

Live well, grow well

STORIES FROM THE KIWIFRUIT INDUSTRY



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‘Live well, grow well’

A NZKGI / FARMSTRONG INITIATIVE



NZKGI is the grower advocacy body for New Zealand’s kiwifruit industry. It works to advocate, protect and enhance the commercial and political interests of New Zealand’s kiwifruit growers.

We represent kiwifruit growers, giving them their own voice in industry and government decision making.

NZKGI’s headquarters in the Bay of Plenty, the geographic heart of the kiwifruit industry, is the central hub for the NZKGI Executive Committee, Forum members and staff.



Farmstrong helps growers and farmers, their families and staff develop habits that improve wellbeing and day-to-day performance. Drawing on science and the experience of other growers, Farmstrong shares the things you can do to look after yourself and the people in your business.

Farmstrong is a community give-back initiative founded by rural insurer Farmers’ Mutual Group (FMG) and the Mental Health Foundation (MHF) in 2015. The Movember Foundation was an early founding contributor and ACC joined as a strategic partner in 2016. Farmstrong works in close collaboration with the kiwifruit industry and farming organisations throughout New Zealand.

In 2020 Farmstrong won the Supreme Award at the New Zealand Workplace Health and Safety Awards.

Visit the Farmstrong website to see what other growers and farmers are doing and lock in whatever works for you.



Growing our resilience

It's an honour to write the foreword for this book on what I consider to be an extremely important, but often overlooked, topic by our kiwifruit industry. The value of our mental health, particularly our management of stress and maintenance of resilience, are absolutely critical to successfully navigate the challenges we face on a daily basis.

So thank you to Farmstrong for collaborating with us on this book to support our growers in this area of pastoral care. Until recently, we often referred to Psa as an example of where growers experienced stress. But lately there have been many more strong examples of when people in our industry have had to face adversity: Covid, severe adverse weather events including wind, hail and frost as well as the recent pressures on our supply chain just to name a few which have been particularly trying, creating a lot of pressure on growers, financial or otherwise.

As a grower, I've also had my share of highs and lows and completely understand how trying the industry can get. That's why it's important to take steps to maintain personal wellbeing, even when times get tough.

The great thing about this book is that it is open and transparent by acknowledging the pressures that growers must often deal with, as well as offering solutions to address them. While growers usually can't control the challenges that put them under the pump, there are pre-emptive steps that can be taken to reduce the psychological impact. NZKGI's collaboration with Farmstrong to produce this book

highlights this fact through a collection of stories from the kiwifruit industry which are filled with hints and tips people can adopt to improve their wellbeing. We know how tough the industry has been lately and how particularly important it is to place emphasis on supporting stress management and resilience. This book couldn't come at a better time.

There's an old whakatauki/proverb that asks "He aha te mea nui o te ao? (What is the most important thing in the world?) He tangata, he tangata, he tangata (it is people, it is people, it is people)." It goes without saying that this industry wouldn't exist if it weren't for the people, which is why it is so important for us to look after ourselves. In a sector where wellbeing isn't always at the top of people's minds, I am really proud of how these stigmas are being broken down through publications such as this book. We are extremely grateful to have this opportunity alongside Farmstrong to help the people of our industry.



Mark Mayston

*Chairman,
New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers*



A message from the Farmstrong Ambassador

The kiwifruit industry is an exciting industry, but I know from talking with growers, that it has its fair share of pressures too. There are always the things that you can't control, such as prices or the weather, which can make life stressful.

That's why it's so important to have a strategy to manage pressure when you're feeling 'under the pump'. On an orchard or a farm, no-one is going to come and tell you to have time off. You have to prioritise your wellbeing and make it happen yourself.

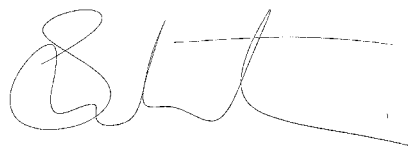
That's where Farmstrong comes in. Farmstrong is a rural wellbeing programme that shares tips and advice about how to stay well and get the most out of life. It helps you build habits to cope with the inevitable ups and downs.

I'm thrilled to be the Farmstrong Ambassador. I've seen first-hand the positive impact it is having among growers and farmers. More than 15,000 growers and farmers say Farmstrong has helped them improve their wellbeing.

Maintaining wellbeing doesn't happen by accident. We need to make space for it in our busy lives. In this book you will read inspiring stories about growers who have done this, often as a result of hitting tough times. And there are also valuable tips and information about how to keep on top of your game.

Rugby has taught me heaps about how to look after myself and handle pressure. I reckon playing rugby is not so different from farming or horticulture – there are always results to achieve and pressures to deal with.

I know from experience you have to spend time and invest in what keeps you well. When you do that, the benefits are enormous – for you, your family and the future of the kiwifruit industry.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Whitelock', with a stylized, flowing script.

Samuel Whitelock
Farmstrong Ambassador



Five Ways to Wellbeing

Whether you're an athlete or a grower, it all starts with getting the basics right. Five simple habits make up the basics, the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing'.

Research shows that people who thrive have five things in common: they stay connected with their mates, they enjoy the simple things in life, they stay active, they keep learning and they give back by helping out friends, neighbours and their community.

These 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' can make a huge difference to your life. The key is to lock them in each day in small ways so they become a habit. These habits are what you can fall back on when you are 'under the pump'.

Connect with others

People with strong social connections are happier, healthier and live longer. Spending time with your mates and making new friends makes a big difference to how you feel about yourself. Talk and listen, be there for others, feel connected. When you do these things, the rewards are huge.

Even when you are busy, try and make it a priority to connect with others. It may be just a phone call, a text or chat with a neighbour. And be a good listener too. It can make all the difference to how someone feels.

Give back

Make time for others. When you give your time to help others – your family, your friends, your community – not only do they benefit, it makes you feel a lot better too. There are lots of ways you can give – volunteering at the school or in the community, helping out a neighbour, spending more time with your kids. When you do this, your world expands and you feel a lot happier.

Be active

Keeping active is a great stress-reliever. When you work up a sweat, endorphins are released that lift your mood. You feel more positive and better able to cope. Make physical movement a habit, aim for at least some form of activity for 30 minutes a day. Physical movement clears the head for better decision-making and also helps prevent injuries.

Enjoy the simple things in life

We all get busy and it's easy for our minds to get cluttered and pre-occupied. Take a few moments each day to notice the things in life that bring you joy – family, friends, interests, animals, nature. Just pause and be grateful. Think of three good things that happened today. Being grateful adds to a sense of wellbeing.

Keep learning

At whatever age, learning new things is good for you. It's good for your brain and keeps you flexible and open. It may be new work skills, or it may be recreational activities, like learning a musical instrument or cooking something new. Make a habit of trying new things, however small, and you will feel surprising satisfaction. ●



'Don't sweat what you can't control'

With 40 years' experience in the kiwifruit industry, Sean Canarchan has some clear ideas about what it takes to last the distance.



Sean Canarchan wears multiple hats in the kiwifruit industry. He is a grower based in Katikati, growing all three varieties of kiwifruit – red, green and gold. He is also a contractor, managing orchards for growers, and runs a small post-harvest operation. He holds several directorships in the industry and is very involved in NZKGI, New Zealand Kiwifruit Growers.

In the 40 years he has been in the industry, Sean has seen plenty of ups and downs. It's a great industry to be in, he says, but there are always challenges.

"When you think things are going swimmingly well, there's always something around the corner to challenge you. And generally the things that challenge us in this industry are not of our own making. They are normally outside influences."

The big 'outside influence' for growers currently is labour shortages, says Sean, who currently employs around 35 staff.

"We've got 95 percent current employment in this country which is what I deem to be full employment. And every industry is competing for the small amount of workers who are available.

"Labour shortages mean there's a lot of work that's not getting done and it's costing more and more to get it done. It definitely is a worry for growers."

When it comes to dealing with stress, Sean has developed a clear philosophy for handling the uncertainty which is part and parcel of the industry.

“If you can get exercise along with socialising happening on a regular basis, it gives you that balance.”

“I always talk about two things: the controllables and the uncontrollables. All the things you can control, you need to have a plan in place to deal with them, but don’t sweat the things you can’t control.

“The classic example is when it rains and you can’t work and you think ‘I’m going to get further and further behind.’ Yes you are, but it doesn’t matter how much worrying you do, it won’t improve the situation.

“What you can do is discuss the work programme, prioritise what needs to be done and have a good plan in place so when the weather comes right, you have retained everybody and you can get on with it. That’s critical.”

When it comes to the labour shortage, Sean has identified some ‘controllables’ that he hopes will alleviate the situation. His key strategy is to maximise staff retention.

“You have to look after the staff you have got so you can retain them throughout the year. We employ a lot of staff for 12 months of the year so they have a permanent job, rather than a seasonal job. We house some of them on our property and we try and be a good employer. Not everybody is focused on the money, there are other



things that make people get up in the morning to go to work. You have to identify those needs.”

Sean is a strong believer in looking after his own wellbeing as well as contributing positively to the wellbeing of others. Taking time out for regular exercise and socialising with others to achieve balance in his life are priorities. If you don’t have that kind of support in place, you have to go looking for it, says Sean.

“If you can get exercise along with socialising happening on a regular basis, it gives you that balance. Socialising with good company is so critical. You want to surround yourself with positive people so you get good vibes off that.”

Sean’s outside interests include “a bit of mountain biking and fishing. They are my two things but it can be as simple as walking your dog around the orchard or going to the beach.”

"I also have a group of guys I get together with for a beer once a week and most of them don't grow kiwifruit. It's something different. We have quite a bit of accommodation here on the farm, people from different backgrounds. We manage to catch up and have a friendly natter once or twice a week over a couple of cold beers we brew ourselves. It's always at the end of the day and a good unwind. It's not a drinking culture, it's a catch-up."

Typically, there is not much downtime in the kiwifruit industry so finding ways to share the load and take breaks is important, says Sean.

"There are not many months when we are not working seven days a week to manage the orchards. This year we managed to run a six-day-a-week business right through the winter which was good because it meant everybody knew they could have a Sunday off."

