding my health can lead to better farm safety (n=111)										
Pre-evaluation only	0 (0.0)	1 (0.9)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	5 (4.5)	3 (2.7)	11 (9.9)	18 (16.3)	24 (21.6)	48 (43.2)

TABLE A8-5 WILCOXON SIGNED RANK ANALYSIS - SELF-RATED IMPORTANCE OF MAKING HEALTHY DECISIONS

	Median	Negative rank	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Positive ranks	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Ties	Z	p
Understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-post	8.00-9.00	15	22.50	337.5	41	30.70	1258.5	36	-3.815	<0.001
Being physically active for health and wellbeing (n=93) n (%)										
Pre-post	8.00-9.00	16	24.28	388.5	47	34.63	1627.5	30	-4.303	<0.001
Managing stress to stay healthy (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-post	9.00-9.00	16	22.66	362.5	35	27.53	963.5	41	-2.853	<0.004
Eating well for good health (n=88) n(%)										
Pre-post	8.50-9.00	17	19.97	339.5	39	32.22	12.56.5	32	-3.794	<0.001
Getting enough sleep to stay healthy (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-post	9.00-9.00	17	26.00	442.0	41	30.95	12.69.0	34	-3.248	0.001
Being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing (n=91) n (%)										
Pre-post	8.00-9.00	16	19.94	319.0	51	38.41	1959.0	24	-5.219	<0.001
Having the resilience to cope with challenging situations (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-post	9.00-9.00	22	23.66	520.5	39	35.14	1370.5	31	-3.120	0.002

TABLE A8-6 SELF-RATED KNOWLEDGE OF MAKING HEALTHY DECISIONS

ON A SCALE OF 1 -10, HOW IMPORTANT ARE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING TO YOU:	NO KNOWLEDGE					EXCELLENT KNOWLEDGE				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked (n=90) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (6.7)	4 (4.4)	11 (12.2)	17 (18.9)	15 (16.7)	17 (18.9)	12 (13.3)	8 (8.9)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.2)	7 (7.8)	13 (14.4)	22 (24.4)	29 (32.3)	16 (17.8)
Being physically active for health and wellbeing (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	10 (10.9)	13 (14.1)	12 (13.0)	16 (17.4)	12 (13.0)	18 (19.6)	10 (10.9)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	1 (1.1)	11 (12.0)	21 (22.8)	41 (44.5)	17 (18.5)
Managing stress to stay healthy (n=90) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	1 (1.1)	2 (2.2)	4 (4.4)	7 (7.8)	12 (13.3)	13 (14.4)	17 (18.9)	14 (15.6)	9 (10.0)	11 (12.3)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	4 (4.4)	16 (17.8)	16 (17.8)	32 (35.6)	20 (22.2)

TABLE A8-6 SELF-RATED KNOWLEDGE OF MAKING HEALTHY DECISIONS

Eating well for good health (n=89) n(%)										
Pre-evaluation	1 (1.1)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	5 (5.6)	15 (16.9)	5 (5.6)	11 (12.4)	24 (27.0)	18 (20.2)	9 (10.1)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	4 (4.5)	7 (7.9)	12 (13.5)	31 (34.8)	34 (38.2)
Getting enough sleep to stay healthy (n=93) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.2)	6 (6.5)	8 (8.6)	10 (10.8)	21 (22.6)	13 (14.0)	15 (16.1)	17 (18.1)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	4 (4.3)	9 (9.7)	10 (10.8)	37 (39.8)	32 (34.3)
Being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	0 (0.0)	3 (3.3)	3 (3.3)	10 (10.9)	11 (12.0)	8 (8.7)	16 (17.4)	18 (19.4)	12 (13.0)	11 (12.0)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.2)	6 (6.5)	10 (10.9)	14 (15.2)	36 (39.1)	23 (25.0)
Having the resilience to cope with challenging situations (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (5.4)	7 (7.6)	10 (10.9)	12 (13.0)	13 (14.1)	19 (20.7)	16 (17.4)	10 (10.9)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (3.3)	6 (6.5)	9 (9.8)	15 (16.3)	37 (40.2)	21 (22.8)

