



**Combatting Stress and Suicide in Rural Communities:  
Issues Identified and Recommendations for Rural Support in  
Northern Ireland**

**Winston Churchill Memorial Trust  
Fellowship Research Paper**

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**April 2014**

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## Executive Summary

Since 2001 Rural Support has provided assistance to farmers, their families and rural residents experiencing significant stress and challenges. This paper examines the current and emerging issues that are causing stress in Northern Ireland and draws lessons from the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, Canada, New Zealand and Australia with respect to their response strategies and the emerging needs they have identified. The aim was to adopt a pro-active stance and establish a basis to refine and improve those strategies necessary for Rural Support to maintain and improve its services. An evaluation of Rural Support's activities over the last three years and its current response was completed. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used both within Northern Ireland and elsewhere to tap the insight and experience of rural residents, farmers, community representatives, policy analysts, academics and key actors in the rural sector.

Change is inevitable and the paper suggests that the pressures experienced by farmers and other rural residents are likely to continue and even increase. The falling number of farms is expected to continue, with potentially increasing and prolonged rural unemployment. Changes in the EU Common Agricultural Policies and welfare reforms are also anticipated and will increase the stress on individuals and rural families. Internationally many of the stress issues identified in Northern Ireland are equally evident. Changing climate patterns, extreme weather events, volatile markets, a decline in rural services, increasing isolation, an aging population, and increasing levels of debt are characteristic of all the jurisdictions examined. What stands out is that it is most often a combination or culmination of multiple issues that generates serious problems and results in individuals and families feeling powerless and vulnerable. As a result of this research fellowship three initiatives have been identified that Rural Support will consider introducing in Northern Ireland. These initiatives are outlined in section 8 of this report and include;

- 1) Develop online resource tools to promote 'Positive Mental Health', provide additional support and increase resilience
- 2) Develop an improved function of delivery and monitoring of services, reporting of issues, outcomes and policy recommendations
- 3) Provide technical expertise to clients in terms of farm management issues and financial / debt management

## **Acknowledgements**

Rural Support would like to offer its sincere thanks to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for its award of a fellowship to the Development Director. This has allowed Rural Support to extend and build its international network and gain insight on international best practice.

We would also like to thank all those who participated in this research, both those who gave their time for interviews and those who participated in the focus groups. Many organisations, individuals and board members, staff and volunteers have provided valuable input and contributed a substantial amount of time and effort to shaping this report.

A special word of thanks is also extended to all those who gave of their time and shared their expertise in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This has allowed Rural Support to build on the success of other organisations, identify best practice and develop initiatives that will allow the organisation to provide the best possible support to those most in need in our rural community. An itinerary of those individual organisations and individual visited as part of the Churchill fellowship is provided in Appendix 1 of this report.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Rural Support was established in the autumn of 2001. The aim was to help farmers and other rural residents impacted by the severe foot and mouth crisis which was plaguing the agricultural industry. In 2002 Rural Support was registered as a charitable company.

During the foot and mouth crisis, the social isolation experienced by rural communities was dramatically highlighted. Farmers were not permitted to have visitors onto their farms, and all social and sports events were cancelled to prevent the spread of the disease. It was a time of uncertainty, stress and anxiety as farmers struggled with how best to deal with the disease that was spreading rapidly across the region, with devastating effect. The farming community was severely distressed. Most farmers like and care for their animals. They were concerned too, that the work of generations could be destroyed if their animals became infected and that high quality breeding animals could be wiped out. In some cases farmers lost their entire herd. On many farms, animals had to be slaughtered and their carcasses burned in massive pyres. These became a lasting image, etched in the memory of many, and epitomising a rural community in crisis.

Organisations associated with the farming industry including the Ulster Farmers' Union, the health sector and government departments, that had previously rarely worked closely together, quickly realised the severe impact foot and mouth disease was having on farming and on the rural community as a whole. It was this awareness and the urgent need to address this distress that led to the establishment of Rural Support and its telephone helpline. Rural Support remains unique in that it is specifically designed to support the farming and rural community, and that its volunteers who staff its helpline all have rural backgrounds.

Initially set up to alleviate the stress, worries and concerns experienced in the face of foot and mouth, Rural Support has subsequently broadened its focus to include concerns related to financial problems, inheritance issues, outbreaks of stock and crop disease, and the burden imposed by farm paper work and related matters. These increasing pressures are a

result of changing circumstances. While retaining its core focus on issues such as stress and emotional distress, physical and mental health and the often related risk of suicide, Rural Support now has extensive experience in handling problems associated with major incidents including animal diseases and major weather events, such as that experienced in the spring of 2013. Such incidents have highlighted the on-going needs of the rural community and the valuable service that Rural Support provides.