Over the years Sean has seen the kiwifruit industry face major threats. When Psa disease attacked kiwifruit vines in 2010 and crippled the industry, Sean got involved personally in supporting growers who were at the end of their tether and ready to walk away from their orchards. Once again it was a case of controlling what you could control.

"It was very serious. What I did was sit down with them and show them there was a pathway through this. 'I don't know how it is going to end up but there is a pathway.' Just talking to them about their personal situation, their cashflow, and encouraging them to have a conversation with the bank who were supportive of us through that period.

"I did the same thing in 2020 when it looked like we might not be able to get our entire crop harvested because of Covid. Encouraging growers to sit down early with the bank manager and understand their financial position so they had some clarity about what they can and cannot do. Once you have clarity, it improves your mental wellbeing about how you can stay in business."

Sean is a supporter of Farmstrong's focus on proactively looking after your own wellbeing, and the wellbeing of your family and community.

"I like what Farmstrong is on about. Now is the time to discuss these ideas and take action before things get potentially even tougher. Have the conversations now. It's well worth it. People have different levels of anxiety and stress in all jobs so it's really good to reach out. It takes an ongoing commitment to look after yourself, it's not a short fix." ●



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“All the things you can control, you need to have a plan in place to deal with them, but don't sweat the things you can't control.”

Doing things differently

Leighton Oats is a veteran of the kiwifruit industry – 20 years plus. Now he runs his own four-and-a-half hectare kiwifruit and avocado orchard in Omanawa in the Bay of Plenty. He shares what he's learnt about managing the pressures of a busy, results-driven industry.



Like many in the industry, Leighton went through the lows of the Psa crisis in 2010, and then enjoyed the boom that followed, climbing the corporate ladder into leadership and management roles. Meanwhile, he had a young family, so life was busy on all fronts. He says he reached a point where he felt burnt out.

"I just noticed I wasn't thinking as clearly as I normally do. I was also getting frustrated with people. They'd come and ask me questions and I'd be grumpy. I soon realised it wasn't them, it was me."

He says the industry itself had changed. "When I first started out there were gaps in the year where you could have a bit of a breather. You'd do your pruning or thinning and then there'd be a gap. But as the industry moved from casual employment to creating permanent jobs, those gaps disappeared. There was less downtime."

As the pressure mounted, so did his stress levels. "When you work in a large industry you don't always have control over decisions, but you still have to implement them. For example, you might be asked to manage another 10 hectares, but there's not staff to do that. That sort of situation can be stressful."

“It’s important to step back from stressful situations and not just react to them. Once you give yourself space, you often realise you’re not seeing the full picture.”

Leighton remembers it as a tough time. “I had to prioritise my health. I discovered adrenal fatigue was a big part of it. The adrenal gland affects how you perceive and handle stress. Mine were only working at about 40 percent of where they should’ve been.”

He made a raft of changes to his lifestyle – everything from how he worked to what he ate to how he spent his spare time. “I was told I could do anything outside of work as long as I didn’t have to run it. If I played sport, I had to just play for the fun of it.”

He heeded that advice. His Tuesday night twilight cricket team became an important part of his life. “It’s just a really great outlet where you can think about something else other than work and have a good laugh with your mates. That’s my down time, the rest of the time I’m either working or with my family.”

He also decided to step back from the corporate world and develop his own orchard block. “My goal was to do as much as I could myself, so I could control my workload and pressure. So, I’ve done all the post work and vine work here. I love the kiwifruit industry and now I’ve got back to doing what I love. The orchard I’m developing is an organic orchard so it’s not just a job to me. I’m exploring whether we can do things as an industry that are less invasive in terms of chemical use. I like the fact I’m free to try anything here.”

He admits managing his workload is still a ‘work in progress’.

“It’s been pretty full-on for the last year and a half, but I’m definitely achieving a better balance. My block is 40 minutes’ drive away from home, but recently I’ve been leaving at six in the morning and then knocking off at 2pm so I can spend more time with my family.”

Looking back on his career, which at one point involved managing 50 staff and up to 200 contractors, Leighton reflects on what helps manage pressure.

“It’s important to step back from stressful situations and not just react to them. Once you give yourself space, you often realise you’re not seeing the full picture. For instance, if you have staff working on orchard and things haven’t gone the way you wanted, is it because they’re doing it wrong or is it because you haven’t given them the right instructions or training or supervision or they haven’t got the right tools?”

“It’s also important to retain a sense of humour – to be able to have a laugh with your mates. Even if you’re in a serious role, you’ve got to be able to enjoy what you do. Otherwise, work is always going to be a drag and you’re not going to end up in a good headspace.”

“I think as an industry, many of us get so caught up in the doing that we forget about the why. There’s always another job on an orchard. For example, I’ve been putting in irrigation here and I told myself, ‘I’ve got to get this done before I go on holiday’. I kept pushing myself, doing 12-hour days. Then I stopped and thought, ‘Hold on, I can just water all these plants and go away for a week. They’re not going to die. Then I’ll come back and finish the irrigation.’”

“That’s the key, telling yourself, ‘I can do this in a different way ... and that’s ok.’” ●

'One hour *a day*'



A diagnosis of breast cancer in her 40s reinforced for Michelle Sullivan the importance of a positive outlook and taking some time out every day for herself.

Growing kiwifruit is in Michelle Sullivan's blood. She's been involved in the industry pretty much all her life and a lot of her family own orchards. "Fourth generation", she says proudly.

She manages four orchards, two of them her own and two belonging to a family member – 11 hectares in total. All the orchards are in the Paengaroa area near Te Puke.

"We've owned our orchard for nearly 21 years. We planted our orchard ourselves. We bought a house with some bare land and developed it all – borrowed, scrounged, bought second-hand posts, dug all the holes for the plants and pretty much laid out the whole orchard ourselves."

Right from the early days, Michelle recognised the need to put some time aside for herself every day. Her 'one hour a day' has been an essential part of balancing a full-on job in a pressured industry with a busy family life.

"I have always given myself an hour every day to do what I want to do – go for a bike ride, a walk, meditate, do stretches, all that kind of stuff. It's so important. Otherwise it's all just too much.

"I love working so I have to make sure I get some work-life balance. If I didn't take that hour for myself, I think I'd burn out."

Two years ago, Michelle was diagnosed with breast cancer. She went on light duties during her treatment which lasted for seven months.

"I had quite bad side effects from radiation with fatigue, so I was very careful not to overdo it during that time.

"Since then, I outsource a few jobs which gives me time to do other things. My children are 15 and 18 and I want more time with them now because they are going to be leaving home soon. To me that is more important than busting a gut out in the orchard, doing a job that I can get someone else to do in less time and a little bit of cost."

The experience of dealing with a life-threatening disease has changed Michelle's perspective on how she wants to live her life.

"I look at life a lot more positively than I used to. If there's something we want to go and do, we just do it. Life's short. I have a sharp awareness of that. It really strikes you when you have had cancer and you are only in your 40s."

“My children are 15 and 18 and I want more time with them now because they are going to be leaving home soon.”

The key to dealing with the tough times is having good support around you, says Michelle.

"I've got incredible support around me and I listen to them – even though I'm stubborn – when they tell me I've got to slow down or stop. Having a good support network is huge. I had that all through my recovery period."

The other thing that helped her deal with her situation was communicating to others very clearly about what needed to be done. That was an essential part of allowing her to step back.

"I wrote everything down so the people who were managing things during my recovery knew exactly what needed to be done. Communication was huge and made all the difference."

These days Michelle is well and fully involved once again. She likes the flexible lifestyle that the industry provides. Jobs need to be done but there is some flexibility to move things around when you have to. "It's not like dairy farming where you have to be there morning and night."

She also enjoys "new ways of doing stuff. I enjoy going to the field days and taking away some ideas that I can implement in the orchard. There's always room for innovation and doing the best you can."

Pressure is part and parcel of the industry. Over the last couple of years with Covid, making sure there are enough people to come in and do the jobs that need to be done at a critical time has been a pressure, she says. And picking time can be stressful too, "making sure the results are right when we do pick the fruit."

These inevitable stresses are why wellbeing has to be a high priority for the industry, she says.

"If you're not well, if you're not around, it's not going to last. I'm quite lucky – a lot of my family own orchards, my brother, my sister, my dad, my uncles so any of them can help. We are always throwing ideas around with one another. Growing kiwifruit is a real family passion."

And how has this year been?

"I'm happy with how our orchards are doing. We were pretty lucky, we didn't get that polar frost that came through. The wind is quite shocking at the moment but that's just Mother Nature. We deal with it." ●



‘You can only control what you can control’

Stu Weston, former CEO of post-harvest business Apata, has been part of the kiwifruit industry since 1991. An episode of burnout years ago still informs how he works today. We asked him how he manages when he’s feeling ‘under the pump.’

How did you get into the industry?

I fell into it. I was broke, needed to make rent and had no warrant for the car, so I picked up a labouring job in a kiwifruit packhouse in South Auckland. I ended up staying for 10 years! I’d grown up in urban Auckland, but I absolutely loved the work. Over time, I picked up other roles and eventually moved to the Bay of Plenty where 85 percent of kiwifruit is grown. At the tender age of 33, I was CEO of one of the post-harvest businesses here.

We manage over 300 hectares of orchards and we’re developing another 250 hectares, so we’ve got a lot going on. The main activity is the packing, cool storage and export of kiwifruit.

What do you enjoy about the job?

I love working with people and this industry is very collaborative. Every day you run across such a variety. It’s like three industries wrapped up in one – horticulture, manufacturing and warehousing. I love that breadth.

What are the main pressures at the moment?

Trying to make do with the labour you’ve got is really challenging when you’ve got 200 clients with 15 million trays of fruit to harvest. These are unprecedented challenges that we are facing as an industry. It’s a whole new level of stretch.

That sounds stressful. What sort of toll does that take?

