

# Isolation, Stress and Farmer Wellbeing in the time of Covid-19

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# Teagasc Goal 3 ... enhance the quality of life in rural areas

## Research funded/supported by:



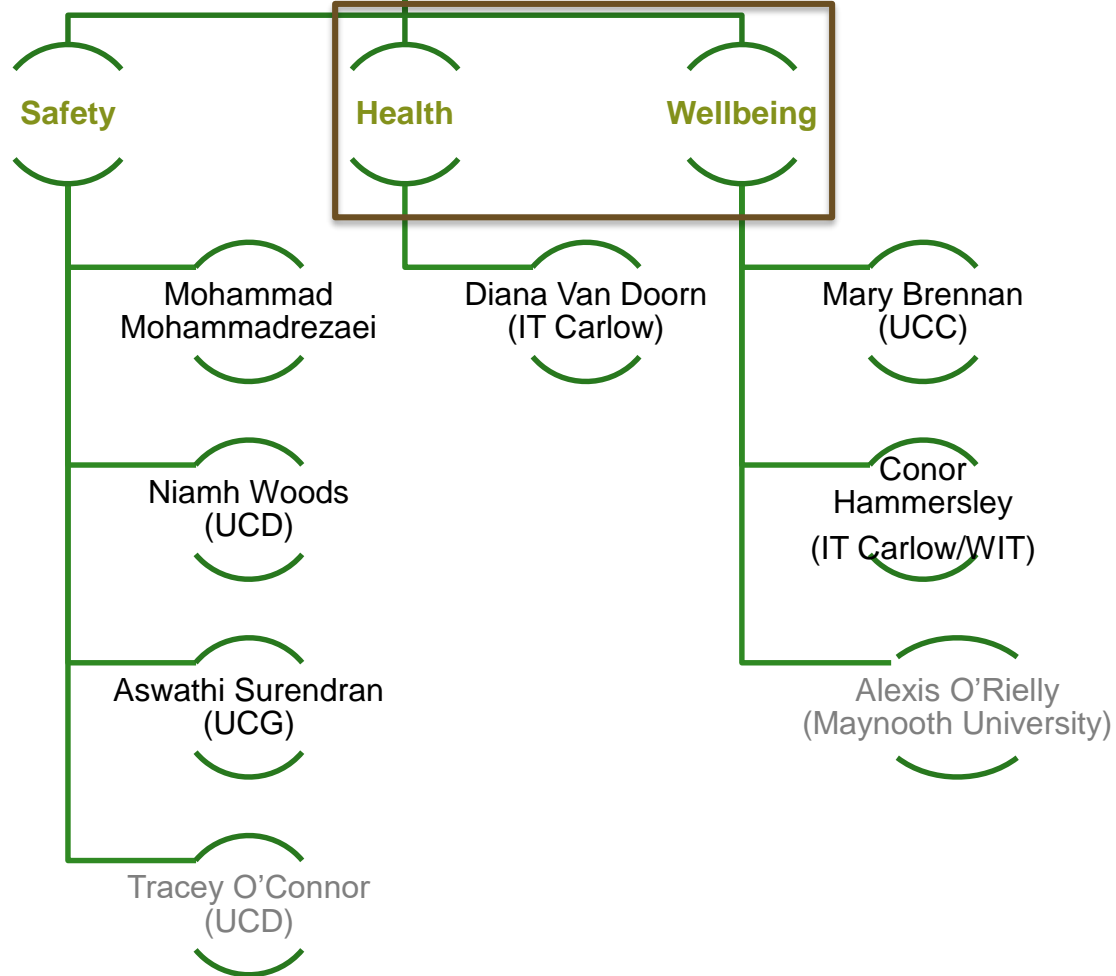
An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine



## Research in partnership with:



## Health and Safety Research Programme



Social isolation refers to people who may have limited contact with social networks such as community, organisational or family networks.

- Social isolation has been linked with poor quality of life and poor mental health outcomes. Farming by its nature involves long periods of working alone.

## Social Connectness (TILDA)

- Farmers were ***less likely*** to have intimate social relationships (visits to or from family and friends) than non farmers.
  - 40.2% of farmers have intimate social relationships compared to 48.0% of non farmers.
  - This indicates that farmers may be at a greater risk of suffering isolation than non farmers.
- Farmers were ***more likely*** to have helped a neighbour
  - 36.0% farmers helped a neighbour compared to 24.7% of non farmers.
- Farmers are ***more likely*** to receive help from a neighbour.
  - 26.3% of farmers received help from a neighbour compared to 17.0% of non farmers.
- 49% Farmers participate in a social group – the same as non-farmers

**Covid-19 and related restrictions may increase the risk of isolation amongst some farmers.**

# Wellbeing / Stress

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 Dr Noel Richardson, Dr David Meredith,  
 Dr John McNamara, Prof Catherine Blake



## Wellbeing / Stress:

Though relatively small percentages of farmers report experiencing stress 'often' or 'very often', substantial numbers (36%) record 'below average' or 'poor' wellbeing.