**Rural Supports vision is: *to contribute to a healthy, sustainable rural community by providing individual support and promoting positive mental health and wellbeing.***

Our aim is; to provide confidential non-judgemental support to farmers and rural dwellers.

- Objective 1: To maximise awareness and knowledge of the Rural Support helpline and its support services for farming and rural families.
- Objective 2: To work with key stakeholder organisations to ensure the support needs of the rural community are recognised and met in an efficient and effective manner.
- Objective 3: Upscale existing services, reduce barriers and provide increased methods of communication for clients to access services.
- Objective 4: Increase preparedness for any future rural crisis including extreme weather events, fodder shortages or animal / crop diseases.

*(Rural Support Action Plan, 2014-17)*

Rural Support endeavours to realise its objectives through the provision of a range of services. Its primary activity is a telephone helpline service for rural residents. This also provides a means to provide contact information and to refer callers to appropriate support services including mediation and counselling, mentoring, financial and legal aid.

Rural Support is only active in Northern Ireland and has three staff members (two full-time and one part-time) based at Loughry College, Cookstown. It is governed by a Board of 11 members (who meet bi-monthly), representing a range of experience and skills. Members include farmers, current and former officials of the Ulster Farmers' Union, members of the

Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster, business leaders, representatives from the community and voluntary sector, health professionals and a former DARD official.

Currently 21 volunteers give their time, knowledge, expertise and experience to those who call the helpline. As and when required, they provide support, mentoring, guidance and counselling and contribute to promotion and outreach.

Over time, the stresses and strains that impact on rural society have not gone away. Ongoing events continue to test the resources and strength of farm households and other rural residents. Working in an environment that is constantly changing, often unpredictable and heavily dependent on weather conditions brings unique challenges. These often may seem overwhelming. Many of the long-established problems of weather and taxes, unpredictable markets and rising costs are recurrent events. Some former problems have re-emerged to new prominence and some new problems have arisen, demonstrated in increasing rural unemployment, continued reforms in subsidy arrangements, burgeoning paperwork, increasing on-farm costs, crop infections, stock diseases and debt. The impact of these is mounting pressure on rural residents, increased levels of isolation, stress and associated health problems.

Rural Support recognises that if it is to build on the success of its staff, volunteers and wider support network, it must reflect and where necessary improve its understanding and skills. This requires an effort "to get ahead of the game". In 2012 Rural Support decided to make a focused effort to better identify emerging issues to help meet the future challenges facing the rural community. This *Research Paper* is a key output, designed to help strengthen Rural Support's strategic thinking and provide insight on emerging concerns among farmers and rural dwellers. The aim is to provide a solid basis for Rural Support to determine any need for change in its function and role and help shape strategic planning and decision making. The approach adopted aims to "scan the horizon", and gather that evidence and insight necessary to better understand and meet the needs of the rural population in Northern Ireland. This includes exploring the services provided by other rural support organisations in the UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and to understand what they see as key threats and emerging issues. Recommendations are then identified to allow Rural Support to implement initiatives that build on international best practices.

In effect, this *Research Paper* is designed to help identify the current state of play, review current needs and assess emerging concerns. It should increase understanding, broaden support and identify those questions which demand answers, whether immediate decisions, or as a consequence of more detailed planning or further research.

NB. For more information on the services that Rural Support can provide please visit our website on [www.ruralsupport.org.uk](http://www.ruralsupport.org.uk)



## 2 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

As explained, Rural Support was established to meet the specific social, emotional and other needs of the rural community when foot and mouth disease was ravaging the countryside. It has been maintained and evolved in response to increased awareness and appreciation of the expanding needs of the rural community. Of course, many of the pressures on the rural community are shared by their urban counterparts, at the same time, the rural community often has unique drivers of change. Perhaps even more importantly, rural residents are often particularly isolated from the social support networks well established in urban centres. Rural residents also commonly face a greater challenge or threat to their anonymity when seeking support.