Well, because I’m no stranger to stress and have been through some dark days, I’m acutely aware of the early signs of stress and I’m careful to manage that. When I was the leader of a large organisation, I realised the best service I could be to my shareholders, staff and clients was to stay cool, calm and collected and turn up at work feeling rested and clear of mind.

What strategies do you use?

I’ve learnt not to burn energy on stuff I can’t control. I just look after what I can control. For the uncontrollable elements, I simply buckle up and enjoy the ride.

What about workload?

It's possible in this industry to work so many hours that your head is just in a fog. There was a time when I was younger that I worked 17 hours day. Now I go home after 12. Rest is vital. There's always something to do. I'll prioritise what needs to get done and then go home and rest.

What about the basics – eating, sleep, exercise?

I'm big on exercise and careful about what I'm eating. When you're young you can thrash that engine all you like, but when you're older, exercise, rest and diet are important to prevent you descending into that fog.

“*I just look after what I can control.
For the uncontrollable elements,
I simply buckle up and enjoy the ride.*”

How do you avoid bringing work worries home?

I give myself a little debrief on the way home before I walk into the house. If I go in wound up like a steel spring, I'm not giving my family what they deserve. So, as I'm driving home, I'm letting go of any work anxieties, tasks that have not been completed or frustration about things not going as planned. And if I get home and I'm still not completely there, then I'll go for a walk in the orchard.

How do you make sure you get a decent night's sleep?

I treat home as a refuge from work. Once I'm home, I'm off-duty. I find it helps train your mind to let go of anxieties and frustrations and rest. If you're about to go to bed and you keep checking work emails, sure as eggs something is going to wind you up and you'll be awake at two in the morning.

You mentioned some dark days. Tell us about that.

I was a young guy, 29, working incredibly long hours with a new wife and baby. I never adjusted my work pattern to accommodate my life. I remember collapsing at work. I thought I was having a stroke. The room was spinning. I was in a bad way, purely because I'd just kept going and going. It was a smaller business and I was chief cook and bottle washer, continually resolving problems. I got trundled off to the doctor. When I told her the hours I was doing, she said that amount of work was so unhealthy, there was nothing she could prescribe to help!

So what happened?

She sent me to a cognitive therapist. He kept asking me why I was working the way I was. It was like peeling an onion. We finally got to the root of it – deep down I had a need to prove to everyone just how hard-working I was. He asked me if that sounded logical. I laughed and replied, 'that's the stupidest thing I've ever heard!'

But that's what was going on in my head. I was so concerned about the welfare of the business, and what people thought of me, that I was killing myself! That was a 'wow' moment. Since then, I've come to see that there are a surprising number of people like that.

How did you recover?

I had to learn how to enjoy things outside of work again. I ended up going to the public pool to swim. It felt so foreign and bizarre at first taking time out of my business to do that. I had very low expectations of enjoyment beforehand, but when I did it, it actually felt nice! It took those baby steps to introduce something else in my life and find some balance.

Now I consciously make time for activities outside work. I recently bought a motorbike. One of my favourite things is to go out for a ride where I'm in my own little world. It feels marvellous.



How do you make sure you don't fall back into old habits?

My wife is my sentinel, if you like. She recognises if I'm falling back into my old ways and will call me on it. The other thing is self-awareness – knowing the tell-tale signs that you're 'under the pump'. For me, it's when I start forgetting things. I'll go out to the car and I've forgotten the keys or my phone. Once you know your markers, you can do something about it.

Did you ever consider another career?

I could probably have found an easier job, but, if I'm really honest, I'm an adrenalin junkie. The theme song to my life could be ACDC's Thunderstruck. I really like the high-octane nature of our industry. I'm never happier than when I'm standing in the middle of it all, cranking it out.

Any final thoughts?

When you're passionate about something, you just want to be the best at it. I know many kiwifruit growers feel like that and it's a great thing ... until it's unhealthy.

I'm a highly competitive person too, a type A personality, but I literally nearly worked myself to death. I learnt the hard way that you have to look after yourself, otherwise you're no use to anyone. That's why I'm happy to share my story. If I can help one other person avoid that abyss, then I'll put myself out there and share it. ●

Making staff wellbeing a priority

A wellbeing work culture needs to move beyond good intentions to a programme of action.

Focusing on the core values of kindness and care is an integral part of kiwifruit operation Baygold's culture, says general manager of engagement and culture, Paul Fawcett.

It's about ensuring workers are being cared for in a way that's appropriate to their work and life, he says. "If you are doing right by people, they will do right by you."

Baygold, which is based in the Bay of Plenty, has around 90 permanent staff and 70 RSE workers. It has put in place a range of measures to help look after its workers.

The company offers health and life insurance, as well as mandatory medical checks for machine operators and voluntary ones for everybody else. "The physical checks are carried out on-site so it's easy for workers," says Paul.

Bi-annual skin checks are also offered for employees who work outdoors. And it's not just physical health checks that are important. Mental health is also a priority, he says.

"We have Vitae's Employee Assistance Programme available on-site for workers to access if they need to talk about anything. We also

have one of our construction team run weekly get-togethers for the guys to talk about mental health and wellbeing.

"At the heart, it's about understanding that we can say we care, but we have to show we care by actually doing things for the team."

"We have great managers and supervisors who listen to people and are looking out for areas of concern. We don't get everything right,

“At the heart, it's about understanding that we can say we care, but we have to show we care by actually doing things for the team.”

but it's an intentional journey to improve workplace wellbeing. You have to keep trying and keep moving forward."

Baygold currently has 70 RSE workers helping fill the gaps, and looking after their wellbeing is important.

"We provide evening meals to make sure they are eating well. This helps their productivity and energy levels and we also have on-site dental checks and nutrition programmes."



Baygold has put in place a range of measures to help look after its workers.

Paul says one of the key challenges at the moment is avoiding fatigue. With staffing shortages, it's important to make sure staff aren't getting fatigued and burnt out. "If people work more than 60 hours a week, they can't function so that's the maximum we encourage people to not go over."

Paul says it's important to be able to adapt to challenging and constantly changing situations. "With Covid, we've learnt how to adapt to the various alert level settings, and we understand what we need to do to operate, whatever situation arises."

The horticulture industry has learnt to be resilient, he says.

"We've been through the Psa crisis which crippled the industry. But you have to endure and work through challenges. This industry is extremely collaborative and working through challenges together is key."

"You need to choose how you frame things and have a positive outlook. In tough times your mindset is critical to getting through and achieving outcomes." ●

Since this story was written, Paul Fawcett has moved on from this role.

“People from different cultures have different cultural needs and you have to take the time to understand that.”



‘Onwards *and upwards*’

The Indian community is making a big contribution to the kiwifruit industry as growers, contractors and workers. Harnessing the skills and energy of a culturally diverse workforce is a vital part of the kiwifruit success story.

Malkit Singh, Grower Liaison Manager for Zespri International, has been involved in the kiwifruit industry since he was 15. Born in India, he migrated to New Zealand when he was 11. As well as working for Zespri, he owns a small kiwifruit orchard in the Bay of Plenty.

“My family migrated here 30 years ago. Many Indian families came to the Bay of Plenty and worked in horticulture – apples, kiwifruit, asparagus, whatever. As the Indian community became established, they became contractors and growers. Some of them are now among the biggest growers in the region with 100 hectares each.”

In his role as Grower Liaison Manager, Malkit regularly engages face-to-face with the Indian community of growers, making sure they are well informed on issues affecting the industry. Most of the Indian growers are in the Bay of Plenty and a large proportion of the workforce, apart from the RSE workers and the back-packers, are Indian, says Malkit.

Malkit says it is very important to understand the cultural background of people working in the industry.

“People from different cultures have different cultural needs and you have to take the time to understand that. They react differently to different situations, so it’s about recognising that so you can adjust and connect in a way that works for different audiences.”

The current Indian kiwifruit growers are all first-generation Indian and have a very strong work ethic, says Malkit. Language can be

challenging, with many of them having minimal English. People can be quite shy and there is a reluctance to ask questions, he says.

“It’s easier for them to engage within their culture. They help one another out and keep one another informed. There’s a lot of pastoral support that happens within the Indian community.”

Malkit sees benefits for the Indian community in engaging more with the broader kiwifruit industry and vice versa. There is so much experience in the industry – growers have had to weather some very tough times such as the Psa crisis, which everybody can learn from.

Having a positive outlook is very important when you’re working in the kiwifruit industry, says Malkit.

“Part of working in horticulture is going through the highs and lows. You have to be resilient and work through the challenges, whether it’s frosts, or quality issues or labour shortages. This is obviously a challenging season but I still think there are a lot more positives than negatives, so it’s onwards and upwards.

“There is so much growth potential in kiwifruit. You can grow kiwifruit til your heart’s content. It’s not as if we are in an industry where we have reached the peak and going down the other side – we grow a fantastic fruit and there’s strong demand for it. It’s a very exciting industry to be part of.” ●

Lessons *learned*

Ian Greaves was at the forefront of efforts to help growers when the Psa crisis hit the kiwifruit industry a decade ago. He says lessons learned back then are still as relevant now for the industry.



Ian has worked in the kiwifruit industry since he left university, running pack houses and cool stores before heading into industry-wide organisations and orchard ownership. For the past 16 years he's been a director of Kiwifruit New Zealand which is the regulator of the industry.

He'd just hit 50 and was about to 'semi-retire' when Psa disease attacked the vines and crippled the industry in 2010. Growers were suddenly under immense financial pressure. Incomes were slashed and land values plummeted. There was a real prospect the industry might not survive. "There was definitely the view that there might not be an industry left," he remembers. "When the first meetings were called by the industry, everyone came. You had 600 local orchardists there."

"Everything was in lockdown. Rural posties weren't allowed up the drive because you spread the Psa on your clothing. People were even too scared to go and visit their neighbour."

Ian realised he had to help. "I wandered into the new Psa office they'd set up and said, 'I'll give you a hand for a while'. I thought it might be 6 weeks' voluntary work. I ended up doing that for 5 years!"

He says there was a 'huge hole in the pastoral care side in the industry'. Nothing was in place to support growers during tough times.

