

Written Evidence submitted by YANA (MH0011)

YANA was established in 2008 to raise mental health awareness and provide support to all who work in the agricultural and rural business community. It provides a confidential telephone helpline, free counselling support and trains Mental Health First Aiders, all ultimately to improve the mental wellbeing of the sector and prevent suicide. The charity operates in East Anglia and Worcestershire. YANA therefore has a strong insight into the mental health challenges facing those in rural communities in these locations.

In response to the questions posed, these are the views of YANA based on first-hand farming knowledge and providing mental health support to those in the industry and rural businesses for 13 years.

1. What specific mental health challenges are faced by those living and working in rural communities?

The challenges that YANA sees which have a direct impact on the mental health of those in farming and rural communities are:

- Uncertainty on trade and policy post-Brexit, particularly the import of food products of a lower standard than required in the UK and increasing costs of exports.
- Labour shortages post Brexit – especially during the harvest season, March - November – which has led to large scale food waste and loss of income. This can also lead to pressure on permanent agricultural workers who undertake additional workloads.
- A sense of isolation in a job or community both physically and digitally (the latter exacerbated by poor levels of rural digital service connection).
- Agricultural workers in particular can suffer from pressure due to job insecurity (for a number of reasons including the changing agricultural industry), low pay and housing insecurity (where it is tied to their role and is lost when leaving the position or retiring).
- Rapid increase in the price of inputs (e.g., fuel, fertiliser, machinery and maintenance costs).
- Low price of outputs, exacerbated by the continual drive for cheap food.
- Wider financing issues and the high cost of funding technological advancement.
- Red tape, over-complicated returns to DEFRA and stressful audits.
- An inability by all in the sector and at every level to take proper rest and recuperation due to the nature of work.
- Unpredictable weather and climate change (including regional water shortages and flooding).
- A desire to meet sustainability goals but a lack of clear direction or vision for the future of farming and food production in the UK.
- Increased rural crime, fly tipping and intimidation of livestock farmers
- Like any other sector of society, personal issues also play their part in mental health pressure and mental health conditions.

- Farms can involve different generations living and working together which can cause increased tension. The older generation do not sometimes plan for the future (on strategy, wills or pensions) or exit from the business.
- Impact of COVID on rural businesses e.g., farm diversification – B&Bs, event venues.
- Physical health conditions and injuries can make it difficult to get the work done. This can exacerbate all of the above factors which can become overwhelming.
- Agriculture also has a poor health and safety record. There is a link between poor mental health and accidents due to such things as lack of concentration and inability of operators to make considered decisions. Any accidents resulting in death are likely to be reported under health and safety rather than mental health.

2. What is the current state of mental health & suicide prevention service provision for those working in agriculture and those living in rural areas more generally? Do they meet the specific needs of that community?

2.1 There is a level of awareness in the rural GP and regional psychiatric services of the issues facing the community, but they do not have the presence or resources to become closer to the community or provide anything other than emergency support. The role of the third sector, and charities such as YANA, is filling the gap with a unique understanding of the agricultural and rural sector, being perceived as credible and able to relate to the specific rural challenges. YANA and DPJ Foundation (Wales) are the only charities in the UK which are Mental Health specific for the agricultural industry.

2.2 YANA raises awareness through public speaking, leaflet distribution, social media, radio and printed media and the training of Mental Health First Aiders (YANA has trained over 170 people in rural businesses and allied charities). YANA not only provides a confidential helpline (which has seen an 80% increase in calls in 2021 compared to 2020) but critically provides free counselling available within days. The latter would be unaffordable for many in the rural sector and only obtainable through state provision after a protracted wait, if at all.

3. What are the causes of the higher-than-average rate of suicide amongst those working in agriculture?

In 2019, there were 135 suicides registered in England, Scotland and Wales in those working in farming and agricultural related trades according to the Office of National Statistics. These included farmers, managers and proprietors of agricultural related services and those working in agricultural related trades and elementary agricultural occupations – some of the categories included were gardeners, horticulturalist, fishermen and women, forestry workers, grounds workers and greenkeepers – 47 of which were among gardeners and landscape gardeners. (ONS, Farm Safety Foundation)

The 2019 Health and Well Being Report by the Worshipful Company of Farmers notes that farm workers were twice as likely to take their own life as farmers.