TABLE A8-7 WILCOXON SIGNED RANK ANALYSIS - SELF-RATED KNOWLEDGE OF MAKING HEALTHY DECISIONS

	Median	Negative rank	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Positive ranks	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Ties	Z	p
Understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked (n=90) n (%)										
Pre-post	7.00-8.50	16	22.28	356.5	58	41.70	2418.0	16	-5.609	<0.001
Being physically active for health and wellbeing (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-post	7.00-9.00	11	22.41	246.5	63	40.13	2528.5	18	-6.197	<0.001
Managing stress to stay healthy (n=90) n (%)										
Pre-post	7.00-9.00	14	23.86	334.0	64	42.92	2427.0	12	-6.071	<0.001
Eating well for good health (n=89) n(%)										
Pre-post	8.00-9.00	8	19.69	157.5	65	39.13	2543.5	16	-6.644	<0.001
Getting enough sleep to stay healthy (n=93) n (%)										
Pre-post	7.00-9.00	15	16.00	240.0	58	42.43	2461.0	20	-6.177	<0.001
Being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-post	7.00-9.00	12	17.75	213.0	63	41.86	2637.0	17	-6.453	<0.001
Having the resilience to cope with challenging situations (n=92) n (%)										

TABLE A8-7 WILCOXON SIGNED RANK ANALYSIS - SELF-RATED KNOWLEDGE OF MAKING HEALTHY DECISIONS

Pre-post	7.00-9.00	12	24.29	291.5	55	36.12	1986.5	25	-5.329	<0.001
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Table A8-8 Self-rated confidence in their ability in making healthy decisions

On a scale of 1 -10, how confident are you in your ability to make healthy decisions in relation to each of the following?	Not confident					Very confident				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	2 (2.2)	3 (3.3)	3 (3.3)	4 (4.3)	13 (14.1)	10 (10.9)	24 (26.1)	15 (16.2)	11 (12.0)	7 (7.6)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (7.6)	3 (3.3)	13 (14.1)	21 (22.8)	30 (32.6)	18 (19.6)
Being physically active for health and wellbeing (n=91) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	0 (0.0)	4 (4.4)	1 (1.1)	3 (3.3)	17 (18.7)	11 (12.1)	12 (13.2)	19 (20.8)	14 (15.4)	10 (11.0)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (6.6)	4 (4.4)	10 (11.0)	14 (15.4)	37 (40.6)	20 (22.0)
Managing stress to stay healthy (n=88) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	1 (1.1)	3 (3.4)	4 (4.5)	6 (6.8)	13 (14.8)	14 (15.9)	12 (13.6)	18 (20.5)	10 (11.4)	7 (8.0)
Post-evaluation	1 (1.1)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (3.4)	8 (9.1)	9 (10.2)	23 (26.2)	29 (33.0)	14 (15.9)
Eating well for good health (n=83) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	0 (0.0)	1 (1.2)	2 (2.4)	7 (8.4)	11 (13.3)	8 (9.6)	15 (18.1)	8 (9.6)	22 (26.6)	9 (10.8)
Post-evaluation	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	4 (4.8)	3 (3.6)	10 (12.0)	15 (18.2)	26 (31.4)	23 (27.8)
Getting enough sleep to stay healthy (n=90) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	1 (1.1)	2 (2.2)	3 (3.3)	8 (8.9)	8 (8.9)	9 (10.0)	13 (14.4)	17 (18.9)	16 (17.9)	13 (14.4)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	4 (4.4)	4 (4.4)	8 (8.9)	17 (18.9)	23 (25.6)	33 (36.7)
Being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing (n=88) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	0 (0.0)	4 (4.5)	2 (2.3)	3 (3.4)	15 (17.0)	6 (6.8)	15 (17.0)	24 (27.3)	10 (11.5)	9 (10.2)
Post-evaluation	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (4.5)	5 (5.7)	10 (11.4)	16 (18.2)	34 (38.6)	18 (20.5)
Having the resilience to cope with challenging situations (n=90) n (%)										
Pre-evaluation	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	5 (5.6)	6 (6.7)	12 (13.3)	8 (8.9)	17 (18.9)	22 (24.4)	13 (14.4)	6 (6.7)
Post-evaluation	0 (0.0)	1 (1.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (3.3)	6 (6.7)	10 (11.1)	21 (23.4)	31 (34.4)	18 (20.0)

Table A8-9 Wilcoxon signed rank analysis - Self-rated confidence in their ability in making healthy decisions

	Median	Negative rank	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Positive ranks	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Ties	Z	p
Understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked (n=92) n (%)										
Pre-post	7.00-9.00	10	20.00	200.00	58	37.00	2146.0	24	-5.992	<0.001
Being physically active for health and wellbeing (n=91) n (%)										
Pre-post	7.00-9.00	13	22.12	287.5	58	39.11	2268.5	20	-5.735	<0.001
Managing stress to stay healthy (n=88) n (%)										
Pre-post	7.00-8.00	14	27.86	390.0	59	39.17	2311.0	15	-5.314	<0.001
Eating well for good health (n=83) n(%)										
Pre-post	7.00-9.00	14	28.71	402.0	53	35.40	1876.0	16	-4.652	<0.001
Getting enough sleep to stay healthy (n=90) n (%)										
Pre-post	8.00-9.00	9	37.28	335.5	62	35.81	2220.0	19	-5.460	<0.001
Being aware of how thought processes affect wellbeing (n=88) n (%)										
Pre-post	7.00-9.00	17	25.79	438.5	58	41.58	2411.5	12	-5.300	<0.001
Having the resilience to cope with challenging situations (n=90) n (%)										
Pre-post	7.00-9.00	7	32.07	224.5	60	34.23	2053.5	23	-5.768	<0.001