"Kiwifruit orchardists are different to dairy farmers. They aren't all on their orchards, for a start, so there wasn't one fix for everyone. We tried different things and all of them had a degree of success – breathing courses, sleep experts, clinical psychologists talking about

stress. Some people needed financial help, others operational help, others psychological.”

More packed meetings followed as the virus spread. “We ran about 20 seminars and I’d start them by asking, “who’s feeling stressed?” and, in Opotiki, one of the main guys from the pack house puts up both hands and says “Can I put up both feet too?” A hundred people in the hall started laughing. It broke the ice, just having someone prepared to admit that they were feeling stressed gave everyone permission to ask for help.”

Ian and his team designed a triage system to direct growers towards the assistance that was available. “The flow-chart was simple to use, but comprehensive. We had 20 financial advisors ready to go, Kiwifruit Vine Health offered operational support and I stepped into the psychological area and had doctors, hospitals and clinical psychologists ready to go.”

One of the immediate needs for growers was an emergency contact point. Ian’s profile in the industry made him an ideal candidate and for the next few years he was on call 24/7 responding to people whose lives and livelihoods had reached crisis point. It was gruelling work.

“If people rang the emergency contact number I’d be at their place within 15 to 30 minutes. I was spending hours with people every day so they weren’t left alone, setting up monitoring systems for them. We know that saved lives.”

So what has the industry learnt from those traumatic times? Things are now buoyant again – prices have rebounded, exports are booming and land and kiwifruit gold licences command a premium. But boom times never last forever and factors like exchange rates, tariffs and export trends are hard to predict.

So the challenge, Ian says, is to get growers and their workers to think about their wellbeing in good times as well as bad. “The lessons of Psa are that your first responsibility is to look after yourself, your second is your family, and your third is your neighbour. If you’re not good, you can’t look after anyone. But people need to remember that for 20 years, not just a few moments.”

Ian’s other main insight is that pastoral care can’t be left to a few individuals, the whole industry needs to own it. “During the crisis we had 200 scientists working on how to get the vines through, but the vines by themselves aren’t the industry. You need the growers in good shape too, you need their intellectual knowledge and passion. Industries really need to look after their people during times of adversity.”

“To me the upside of Psa is that people will have found a greater quality in their life and appreciate what they have. We also have better tools in place now to keep people well. We just need to remind them to use them every now and then. To make sure they eat well, sleep well, exercise and connect with friends and neighbours. Those are the things that build physical and mental resilience.”

“People never used to talk about mental health. It was just not a topic. If you talked about it to some of the old growers, they thought you were a crank. I had one old guy in the smoko room one day and he says “Is anyone actually talking to you about this stuff?” and I said ‘yeah, quite a few.’ And I knew he was at the point of breakdown, and he said ‘yep, well I’ve been to the doctors and had a jab’, but he couldn’t look me in the eye and talk normally about it. He just kept looking into the distance.”

“I’d like to think New Zealand’s a different place now. We’ve got younger orchardists coming through who talk about these issues far more naturally. After all, it’s normal to feel stressed during tough times, we all do! It’s what you do about it that counts.” ●

Understanding stress and burnout

Horticulture, like any industry, has its share of highs, lows and challenges. Heavy workloads, combined with things outside your control such as weather events, changing compliance requirements or labour shortages, can greatly increase the risk of unhealthy stress and burnout.

Knowing the warning signs and acting on them will help you manage stress and prevent burnout. Whether you are working in the orchard or in the packhouse, there are things you can do to increase your wellbeing and make you more resilient.

What is burnout?

Burnout is a way to describe feeling physically and emotionally exhausted. It is accompanied by feelings of ineffectiveness, lack of accomplishment, cynicism and detachment. It is your body letting you know that it can no longer cope with the demands you are placing on it and you need a break. Health, relationships and family life can suffer. It can also make you more at risk of accident and injury.

“One of the biggest signs of stress I see is irritability. People lose their tolerance and little things start to bug them a lot more. That means you have a pretty short fuse and partners and kids can often feel the brunt of that. Feeling tired and losing a bit of motivation are other signs. Feeling churned up inside is another. If our thinking loses focus, becomes jumbled or we find it hard to make decisions – that’s another sign of unhealthy stress.”

SARAH DONALDSON, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

Sam’s top tips for managing stress

- 1 Treat yourself as your business’s number one asset. Make your health and wellbeing a business priority.
- 2 Build rest and recovery into your daily and weekly work schedule. All top sports teams build in downtime as no one can go 110% all the time without a break.
- 3 Prioritise during busy times. What are the top two tasks you need to work on today? Once you’re feeling back in charge, your stress levels will go down.
- 4 Look after the basics. Eat well, get enough quality sleep, keep active and get fit for busier periods.
- 5 Talk to mates and stay connected. Others have been there and everyone needs support. If you’re in a relationship talk things through together.
- 6 Get away and do stuff you enjoy – hunting, fishing, team sport, kids’ sport, horse riding, contributing at community events – whatever helps recharge you.
- 7 Think in ways that keep things in perspective and that help boost your mood.

*If you are feeling under pressure and would like to have a chat to someone, call **Rural Support Trust 0800 787 254**. Rural Support Trusts understand your issues and are there to help you through.*

Signs of unhealthy stress – what to look out for

YOUR BODY

- ☐ Breathing problems
- ☐ Chest tightness
- ☐ Upset stomach e.g. nausea, diarrhoea, constipation
- ☐ Tension, aches and pains
- ☐ Headaches
- ☐ Fatigue
- ☐ Feeling 'wired' – unable to relax
- ☐ Lower immunity, catching any little bug going around and taking longer to recover
- ☐ Reduced sex drive



YOUR MIND

- ☐ Thinking feels sped up and thoughts are intrusive
- ☐ Difficulty making decisions
- ☐ Forgetfulness
- ☐ Poor concentration
- ☐ Poor problem-solving
- ☐ Easily distracted



YOUR EMOTIONS

- ☐ Worrying excessively
- ☐ Feeling overwhelmed, stuck or trapped
- ☐ 'Short fuse' – bursts of anger often at small issues
- ☐ Tearfulness
- ☐ Feeling down
- ☐ Feeling lonely
- ☐ Loss of motivation and enjoyment
- ☐ Reduced self-confidence



YOUR ACTIONS AND BEHAVIOUR

- ☐ Sleep problems e.g. can't get to sleep or wake up often, or sleeping too much and can't get out of bed
- ☐ Poor eating
- ☐ Withdrawing from people and activities
- ☐ Unhealthy alcohol, tobacco and caffeine use
- ☐ Becoming reactive rather than proactive
- ☐ Avoiding situations or issues e.g. not returning phone calls or opening invoices
- ☐ Delaying demanding tasks



Check to see if any of these signs sound like you.

Combating fatigue



“A lot of fatigue happens from being mentally busy because our head is full of worries and what ifs. Sometimes it’s about putting that thinking on hold for a bit and giving ourselves some respite. That might be gardening, cooking, talking to someone else, doing what we enjoy off orchard. Because as soon as we are busy doing something like that, there is less time for that little voice in our head to be chipping away. The real antidote to burnout and fatigue is leisure and pleasure. By taking time to rest and recover you are increasing your ability to handle pressure and challenges at work.”

FARMSTRONG CONTENT EXPERT SARAH DONALDSON IS A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST WHO WORKS FOR THE RURAL SUPPORT TRUST.

“It’s really easy to just put your head down and keep going when you are facing challenging times. But it’s not actually in your best interests. You need to build in time to rest and recover. Have cut-offs at the end of the day and spend some time with your family or doing something simple that will give you a sense of accomplishment, like sorting out your shed. If we just keep going our brain heads off in lots of different directions and reduces our ability to solve problems. Taking time to slow down re-focuses you and makes you more productive in the long run.”

SAM WHITELOCK, FARMSTRONG AMBASSADOR

Sleep – the performance wonder-drug

Getting enough sleep is like a performance wonder-drug. It helps you make better decisions, feel great and be psychologically and physically stronger.

Farmstrong research shows that lack of sleep consistently comes up as one of the biggest concerns among growers and farmers. There are three main problem areas: feeling there is not enough time for sleep because there's so much to do, wanting to get to sleep but having trouble nodding off, and waking during the night and worrying.

Not enough time for sleep? Think again.

Everyone knows we have to sleep, but it's tempting to try and take shortcuts. Particularly during the busy times it's easy to see sleep as a drain on our time, so we cut back.

However, consider the following:

- According to sleep researchers nearly everyone needs between 7–9 hours sleep a night. Very few can get away with less over the long-term.
- Not getting enough sleep can increase your risk of heart attacks, strokes, accidents, depression, weight gain, lower your immune system and decrease your ability to solve problems. It also puts you at higher risk of an accident. These are big downsides that will badly impact on your business and family life.

Can't get to sleep? Try this.


If you're having trouble getting off to sleep, sleep experts recommend:

- end screen time early in the evening if possible
- cool your core body temperature down. Having a hot shower can do this as it draws heat from your core and actually cools you
- dim the lights as you get close to bed time
- avoid caffeine from the afternoon and keep alcohol intake moderate
- make your times for going to bed and getting up as regular as possible
- write down what you've done well during the day and what you're grateful for.

When life is really stressful, you may need to look at other strategies to get some better sleep such as sharing your worries with someone you trust, asking for help, getting more exercise, having relaxation routines and healthy thinking practices to get some perspective.

Waking and worrying. Five great solutions.

A very common reason for not being able to get back to sleep is lying awake worrying. Typical things growers and farmers have told us trigger early morning worrying are: the weather, financial problems, the amount of work to do the next day and relationship problems with employees or family.



“Sleep’s massive. Most of us need 7 to 9 hours of sleep each day to give our bodies a chance to repair and re-energise for the next day. Without the right amount of sleep, you won’t function at your best. When I am having trouble sleeping because of worrying about things, I write them down on a bit of paper and save them for the next day.”