The over-riding aim of this research paper is:

*To examine the current and emerging causes and impacts of stress on farm families and other rural dwellers and to learn from Canada, Australia and New Zealand to identify those strategies necessary if Rural Support is to continue to improve its services.*

This requires addressing:

- *The current factors that cause stress (and in extreme cases- suicide) on farmers and rural dwellers*
- *The impacts of major restructuring on farmers / rural dwellers and emerging pressures*
- *To draw-on and learn from organisations / initiatives in Canada, New Zealand and Australia that are working to increase resilience and reduce stress and suicide*
- *Identify recommendations and strategies to improve Rural Support services and assist those most vulnerable in isolated rural communities*

To repeat, the challenge is to “get ahead of the game” and provide a robust basis for Rural Support’s Strategic Plan for the next three years - 2014-2017.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

The approach adopted has a number of different components. Firstly, desk-top research identified the key organisations that provide support to rural residents in Northern Ireland, the UK, the Republic of Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This included an analysis of the different approaches taken by these groups. An overview of Rural Support's operational activities was also carried out, including an analysis of its database established two years ago and an evaluation of its activities against its current three year contract with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

To determine the drivers of change and their impacts and to learn from others and identify best practice, interviews were also carried out with representatives of rural support organisations in the UK and the Republic of Ireland including The Rural Stress Helpline, The Farm Crisis Network, The Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution, The Institute for Rural Health-Wales, and Leitrim Development Company, Ireland. Interviews were also conducted in Canada including with the Farm and Rural Support Services in Manitoba. A total of 20 such interviews were completed. In Australia 8 interviews were held with individuals including staff at the Centre for Rural Remote mental Health in New South Wales in Australia. Throughout New Zealand 20 interviews were conducted in both North and South Islands with individuals including Rural Support Trusts.

## **4 THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT:**

### **LESSONS FROM THE UK, IRELAND, CANADA, AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**

Rural Support is a young organisation but has had many successes and achievements in providing support to rural individuals and families in times of need. Similar organisations in other countries have developed their own effective support programmes and offer a means to identify best practice. As a starting point it was important to look at what our neighbours in other parts of the UK and Ireland are doing. With similar rural landscapes, agricultural industries and economic pressures it was felt that these countries could provide useful insight on our work. Canada was chosen primarily as a result of internet research. Manitoba in the Prairies of Canada has a widely scattered, mainly rural populations and a well-established rural support programme including a helpline and recently established online support using email, instant messaging and texting.

Figure 1 on the next page highlights eight key organisations outside of Northern Ireland that took part in this research. Key similarities with Rural Support include a focus on assisting and supporting farm families and rural dwellers in times of need. However differences exist in terms of the use and role of volunteers, the number of staff and sources of funding. It is also apparent that the means of connecting and communicating with clients differ across organisations and countries.

**Figure 1: Key organisations interviewed**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Date established</b>	<b>Number of staff / Volunteers</b>
<b>Farm Community Network</b> England/Wales	<b>1995</b>	<b>11 full- part time /300 volunteers</b>
Formally the Farm Crisis Network, FCN seeks to provide confidential, non-judgemental support to all those in need of help in the farming community, whether the issue is related to the farm business or the farm household. FCN offers a helpline service. Funded is through statutory, individuals, corporate, churches, foundations and trusts.		
<b>RABI</b> England/Wales	<b>1860</b>	<b>80 staff / 600 volunteers</b>
(NB staff including two residential care homes) Aims to provide confidential welfare advice, practical care and financial support to those in need within the farming community. No helpline. Funded through endowment.		
<b>RSABI / Gatepost</b> Scotland	<b>1897</b>	<b>12 staff</b>
Provides financial and practical support and friendship to over 600 individuals and their families across a range of occupations with the common theme of working on the land in Scotland. Includes a helpline service. Funded through endowment.		
<b>Institute of Rural Health / Rural Support</b> Wales	<b>1997</b>	<b>9 staff</b>
Seeks to inform, develop and promote the health and wellbeing of rural communities through its two programme areas: workforce development (comprising the education and training programme); and the Institute's portfolio of project activity underpinned by the intention that this work seeks to make a difference to the lives of those residing and working in rural areas. No helpline. Statutoryfunding from the Welsh Assembly.		
<b>Leitrim Development Company</b> , Ireland	<b>2009</b>	<b>260 staff / many volunteers</b>
(NB was part of a partnership since 1996) Strives to stimulate social, local, economic and rural development throughout Co. Leitrim, for the benefit of all, particularly the marginalised, empowering them to engage with development opportunities that respond to their needs. No helpline. Funded through various EU and ROI programmes.		
<b>Manitoba Farm and Rural Support Services</b> , Canada	<b>2001</b>	<b>3 fulltime 7casual staff/12 volunteers</b>
Provides telephone and on-line counselling & support to farmers and other rural and northern Manitobans. Offers helpline service. Statutory funding by the Department of Health Provincial Government.		
<b>Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health</b> , Orange, New South Wales, Australia	<b>2007</b>	<b>20 staff</b>
Aims to bring quality education and research programs to all rural areas of NSW through effective partnerships and improve the mental health of rural and remote communities through academic leadership, collaboration and achievements in research, education, service development and information services.		
<b>Rural Support Trusts</b> , Regional across New Zealand	<b>20+casual staff countrywide</b>	
Help people and families in the wider rural community who experience an adverse event - climatic, financial or personal - to more effectively meet and overcome these challenges. Services are free and confidential		

