

People living and working within the rural economy are experiencing difficult times as farmers face market uncertainty following Brexit and the impact of Covid.

Many people working in a rural setting lack regular social contact with others, this must be a significant contributor to the high level of suicides in the farming sector. Often opportunities to socialise, particularly in winter when the incidence of depression is high, are significantly limited when compared to those living in urban settings. Many people from farming backgrounds participate in local shoots, often this being their only opportunity to spend significant time with others.

Research conducted by Dr Tracy Latham Green, University of Northampton found the following. (<https://www.giftofgrouse.com/2020/09/30/understanding-the-social-impact-of-participation-in-driven-game-shooting-in-the-uk/>) found the following:

**‘An estimated 1.5 million people take part in driven game shooting in the UK. The findings of this PhD thesis show that participation offers significant benefits for participants in terms of physical health, mental health, social cohesion, inter-generational mixing, combating loneliness in rural areas and offering a sense of purpose.’**

Shooting, either as a business or a leisure activity find little political support. This is driven by an urban based aversion to witnessing the death of an animal or seeing the remains of dead animals, this is despite the majority still enjoying meat in their diet. This illustrates a disconnect with where our meat comes from as the modern grocery and butchery sector shield society from the fact that an animal has to die if we eat meat. Conversely people who work in the countryside are far more likely to be exposed to this reality and so don't develop squeamish sentiments about death. There was a time when most people saw the chicken they ate being killed, were we any less civilised then than we are today?

This aversion to the reality underlying the provision of protein for society has now filtered into the attitudes of our politicians. This was recently exemplified when Julie James, Welsh Government Minister for Climate Change wrote;

**‘The Welsh Government do not support the shooting of live quarry as a leisure activity’.**

This is stated regardless of the fact that game shooting is a significant contributor to the leisure industry in Wales giving much needed employment in the winter when tourism is at low ebb. The shooting industry in Wales also supports many down stream ancillary businesses such as hospitality, agricultural machinery and supplies, car hire etc.

The overall impact of such hostility to shooting is marginalising many people living and working in the rural sector, and this is having undeserved impact on their mental and physical wellbeing.

Provision for mental health services are difficult in any setting, however there is a far greater likelihood of people working in farming not reporting their true situation to their GP.

A recent study (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/10935946/>) found that 30% presented with physical problems rather than admitting that they had a mental health issue.

For many there is a steady spiral into depression and suicide as they feel that our politicians and society have little empathy for their plight. It was recently estimated that in the UK one farmer a week takes their own lives.

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