SAM WHITELOCK, FARMSTRONG AMBASSADOR

THE FUNDAMENTALS

Here are some things you can do to trick the worrying brain into calmness:

- 1 Slowly count backwards from 30 in time with your breathing. Why backwards? Because you do have to concentrate a little bit to count this way, it means the mind can’t think about other things. Counting in time with your breathing relaxes your body.
- 2 Write a to-do list late in the day and make an agreement with yourself that you will tackle these tasks in the morning. This tells your worrying brain that you have things under control.
- 3 If you’re feeling riled up and tense, with a racing mind, get up and do some stretching. It’s worth learning proper techniques in advance, e.g. from the gym or a yoga course.
- 4 Don’t turn the light on if possible as this disrupts the sleep cycle. If you decide to get up, keep a small torch on hand to avoid tripping over things.
- 5 Learn some relaxation techniques like meditation, a body scan, visualisation or breathing techniques. Then if you wake and can’t get back to sleep use this time to practice them in bed.

Use sleeping medications sparingly

Sleeping meds can be useful if you are desperate for a good night’s sleep. But don’t become reliant on them. Seek professional help if you suspect a medical cause for your sleep deprivation. Talk to your doctor to address any chronic physical or mental health problems that may be disturbing your sleep or to make changes to any prescription medications that could be triggering the problem.

This material is based on material from Hugh Norriss and sourced from the Farmstrong website.

Give yourself a break

Taking breaks and getting away from the orchard makes a huge difference to how you feel and how well you do your job. Yet it's often the thing that slips down the priority list.

Aim for some downtime every day, at least one day off a week, and one decent holiday break a year. Don't fool yourself that long hours equal best results. Research on workplace fatigue shows that when people are tired:

- their brain doesn't function as well
- they have trouble thinking through issues
- they find it harder to make decisions
- their coordination is impaired and they are at higher risk of an accident.

Being productive is about working smarter, not longer hours. It's about managing workload and scheduling downtime for other activities.

“One year we took the girls to the United States to Disneyland and to see family. I suddenly saw things in my kids that I hadn't noticed before, and it was because I'd taken a month off work. One of my girls was 14 and the twins were 12. I'd see them doing something and I'd think, 'How long have they been doing that for? I haven't seen that before.' I realised that I was spending way too much time at work.”

STEPHEN ANDERSEN, HORTICULTURE MANAGER, HAWKE'S BAY

How do you get beyond good intentions and make sure you get the breaks you need. Here are some ideas from other growers.

Make time off a business goal. Include it in your business plan.

Plan your holiday well ahead. Don't wait until you need it.

Try something different – a new sport, read a book, see a show, anything that helps you see the world a little differently.

Trust your staff and learn to delegate. Train others to take your place.

Schedule micro-breaks during the day – even 10 minutes can help you reset physically and mentally.

Take short breaks as well as a good holiday. Even a few days can refresh you.



A helpful thinking tool – *Catch it, Check it, Change it*

Our thought processes, how we think about what's in front of us, have an enormous impact on our behaviour and ability to enjoy life.

Can we change the way we think and behave to be more positive and helpful? Is there something we can do to address a downward spiral of negative thoughts and emotions? The answer is definitely yes. A simple tool we recommend is called **Catch it, Check it, Change it**.

The negative thought cycle

When we notice something negative happening, or think about something going wrong, it triggers an emotion. The emotion might be frustration, anger or sadness and may lead to a behaviour, such as lashing out, berating others, or withdrawal. These behaviours easily lead to a downward spiral where negative thoughts, emotions and behaviours reinforce each other. One way to break the downward spiral is by noticing the unhelpful thought and applying **Catch it, Check it, Change it**. The aim is to stop the unhelpful thought in its tracks and think about the situation in a different and more helpful way.

Source: Hugh Norriss, Farmstrong's wellbeing adviser, Farmstrong website. We are indebted to the BBC online health programme Headroom for the 'Catch it, Check it, Change it' concept.

Catch it

When you get upset about a situation, imagine standing outside yourself and hitting the pause button. Take a deep breath, then see if you can catch your thought, notice the emotion you are experiencing, and any impulse to behave in a certain way.

Check it

Then examine the thought and decide if there is a more positive interpretation without denying the reality of the situation. Try to be curious about what's going on, rather than assuming you have all the facts. We often decide that the thought we're having is the one and only reality, whereas almost always there are a number of interpretations about what's happening, or what someone meant by what they said.

Change it

We can then change the thought to a more positive interpretation, or at least reserve judgement. More positive thoughts will lead to easier emotions and calmer behaviours. If you do discover that the situation is the worst possible scenario, at least you have given yourself breathing space.

Applying this technique helps us get better at understanding how our thoughts affect our emotions in the long term and will ensure we are less prone to depression, anxiety and angry outbursts.

Managing turbulent times



Kiwifruit industry stalwart Marty Robinson says the challenges facing growers currently require a different mindset to both work and wellbeing.

Marty's been involved in the kiwifruit industry for many years. He currently manages 16 hectares of kiwifruit, is involved in developing the Baygold group and runs his own farm. He's also involved in the not-for-profit Daily Cafe in Te Puke which acts as an informal gathering place for the industry and operates a substantial food-in-schools programme (2,000 lunches a day).

"I have a finger in many pies" he laughs. "I suppose 80 percent of our industry is within 40k of here so I do meet a lot of growers and workers. This cafe is a nice friendly space for them."

Marty says there's no doubt Covid-related labour shortages added to the traditional pressures growers face. His own operation was no exception.

"They were extraordinary times. Workers were hard to find, contracts were harder to manage and labour costs went up 25 to 40 percent."

Rather than plough ahead pretending it's 'business as usual', Marty believes growers need to adopt a different mindset.

“...I was the classic example of someone overdoing it. I learnt a hard lesson. Once you let yourself get too far down that hole, it's a long way back.”

“Covid added another layer of stress. The challenge is always to adjust your thinking, look after each other and focus on getting through.”

Marty speaks from experience. Some years back he experienced burnout. “I didn’t realise what was happening til my wife and I were discussing post-natal depression after the birth of our second child. We were going through this list of signs when it suddenly dawned on me, ‘hey, that’s exactly how I feel’. I just thought it was normal!”

Marty sought the help required to get his life back on track, but his recovery took a while and taught him plenty. “I was a capable person who could turn his hand to most things but what started out as an asset eventually became a burden. I was going at things hammer and tongs, doing six or seven things at once. I ended up burnt out in a major way.”

“It was a hard lesson. I had to learn to say ‘no’, step back and pass things over to others. I was lucky I had great support from my wife, family and team.”

Not surprisingly, Marty’s a good source of advice for growers feeling stressed. “Even when things happen that are outside your control, like Covid, there are still things you can control to ease pressure. For instance, get away from your phone, just use it for a set period every day. Turn off your notifications and get off social media.”

“Prioritise your workload too, especially if you’re short of help. There’s no point stressing about orchard work you can’t realistically get to. Write a list of what you can do and reschedule other things until after harvest. You’ll feel more in control.”

“The other thing is to stick to your strengths. I was a great one for taking on other people’s jobs as well as my own. The reality is your business only needs you to do the things you excel at.”

“Very few people have the time, skill or knowledge to make every business decision themselves. It’s much easier in a team environment, so surround yourself with helpful, positive people.”

Marty says regular time off orchard is essential. “You need strategies in place to unwind. I like mountain biking and getting out in nature. We’ve got a property, Redwood Valley Farm, with a stream and native bush that allows us to go for walks and get away from it all. Something as simple as that is a circuit-breaker if you’re feeling stressed.”

Staying connected with friends is another good stress-buster.

“Te Puke is a great place to live and work. We’re only 20 minutes from the beach and an hour to a lake. There are also things like Tuesday night social cricket that you can get involved in over summer, so you get a break, catch up with mates, have a laugh.”

Marty’s seen the industry navigate hard times before and is optimistic it will do so again. “I know there will be growers out there who are quite stressed, but the industry has been through tough times like the Psa lockdown in 2010 and survived. These stresses will pass too.”

“To a certain extent, we all have to grin and bear things, but if you’re really feeling under the pump, don’t be afraid to step out, leave the phone at home and do something different for a day.”

“I love the industry, but I was the classic example of someone overdoing it. I learnt a hard lesson. Once you let yourself get too far down that hole, it’s a long way back. I had to prioritise what really matters in life – my health, my family and then my income. Once you’ve got things in balance, you’ll be all right no matter what’s happening in the industry.” ●

Building **people capability**



Kate Trufitt, previous Chair of Kiwifruit Industry Health and Safety Forum and a Director of Horticulture New Zealand (HortNZ).

A systematic approach to fostering wellbeing is increasingly important in the dynamic kiwifruit industry.

The last few years have brought plenty of challenges for the kiwifruit industry. Labour shortages and absenteeism due to Covid have been a major issue. Businesses have also had to contend with shipping constraints and ongoing turmoil in overseas markets due to the effects of Covid-19.

“Covid has brought unique pressures to an industry that already had a lot of pressure on it,” says Kate Trufitt, previous Chair of Kiwifruit Industry Health and Safety Forum and a Director of Horticulture New Zealand.

“We used to be a ‘peak’ industry – after harvest there was a big sigh of relief and you could move onto other things. It doesn’t work like that anymore. We are now growing red, gold and green kiwifruit which elongates the season and you still have to deal with it coming out of coolstore and being repacked and shipped. This year we finished harvest and it was straight into re-pack.”

Multiple pressures require the industry as a whole to develop its capability and capacity, says Kate.

“This involves workforce development, more training for key roles, learning all the time from experience and building a positive work culture.

“It’s about risk mitigation. If your business depends on people, you have to make sure that you are looking after them as people and providing a safe workplace. Workplace expectations among young people coming through today are a lot more than back in the day.”

Kate is a member of the NZ GAP (Good Agricultural Practice) committee and has recently been working on an ACC-funded Injury Prevention project. It's important that growers have the tools to develop a worker welfare programme and have good safety systems in place, she says.

"If you look at it holistically, there are a lot of things which are injuring people and influencing their wellbeing. GAP systems have a health and safety module within them and a social practice module around worker welfare. We need to give growers the tools to work within that framework – 'this is what a good worker welfare programme looks like, this is what a good safety system looks like'. A lot of growers are doing it intuitively. The challenge is to make it more systematic."