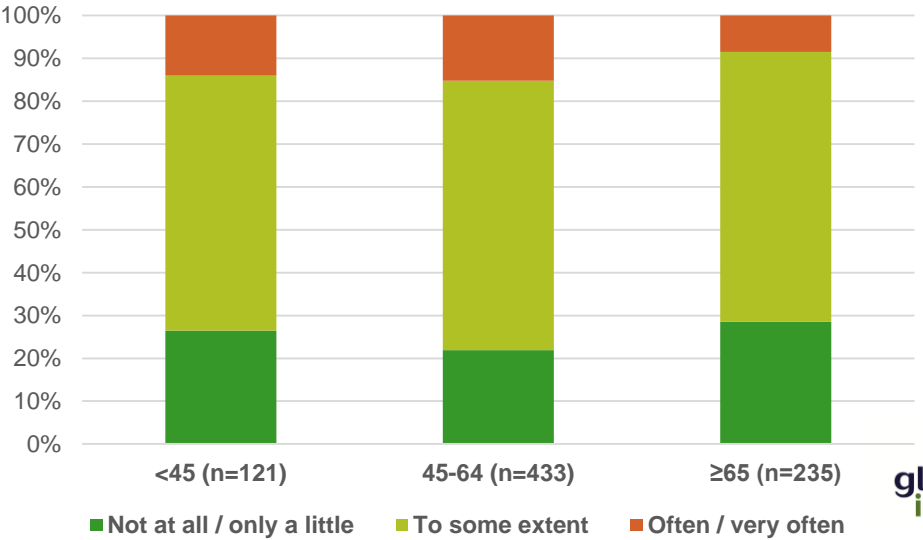
Those 45 - 64 are more likely to experience stress than their younger / older counterparts.

Farmers aged over 65 appear less likely to experience stress often or very often.

## Key Points:

**Wellbeing of many farmers was poor and stress rate relatively high for some.**

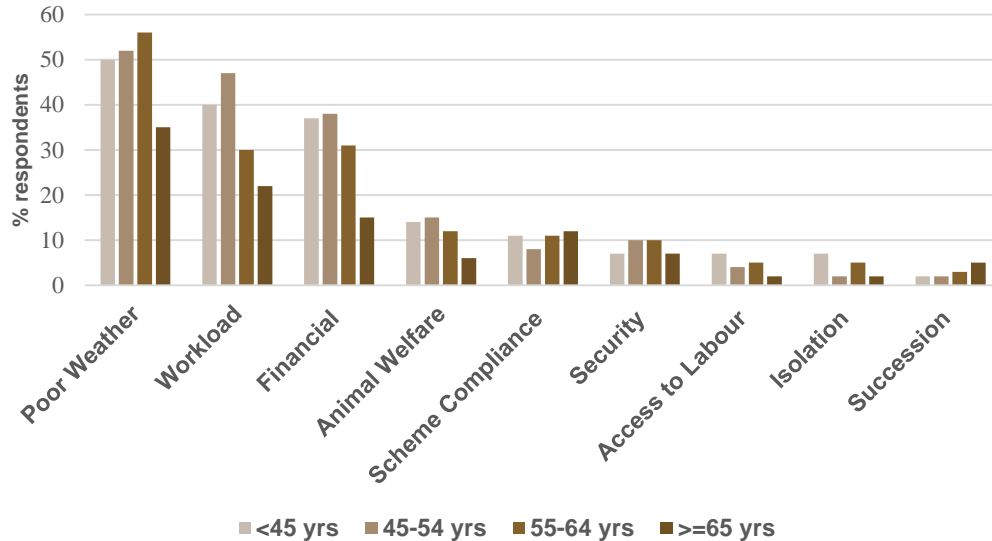
**No direct relationship between, enterprise type, wellbeing and experience of stress**



# Sources of Stress

Mary Brennan  
Dr Emma Dillon  
Prof Thia Hennessy

Sources of Stress identified by Age Group



- Poor weather conditions (2018) were found to be the primary source of stress impacting 48% of NFS farmers, followed by managing workload (33%) and financial pressures (28%)
- Stressors vary by age and system.
  - <45 years of age (workload / labour).
  - 45 – 54 (Workload and finance).
  - >65 (negative relationship to weather, workload and finance).

## Key Point:

‘Stress’ is, for most, a combination of stressors. Weather, so far, in 2020 has been relatively benign but one would expect all other stressors to remain at similar levels.

Covid-19 will have interacted with these stressors in both positive and negative ways (depending on the characteristics and resources of the household).

Age Group		Poor Weather	Workload	Financial	Access to labour
<45 years	Pearson	.036	.103**	.046	.081*
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.321	.005	.205	.026
45-54 years	Pearson	.057	.097**	.095**	-.030
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.118	.008	.009	.416
55-64 years	Pearson	.070	-.013	.002	.034
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.055	.724	.958	.354
>=65 years	Pearson	-.166**	-.160**	-.134**	-.073
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.045

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

# Wellbeing & Change

Conor Hammersley

Dr Noel Richardson, Dr David Meredith,

Dr John McNamara, Dr Paula Carroll



- Farmers are subject to a wider set of longer-term changes driven by evolution of their place in society and, related to this, the governance of agriculture (EU agri policies).
- Qualitative research being undertaken by Conor Hammersley explores how changes shaping farming practices impact on farmer identities and hence their wellbeing.
  - This research feeds into the development of a programme to support farm advisors to support the wellbeing of farmers.
  - In doing so, it seeks to address wellbeing challenges arising from the tensions between societal sustainability demands focused on global challenges including climate, biodiversity and antibiotic resistance, and farmers' sustainability concerns centred on livelihoods, traditions, culture and identity.

# Recap

- Covid-19 and related restrictions may increase the risk of isolation amongst some farmers.
  - Isolation not seen as a key source of stress but this does not mean that it is not an issue, i.e. are the coping mechanisms 'healthy' or unhealthy'?
- Wellbeing of many farmers was poor and stress rate relatively high for some prior to Covid-19.
- For all farmers, regardless of enterprise type, stressors vary by age:
  - <45 years of age (workload / labour).
  - 45 – 54 (Workload and finance).
  - >65 (negative relationship to weather, workload and finance)
- 'Stress' is, for most, a combination of stressors. Weather, so far, in 2020 has been relatively benign but one would expect all other stressors to remain at similar levels.
  - Covid-19 will have interacted with these stressors in both positive and negative ways (depending on the characteristics and resources of the household).