Table A8-10 I believe that the decisions I make about my health impact my farming safety practices (n=94) n (%)

Please tick the box which describes you best.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre-evaluation	1 (1.1)	1 (1.1)	10 (10.5)	48 (51.1)	34 (36.2)
Post-evaluation	2 (2.1)	0 (0.0)	3 (3.2)	38 (40.4)	51 (54.3)

Table A8-11 Wilcoxon signed rank analysis - I believe that the decisions I make about my health impact my farming safety practices

	Median	Negative rank	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Positive ranks	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Ties	Z	p
Understanding how wellbeing and mental health are interlinked (n=92) n (%)										
21.75	261.0	31	22.10	685.0	51	-2.746	<0.001	24	-5.992	<0.001

Table A8-12 On a scale of 1 -10, how do you rate your experience of the FarmConnect programme? (n=114)

Not good					Excellent				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	4 (3.5)	5 (4.4)	17 (14.9)	26 (22.8)	61 (53.5)

Table A8-13 Would you recommend the FarmConnect programme to other farmers? (n=110)

Yes	110 (100.00)
No	0 (0.00)

Table A8-14 In relation to the delivery and content of the FarmConnect programme, please rank each of the following:

Please tick the box which describes you best.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
The number of sessions in the FarmConnect programme was sufficient (n=113)	1 (0.9)	9 (8.0)	11 (9.7)	60 (53.1)	32 (28.3)
The content of the FarmConnect programme was easy to understand (n=112)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.8)	0 (0.0)	53 (47.3)	57 (50.9)
The content of the FarmConnect programme was applicable to me (n=112)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	6 (5.3)	60 (53.6)	45 (40.2)
The FarmConnect programme addressed specific challenges in relation to farming (n=111)	1 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	14 (12.6)	56 (50.5)	40 (36.0)
I enjoyed the FarmConnect programme (n=111)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.8)	18 (16.2)	91 (82.0)

Table A8-15 Please answer what describes you best. As a result of taking part in the FarmConnect programme:

Please tick the box which describes you best.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am thinking of making changes in the way I take care of my mental health and wellbeing (n=111)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	6 (5.4)	67 (60.4)	38 (34.2)
I am more at ease in discussing my health and wellbeing with others (n=110)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.9)	12 (10.9)	59 (53.7)	38 (34.5)
I know where to look for other supports and services (n=111)	0 (0.0)	2 (1.8)	10 (9.0)	58 (52.3)	41 (36.9)

Table A8-16 What were your key learnings from the programme? (n=94)*

Learning themes	n (%)
Mental health and wellbeing (incl mindfulness)	36 (38.3)
Importance of connecting with others	34 (36.2)
Importance of positive thinking	32 (34.0)
Life-work balance (incl taking time for yourself)	28 (29.8)
Diet	25 (26.6)
Health awareness	22 (23.4)
Importance of sleep	16 (17.0)
Asking for help	13 (13.8)
Physical activity	13 (13.8)
Stress management	13 (13.8)
Others have similar issues	12 (12.8)
Importance of community	10 (10.6)
Farm safety	4 (4.2)
Other	18 (19.1)
Third level	31 (25.8)

Table A8-17 Have you any suggestions or recommendations for future roll-out of the programme?? (n=57)*

Suggestions themes	n (%)
Organise follow-up sessions	11 (19.3)
Better and clearer recruitment strategies	8 (14.8)
Target those farmers most in need of courses like this	6 (11.1)
More information about farm issues (safety, independence, CAP)	6 (11.1)
Nationwide roll-out	6 (11.1)
Bring in external speakers in (peer mentors, advisors)	6 (11.1)
Link in with local sport- and support organisations	4 (7.4)
Alter course introduction (expectations, name tags, rationale for people to attend)	4 (7.4)

Table A8-17 Have you any suggestions or recommendations for future roll-out of the programme?? (n=57)*

Timing more farmer friendly	3 (5.5)
More group conversations	3 (5.5)
Other	13 (24.1)
Importance of community	10 (10.6)
Farm safety	4 (4.2)
Other	18 (19.1)
Third level	31 (25.8)



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Final Evaluation
2023



**Men's
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Better Lives for Men, Better Lives for All

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