“If your business depends on people, you have to make sure that you are looking after them as people and providing a safe workplace.”

The importance of pastoral care is something that comes through "loud and clear" in workforce research, says Kate.

"A lot of pastoral care goes into RSE workers. But what about other workers, particularly in poorer regions where there are housing and other social issues? We have growers who are picking people up and feeding them in the morning, to get them up and running. Growers are doing great work around this but there is little support for it from government. What more can be done there? It's all part of building a positive workplace culture."

'Sustainability' is a buzzword in the industry these days and a vital part of that is worker retention and satisfaction, says Kate. Feeling part of a community, particularly in rural settings, is key, she says.

"Workers like to feel part of a community. One of the RSE groups we interviewed loved to play football with the community. It was a great way for them to integrate into the community. Quite a few growers already do this, but we need more of it. Some of our Indian growers and contractors celebrate Diwali with a dinner or a function. There are quite a lot of things happening in the industry to celebrate different cultures."

Kate says Farmstrong has some valuable tools to assist the industry to focus on wellbeing, such as podcasts with people in the industry talking about their ups and downs.

"We know growers love a story and learn from other growers. The best thing we can do is share the stories from people 'who look like me'. That's how people learn. Some very brave people in the kiwifruit industry have stood up and said, 'hey I have an issue, this is what it looked like, and this is what I did about it.'"

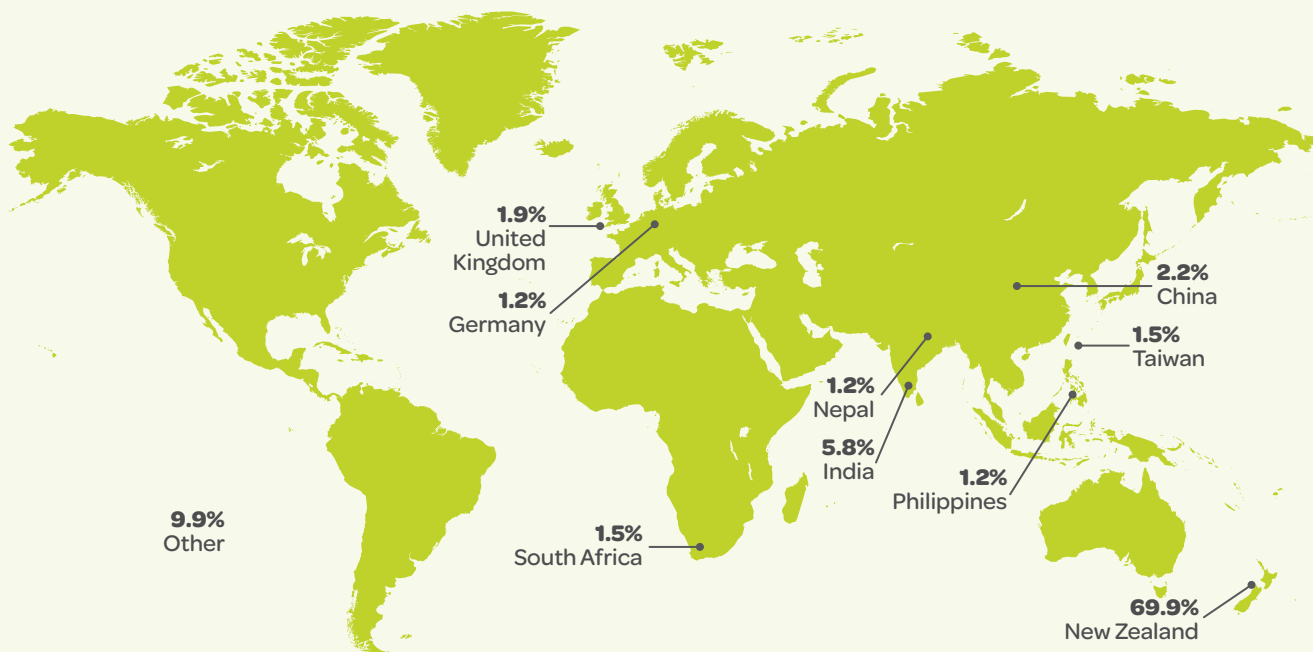
Wellbeing is a complex reality and you have to look at it holistically, says Kate.

"There's no one fix, it's a whole lot of things. If you are feeling like you are going down a spiral, it's not going to be fixed just by getting a good night's sleep or going to the gym. It's going to be a whole lot of things. You're going to need to review what you are doing and make some life changes to get yourself well again. I think that's really key." ●



Key facts

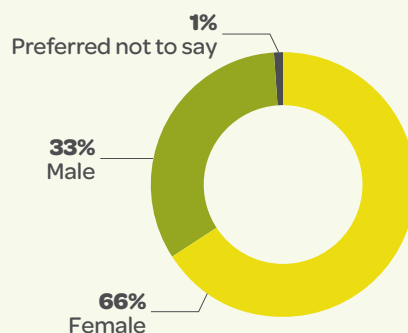
Where are the workers from?



Of the **69.9%** of those who identified as **New Zealanders**, **39%** identified as **Māori** and over **50%** of those picking identified as **Māori**.

17.5% were involved in **picking / orchard** work and **82.5%** were involved in **packhouse** work.

Gender breakdown



54%
PICKING
WORKFORCE
WERE **MALE**

69%
PACKING
WORKFORCE
WERE **FEMALE**

APPROXIMATELY
2,800
KIWIFRUIT
GROWERS

3,200
REGISTERED
ORCHARDS
IN NEW ZEALAND

13,610
HECTARES OF
KIWIFRUIT
IN PRODUCTION

79% OF
NZ-GROWN
KIWIFRUIT
COMES FROM THE
BAY OF PLENTY

Zespri
INTERNATIONAL LTD
IS THE WORLD'S
LARGEST
MARKETER OF
KIWIFRUIT

‘It’s not about the cricket’

A farmer versus grower cricket game is an annual event in the Bay of Plenty. Organiser, dairy farmer Stephen Crossan, says the fun event highlights the importance of looking after yourself.



Stephen is the driving force behind the event. He plays premier league cricket for Te Puke and started out with the idea of wanting to get more people involved with his local club.

“So I decided to bring the farming people and the hort people together to have a game of cricket here.”

He got sponsors involved and then decided to use the event to raise awareness about Farmstrong, a cause close to his heart.

“As a farmer I think it’s important to down tools every once in a while and come and have a great day with like-minded people. It’s pretty easy for a farmer or an orchardist to be stuck in their own little bubble and not get out and see other people.”

A change of scene can work wonders, he says. “To someone else looking in it might just look like a fun game of cricket, a couple of hours on a Sunday, but for someone on the field it might be their one opportunity to get off their farm or orchard for the week or for the month.”

“When we got together afterwards, there was no ‘shop talk’. We just talked about the game over a couple beers and a nice barbecue.”

Stephen believes time off-farm to rest and recover has benefitted his business. “It goes back to the wellbeing thing. If your mental and physical wellbeing are in good shape, your farm is going to be operating a lot better.”



Enthusiastic participants in the annual farmer versus grower cricket match.



Stephen's a fan of Farmstrong's 5 Ways to Wellbeing – simple habits that help people keep well. One of them is giving back to friends and community.

"Running this event, and seeing people enjoy it, made me feel so good. It gives you energy. It took a bit of ringing round, tracking down sponsors. I made sure the players could just show up – I had the cricket bats, the uniforms and the food and drink all there ready to go. So it was pretty hard to come up with an excuse not to play."

In the interests of inter-sector rivalry, we can report that the farmers batted first and scored 136 runs off 30 overs. The hort team successfully chased down the total in 25 overs.

"The hort team were a very good team so we'll be on the lookout for some 'gun' dairy farm cricketers next year. If there's any out there, get in touch. We can't lose two in a row – that's for sure," he laughs. ●

Postscript: Since this story was written, Stephen has 'swapped sides' and now works in the horticulture industry.

‘Don’t let a setback define you’

Dealing with a devastating weather event, such as the Bay of Plenty frost which struck in October 2022 or the Nelson hailstorm on Boxing Day 2020, is one of the biggest challenges which kiwifruit growers can face.



When orchards in Motueka and Riwaka were hit by a freak hail storm on Boxing Day 2020, Farmstrong Ambassador Sam Whitelock decided to pay growers a visit.

The massive storm ruined millions of dollars worth of fruit with some growers losing their entire crop. The storm was so heavy that hail remained on the ground in Motueka more than 24 hours later with growers describing hail the size of golf balls. The storm came on top of an already challenging year for apple, kiwifruit and hop growers who were struggling to find labour due to Covid border restrictions.

Motueka Fruit Growers Association president Richard Clarkson estimated a cost of \$100 million through loss of income and damage.

Sam’s first port of call was Golden Bay Fruit in Motueka, the biggest apple business in the district. The company employs up to 500 people and has over 750 hectares of apple orchards and 100 hectares of kiwifruit as well as a state-of-the-art pack house, where fruit is sorted and graded using the latest computerised technology. The company lost 90 percent of its kiwifruit and 40 percent of its apples in the storm.

“This hailstorm hurt us in the orchards and it hurt us in the pack house,” says Managing Director Heath Wilkins. “We were doing 80,000 bins before the hail. That dropped to 40,000 bins so we lost just over half of the fruit.”



In the 2020 Boxing Day hailstorm, hail was still on the ground 24 hours later. The cost to the Nelson region was estimated at \$100 million through loss of income and damage.

“*If you see someone struggling, start that conversation, ask them how they're going and make time for a proper catch-up ...***”**

Sam, who comes from a farming background, shared some of the pressures his own family had faced in farming. He highlighted how important it was to keep talking and check on those who might have ‘dropped off the radar and stopped communicating’ during challenging times.

“I know the hail storm has brought massive stress and pressure for this community. Hopefully us being here today can help start a conversation so people feel able to open up and talk about these things and support one another.”