#### 4.1 The United Kingdom

In England and Wales the main current and emerging pressures identified include animal disease (TB and schmallenberg), the threat of disease, poor weather and financial pressures. Other issues identified included the collapse of rural services, rural transport, single farm payments, mental health, rural poverty, changes to the welfare system, and unemployment. Philpa Spackman, Communications Manager with RABI explained:

*Stress comes when there is a combination of things happening. Obviously the weather last year was a major problem that hit people particularly hard. Then you have TB hitting the dairy sector, the weather meaning arable farmers having to reseed, fertilizer costs, extra costs, tremendous rise in input costs. There is often another spanner in the works; there could be a bereavement or sickness. Now we are getting worried about schmallenberg disease – in some parts of the country we are hearing that there are 40-50% losses in lambing. Not only that, you may lose ewes you may have to get a cesarean section maybe costing £300, those costs are unbearable. Another thing that is very worrying is the changes in the welfare system. It looks unlikely that they will be able to claim working tax credit in the future. A report last year found that one quarter of all farming families are below the poverty line, that was 2 years ago – with 2012 we can only assume those figures have got worse. So put together, we are very concerned.*

*(Oxford, January 2013)*

In Scotland similar issues were identified with adverse weather conditions and financial difficulties again highlighted in an interview with Gatepost. Due to increasing pressures on rural and farm families Gatepost was recently established as a trial project within the RSABI. What was also highlighted was that these pressures are contributing to the breakup of families. Again it was emphasised that it is not just male farmers who are experiencing difficult times, it is also farm women, children, the elderly, the disabled and the young. Additional emerging issues in Scotland are the impacts of welfare reforms and uncertainty over the reform of CAP. The lack of profit in some farm businesses was highlighted, and the need to assist in managing change.

Maurice Hankey from RSABI and Karen Messruther of Gatepost Scotland highlighted the range of issues reaching their helpline:

*The issues are very variable, I mean of late given the horrendous weather we had last year, financial issues are the ones that are causing big stress. But we get everything from people going through divorces, health issues, bereavement, family worries, everything that causes stress to people and also all the farming stress as well.*

*The impacts can be severe as you would expect really. Inability to operate- I mean there are businesses that are coming to standstills just because of the financial pressures. On a personal and family level it's friction between family members, sleepless nights, feeling sick with worry that you can't keep your food down and people having suicidal thoughts. Bank managers, yes the bank seems to be adding to that sort of feeling, people feel out of control....it's a big worry.*

*(Edinburgh, 2013)*

What stood out is that the complexity and culmination of pressures impact entire families and communities. The current and emerging issues are pushing many rural dwellers to the edge. As Maurice Hankey explains:

*The adjustment to whatever CAP reform brings and how people see or don't see that they've got a future within that is a concern. There was a lovely statistic at a conference I was at 50% of farmers believe they're in the top 10% of performers....Everybody thinks they're doing a good job and a lot of them need to wake up to the fact that actually they're just pretty run of the mill and to survive they're going to have to learn to do better. There are going to be big changes and we need to help people adjust to these changes.*

*(Edinburgh, 2013)*

Respondents identified many current and emerging issues including depression, anxiety, suicide, increased hidden poverty, family breakups, unemployment and drug and alcohol abuse. As Phillipa Spackman from RABI (England and Wales) explains:

*The number of people that our welfare officers see who are in tears is quite amazing... I know we have dealt with many cases of suicides, suicide attempts and suicide intentions. The impacts can be absolutely extreme... The mental health issue, the stress issues are huge. We address this by ensuring that the mental health workers are aware of the financial help that we can give. Because at least if can reduce one of the burdens. We help people deal with their finances. We help people claim state benefits and that's going to be even more important in the future. Hidden poverty is a big issue, people are trying to get to grips with what CAP reform might mean, it's only when that begins to bite that people remember that farmers are guardians of the environment and guardians of food production.*