3.1 In YANA's view the higher-than-average rate of suicide amongst those working in agriculture can be attributed to the challenges stated in answer to the first question together with:

- A persistent stigma in the sector about talking about mental health and a reluctance to communicate about personal problems.
- Lack of contact with statutory MH services.
- Treatment of physical health without understanding the impact on ability to work and therefore mental health.
- Access to the means.

4. Are there other linked professions, such as vets, that have similar issues?

4.1 Vets and gamekeepers are also in the high-risk group for suicide: access to the means being a factor.

4.2 Those in horticulture are also high-risk, isolation of the workplace being a factor.

5. How effective are suicide prevention services offered to these groups?

In YANA's view, given the higher-than-average suicide rate, preventative mental health services are not sufficient, and enhancements should be made to services as outlined in our answers to the further questions in the subsequent sections.

- In terms of YANA's own work, YANA runs a Suicide Prevention campaign '7 Tractor Facts to Save A Life', aimed at the cohort, which was established with support from the UK's leading Suicide Prevention Charity, Grassroots. These cards have been distributed nationally but could be part of a government led initiative.
- The confidential helpline provided by YANA is staffed by Samaritans trained volunteers. All of whom have experience of handling calls from those who are suicidal.
- Feedback confirms that the counselling provided by YANA has been effective in helping those who have felt suicidal.

YANA sees prevention as a long-term investment and recognises that measuring the effectiveness of preventative work is challenging. Whilst we can measure our reach and review anecdotal feedback, actually understanding the number of lives saved is difficult.

6. Is sufficient mental health support made available to rural communities following 'shocks' such as flooding or mass animal culls?

6.1 The primary support for mental health following 'shocks' seems to be provided by the third sector. For example, during the recent pig farming crisis, YANA distributed support information to 80 pig farms in our region and made the National Pig Association aware of the psychological support YANA could provide to its members. The advantage of

being a regional, rural based charity is that YANA is in close contact with the industry and can react quickly to need.

6.2 'Shocks' include decisions made by government or DEFRA which have an immediate impact, not just on the industry as a whole, but individuals involved with farming e.g., the recent confusing ruling on muck spreading.

6.3 The impact of culling cattle due to positive TB testing is underestimated. Building a milking herd takes decades: the family line might have been on a farm through generations and the loss of stock is devastating, emotionally and financially.

7. Does the Government's recent investment in mental health services adequately provide for agricultural mental health?

7.1 YANA works with the statutory services, but the evidence seems to be that the mental health provision remains under considerable strain. The state provision would need to seek a way to demonstrate empathy and authentic understanding of the sector and provide resources to raise awareness and provide support. Op Courage - the specialist NHS mental health service for those current or former members of the Armed Forces could be a model from which to start exploring a co-ordinated focussed agricultural option. The service provides critical support, raises awareness and joins up a common approach sign posts a range of support including that provided by the third sector.

7.2 An example of good local practice: Breckland Council (South Norfolk) has established the Breckland Mental Health Community Partnership to collectively deliver the Mindful Towns mental health training and education programme for small business and community organisations. As an example of local council and third sector collaboration, YANA is providing the Mental Health First Aid training for those in Breckland's rural businesses.

7.3 Given the evidenced higher suicide rate in the agricultural sector, much greater emphasis and investment must be made by the state in mental health support and suicide prevention, whilst recognising the key causes.

8. How joined up are key actors, such as DEFRA, DHSC, NHS England, Public Health England and Local Government in their approach to improving quality of, and access to, mental health service in rural and agricultural communities?

- A joined-up approach is currently lacking but there is a real opportunity for all to collaborate, be more focussed and make a substantial difference to mental health in the agricultural and rural community in the UK. This will require a better understanding of the industry, more financial and resource investment and close collaboration with the third sector, such as YANA which is highly regarded nationally and has a proven track record of supporting the sector with effective outcomes.

- Undoubtedly, distressed, possibly even suicidal, farmers and staff are contacting DEFRA. In order that DEFRA staff are equipped to deal with such calls, YANA, via The Prince's Countryside Fund, has offered free places on its Mental Health First Aid training courses.

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