“I know from my own experience in the rural industry, and also in professional sport, that just listening can be a huge help to someone who is feeling ‘under the pump’. So if you see someone struggling, start that conversation, ask them how they're going and make time for a proper catch-up, whether it's over a coffee or at the pub.”

After touring Golden Bay's pack house and meeting staff, Sam headed to the Riwaka Rugby clubrooms to meet more local growers. There he spoke about how he handles the pressure and setbacks of top level rugby.

“Pressure is pressure whether you're a grower, a farmer or a rugby player. One of the best things I've learned is to ask questions and listen to people who have been through similar experiences before. There'll be a lot of knowledge in this community about how to get through events like this, so make sure you tap into that wisdom and advice.”



“I’ve learnt, you can’t just go hammer-down the whole time.”

Dealing with pressure is a reality whether you are a grower or a rugby player, says Farmstrong Ambassador Sam Whitelock.

Sam stressed the importance of retaining perspective when reversals happen and how he’s handled unexpected losses in his career. “It’s important when you have a setback that you don’t let it define you. I know you guys only know me as a rugby player and rugby is a big part of my life, but the reality is I also have other things going on in my life so it doesn’t define who I am as a person.

“The expectation is always there that we will win every game, but that’s not the reality. So yes, losing a rugby game still hurts but I tell myself, I’m still a father, a husband, a son with a great family. That’s the most important thing. Sometimes you’ve just got to accept your setbacks and move on.”

Sam encouraged the audience to give themselves some recovery time. “Pressure is pressure whether you’re a grower or a rugby player. How do I deal with it? I travel towards it, embrace it as part of my job and then, when I get the opportunity, I step away from it and make sure I recharge.”

“I’ve learnt, you can’t just go hammer-down the whole time, you need to step away. For me, I can head home into a different world after rugby, so I make sure I’m not just focussing on one thing only. If you’re only thinking about hail storms all day, every day, of course it will start to get on top of you. So it’s important to go and do something else whether it’s with your family or a hobby or catching up with mates outside the industry.”

Sam also spoke of the importance of retaining a sense of humour in the face of adversity. “I know from my own experience that just getting together with friends and having a giggle over a cup of tea after a tough event can work wonders. When you’re having a good time, it relieves the pressure and you start thinking, ‘maybe I can do this, maybe there is a solution to my problem.’” ●

Live for *the day*

Simon Cook owns a 5-hectare kiwifruit orchard in the Bay of Plenty, runs a contracting business serving local orchards and holds a number of industry governance roles. Achieving a decent work-life balance is critical to managing his busy life.

“You’ve simply got to make time for other things,” says Simon.

Sounds easy, but it’s a hard-won insight. Simon enjoyed a successful commercial career in Auckland before he took up orcharding in 2003. At first, he admits he was very hands-on. His ‘lightbulb moment’ was a conversation with orchard adviser and kiwifruit pioneer Mike Muller, a legend in the kiwifruit industry.

“My father and I were both flat out and stressed out, trying to keep up with everything. Mike was blunt and just told us that we needed to run the business, not be in the business. It was true. So I appointed a manager to take over the day-to-day running and that’s what freed me up to do the stuff I’m doing now.”

Simon still faces the same pressures anyone in the industry faces, but work-life balance is part and parcel of the way he runs his operations.

“There’s always a big to-do list on an orchard and I live on-site as well. We’re a seven-day-a-week business and we’re also working in a weather-dependent industry, so we have to work when it’s fine.”



Simon and his three daughters (from left to right) Kody, Jessy and Sammy.

“The two main crunch times for us are spring when we’re doing things like spraying and harvest. I spend most of harvest sitting in a truck carting a lot of fruit round the district. It’s busy but I love that change of pace.”

Though he enjoys the busy times, he still makes time for the things he enjoys.

“I can always tell when I’m feeling a bit under the pump,” he says. “If I’m losing sleep then that’s a sign. Mainly that’s just down to the hours you have to put in sometimes. It’s a matter of recognising that and making time to get off-orchard when you can. If you don’t, everything suffers.”

"For example, we work with our customers to make sure everyone in our team can still get a day off every weekend. There are times of the year we can't do that, but most of the year we can. I actually lost a customer this year because I refused to do all his work on Sundays."

Simon's got a couple of pastimes that regularly get him off the orchard and help him recharge. In winter, he plays senior club rugby and Golden Oldies rugby.

“At the end of the day, money's not everything. I believe your own lifestyle is more important.”

"Even at 45, I still love playing. I go to training a couple of nights a week over winter and play on Saturdays when I can. Why am I making time for this? At the end of the day, money's not everything. I believe your own lifestyle is more important."

There's a back story here. Simon's father-in-law owned a successful engineering business, got through to his mid-70s and retired. His dream was to sail round the world. He bought a yacht, but then got cancer and died before he could live his dream.

"That taught me a pretty good life lesson," reflects Simon. "You only get one go at life and you've got to make time to enjoy what you're doing."

Family time's an important priority. Simon's got three kids aged 11 to 14 and loves to take them wake boarding and water skiing in Taupō. He sold up some shares in Zespri to buy the boat. "That's costing me dividends, but I'd rather have the memories than the money."

Simon's been in the industry long enough not to take anything for granted. "When Psa hit in 2010, we went through two years of dire times so things can easily change. Fortunately, since then it's been an upward trajectory. People aren't worried about getting paid these days, they're worried about getting through the volume of work."

"So, we're surfing a wave at the moment. It's a fun industry to be part of and everyone's doing well, but you've still got to remember to enjoy life while you can."

"My advice to anyone new to the industry is plan for the future, but live for the day. If you're always focused on the future, you won't have enough time to enjoy today."

"The other thing is don't try and do everything yourself. Delegate. I remember when I was doing all the accounting work and billing for my business, I was reluctant to hand that over to somebody else. But now I love having an office administrator. That took a huge amount of work off me."

"It's important to realise that no-one is indispensable and it doesn't actually help the business. If you're trying to do everything yourself, you'll never get anything done." ●



Coming together in tough times

A group of kiwifruit growers north of Katikati show the value of neighbourly support in the wake of the worst frost in 20 years.

For Rowan and Jennifer Bullock, the sudden frost that arrived on the night of October 6/7 was very significant.

“We are lifestyle operators,” says Rowan, “with half a hectare of kiwifruit and we lost everything. If we can fill a fruit bowl with kiwifruit this year, we will be doing well.

“Our property is just north of Katikati and it’s a frost-prone area but people who lived in other areas that were not usually frost-prone also suffered. There hasn’t been a frost like it since 2002.”

The frost affected growers throughout the Bay of Plenty and the Waikato with production losses of up to 25 percent across the region. Growers living near the Bullocks were badly affected.

“When something like this hits, you have to keep an eye on [people], make sure they’re okay.”

“Most frosts come from the ground, but this was an advective frost which means it came from the top and the bottom,” says Rowan.

“There was no warm air for the fans or even the helicopters to circulate downwards. It was devastating, not just for kiwifruit growers but blueberry and strawberry growers also. People with frost protection still had up to 30 percent of their crop damaged. I was out there at three in the morning and our frost protection froze. It just stopped working.”

Aware of the huge impact of the frost on the local community, Rowan and Jennifer decided to organise a get-together for local growers and spraying contractors to talk about how they were all getting on. They did two letter-box drops in the wider neighbourhood, inviting people to a pot-luck dinner.

“The weather on the night was absolute rubbish,” says Jennifer
“It was pouring with rain and we weren’t expecting a very good turnout. Well, everybody we invited came. Most who came were affected to some degree – minimum around 30 percent, some very severely.

“People were really looking forward to getting together and supporting one another. There have been so few of these street events since the arrival of Covid. We limited the numbers because of Covid but it was a great turnout.”

"It started at 5 and we planned on finishing at 9 but some couples stayed on til 11.30pm. We provided a ham, cooked a couple of roast shoulders of pork on the barbecue and some chooks and ladies brought salads. There were mini-Magnums for dessert. You could see everybody was having a good time."

Connecting with neighbours and being there to support one another is an essential part of dealing with the ups-and-downs of horticulture, says Rowan.

"We are life-stylers but we still want to have a good quality harvest. But some growers are heavily exposed with kiwifruit and the sky-high price of the gold fruit licence. A severe weather event like the October frost has a big impact on these people. A lot of them have done farming and horticulture for many years and are very philosophical. But it's harder on the newer investors. It's shattering. When something like this hits, you have to keep an eye on them, make sure they're okay."

The full impact of the frost will really hit home next year, says Rowan. There will be reduced or no income from this year's crop but growers will still face all the usual costs – winter pruning, fertiliser applications, managing the canopy and vines, and labour costs. "A lot of people are going to really feel that next year."

Support needs to be ongoing, not just when there is an immediate crisis. But it's easy to get a bit isolated when you are a grower, says Rowan.

"We have shelter belts and you get on and do your own thing. You have to find ways to stay connected."

The Bullocks are planning another get-together in the new year. There is also a long-standing Tuapiro Group which was formed about 20 years ago in the area. The group, mainly women, gets together monthly for morning tea to help people keep in touch.

Rowan and Jennifer are fans of the Farmstrong 'Live well, Grow well' initiative and have been actively involved in distributing Farmstrong resources to the local kiwifruit community.

"Farmstrong is great," says Rowan. "When you read the Farmstrong book, you know you are not on your own. Going through tough times is not just your journey. Other people have been down this road." ●



1. Rowan and Jennifer Bullock.
2. Kiwifruit growers Parry Parbhoo (left) and Mark Bryant
3. (From left) Nicole and Michael Shanley (kiwifruit, strawberry and avocado farmers) and Linda Groenewegen.
4. Kiwifruit growers Peter Carson (left) and Gordon Scott.

Putting the right 'fuel in the tank'



To work productively you need lots of energy. Nutrition expert **Sarah Percy** talks about the importance of a healthy diet to keep on top of things and enjoy life.

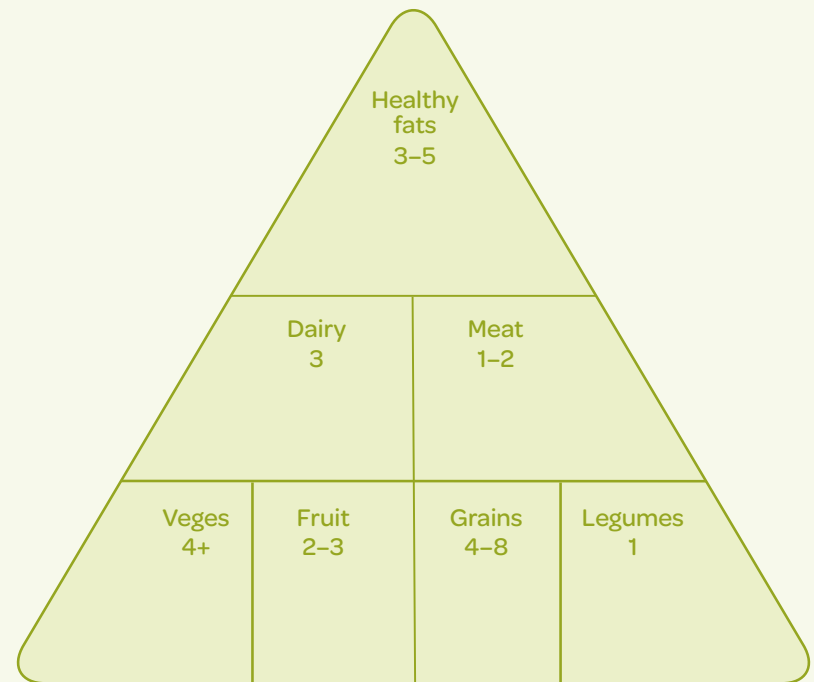
Eating well gives your body the energy and nutrients it needs to perform at its best. That's why a nutritious diet and regular meals are a must for everybody, particularly those with physically demanding jobs.

The essentials

- Choose fresh, nutrient-rich food instead of processed foods.
- Stay hydrated. Keep water bottles handy where you are working.
- Eat something before you begin work in the morning. Starting work on an empty tank is not a great idea.
- It's best not to skip meals. Try and eat three meals a day.
- When snacking between meals to keep energy levels high, choose snacks low in fat, sugar and salt.
- Keep your fridge and pantry well stocked. If you keep good food in your fridge, you will eat good food.

Get to know the food pyramid

Eating well means choosing a balance of foods from the following food groups each day – healthy fats, meat and meat alternatives (fish, chicken, eggs) dairy, fruit, veges, grains and legumes. This food pyramid shows the numbers for recommended daily servings for the different groups.



Time-saving tips

- **Pre-breakfast snack options for early-morning workers**
Try smoothies, eggs, fruit, cereal, porridge, grainy toast with peanut butter. Prepare the night before if time is short.
- **Quick alternatives to a meat and 3 veg meal**
Try poached egg on toast; muesli/porridge with milk, yoghurt, nuts and chopped fruit; a smoothie; toasted sandwiches with cheese, onion, tomato, cold meat and chutney.
- **Create your own food bank**
When you cook a casserole, curry or soup, cook a double or triple batch and freeze half. You'll soon have a freezer 'food bank' to use when work is flat out.
- **Cook once, eat twice**
Cook a double batch of mince. Have a shepherd pie one night, the next use the leftover mince, mix in chilli beans and serve as Mexican wraps with salad and avocado.
- **Keep the pantry stocked**
Have plenty of quick options handy in the store cupboard, such as tinned fish, tinned tomatoes, frozen veggies, rice and potatoes so that a balanced meal can be whipped up from pantry items.



“You need the right ‘fuel in the tank’ to perform at your best. Eat more unprocessed, natural foods – they’ll give you heaps more nutrients and energy. Avoid skipping meals and carry snacks during the day for when you need energy boosts. And have water handy. Poor hydration can really affect your decision-making and ability to perform.”

SAM WHITELOCK, FARMSTRONG AMBASSADOR



Your wellbeing bank account



Wellbeing simply means that you feel pretty happy about how life is going, that life is good!

Hugh Norriss, Farmstrong's wellbeing advisor, shares some tips on how to look after your wellbeing.

There are lots of things we can do, or happen to us, that boost this feeling of wellbeing. There are other things that make life feel relentlessly hard and difficult. There are still other situations that do a bit of both.

One way of thinking about your wellbeing is like investments in a bank account. If you invest wisely and often, even with little amounts, you get big dividends over time.

As we experience stressful situations and knock-backs in life, our natural supply of wellbeing can get depleted. Think of these like withdrawals from your wellbeing account. If this continues for too long, we start to head towards an 'overdraft' situation that could be burnout and depression along with feelings of guilt, shame, despair and hopelessness.

It can be very hard to climb out of this pit once we slide into it. We will need help from others, friends and family, recovery time to get back to normal and professional help such as therapy and counselling. So it's best to do everything we can to avoid this situation by learning and locking in our wellbeing habits when we are doing well, feeling positive and energetic.

If we wait until we are burnt out or depressed before we think about our wellbeing, we will barely be able to get out of bed at that point, let alone learn new skills. To go back to the bank account analogy, the best time to invest is when you have some spare cash.

Common withdrawals on your wellbeing

Growers and farmers have told us that the following situations make a dent in their wellbeing, that is a withdrawal from their wellbeing bank account:

- having too much to do, all of the time
- lack of sleep
- relentless compliance obligations
- not getting time off the orchard
- staffing problems
- succession worries
- financial uncertainty.

These situations lead to negative emotions like frustration, anxiety, anger, guilt and feeling overwhelmed, which after a while put a strain on our wellbeing.

How you can invest in your wellbeing

So, how can we offset these inevitable wellbeing withdrawals with wellbeing investments? The first step is to do what we can to reduce any unnecessary stress from our business and personal life. We can do this by:

- identifying risks and planning for them
- prioritising work tasks
- not over-committing
- minimising contact with very negative people
- being well organised.

Other habits are well supported by research as ways to boost your wellbeing. These include healthy thinking, taking time out, good nutrition, quality sleep and the 5 Ways to Wellbeing.

The 5 Ways to Wellbeing (see page 10) are small things that are easy, low or no cost, and science-based. They are like your 'five a day' fruit and vegetables, but more for the mind. Grand plans like doing an ironman can be good for some but risk being too hard for many. Also, they are often a one-off. To boost your wellbeing bank account, go for small, regular wellbeing habits rather than create grand plans.

Long-term benefits of wellbeing

Last but not least there is the wellbeing interest payment. Scientific studies show that people with higher levels of wellbeing are more productive, sociable, physically healthy and successful. So, you get long-term benefits by boosting your wellbeing, regardless.

Having a healthy wellbeing bank account is a definite win-win situation. It reduces risk of mental ill health and gives business and social benefits at the same time. In a busy industry like horticulture, it's easy to put off your own wellbeing because so much needs to get done. But this is a false economy in the long run, as you are neglecting the most important asset on the farm, *you*.



INVESTMENTS

Habits that growers told us boost their wellbeing account



WITHDRAWALS

Things that growers told us drained their wellbeing account

Keeping in touch

Keeping in touch with others can make all the difference when you are 'under the pump'. The overwhelming feedback from growers and farmers is that taking time out to share the ups and downs of life with family and friends, is one of the best ways to deal with pressure.

In tough times, it really helps to talk about what's on your mind. People you trust have their own solutions and ideas. Usually you will find you are not alone – others have gone through something similar. Bottling things up only makes things worse.

Being a good listener is a great way to support others. Just listening to someone who is 'under the pump' can make a huge difference to how they feel. Providing a friendly ear is often all that is needed.

“When people are under stress the things that go out the window are often the factors that keep us well. Things like socialising with other people, exercise, nutrition, continuing to learn, contributing to the community. Getting away from the day-to-day routine – whether it's hunting, motocross or kids sport – it gives you respite. Building in these enjoyable activities is really important.”

SARAH DONALDSON, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST



You Matter, Let's Natter

Sam on what makes a good listener



Choose a good time.



Begin with a simple question like 'how are you getting on?'



Be comfortable with silence, let the other person do the talking.



Don't jump in with your solution to the problem.



Keep an open mind and be non-judgemental.



Sam Whitelock
FARMSTRONG AMBASSADOR

Keeping fit

Working on your overall fitness makes a huge difference to your ability to work well and stay healthy. It means you can deal with the many physical demands of working in an orchard. And it greatly improves your mood. Whether it's sport, or the gym or any kind of fitness routine, exercise results in a much more positive outlook.

Regular physical activity improves your muscle strength and boosts your endurance. Exercise delivers oxygen and nutrients to your tissues and helps your cardiovascular system work more efficiently. When your heart and lung health improve, you will notice you have more energy to tackle daily tasks.

It's a good idea to begin with the physical activities you enjoy and make those part of your routine. It may be regular walking, biking or running, it may be the gym or it could be joining a footy team. Make a commitment to do some form of exercise every day. Many people find that exercising with a friend or a group really helps them stick to their fitness routine and makes exercise more fun. Once you've established the habit, it's much easier to maintain a good level of fitness.

If you have not been exercising regularly, begin small and slowly build up. As you make the gains, you will be motivated to do more. When you are exercising regularly, you're much more likely to get a good night's sleep.

Turn on Your Core

In addition to general fitness, it's important to strengthen 'core' muscles which play a fundamental role in stabilising the spine and pelvis. These muscles are key to maintaining good posture and help protect you against injury.

Farmstrong promotes a four-week 'Turn on Your Core' challenge to build your strength, help you be more flexible and have better balance. Once you establish your routine and repeat it at least four days a week, you will quickly notice the improvements. Little and often is the key. For guidance on how to do the challenge, you can view the videos on the Farmstrong website www.farmstrong.co.nz



To grow well, you have to live well. In this publication kiwifruit growers talk honestly about the ups and downs of kiwifruit growing and how they deal with it. Their uplifting stories reveal a determination to look after themselves so they can thrive in the dynamic kiwifruit industry.