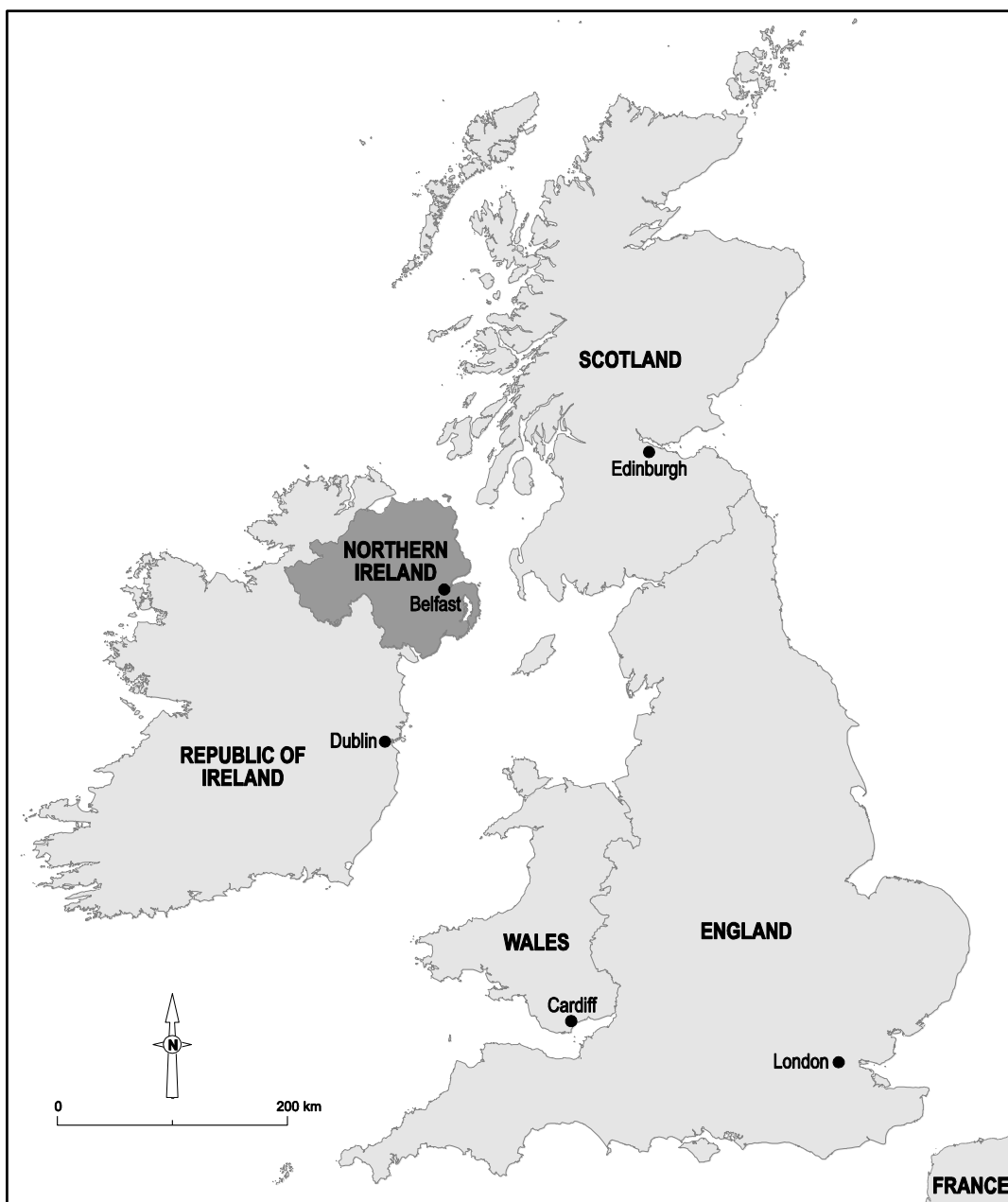
*(Oxford, January 2013)*

In an interview with Charles Smith from the Farm Community Network, Charles identifies 4 key current and emerging issues that support organisations (like FCN and Rural Support) need to consider for the future;

- Growing levels of trade and bank debt in small family farming businesses, rising to levels which are unsustainable;

- Continuing resistance amongst farmers to change and adapt methods and enterprises, threatens the long term viability of many farms;
- Government austerity plans will impact on available services – public health and welfare support may diminish with particular impact on rural areas;
- Statutory financial support of the “third sector” is likely to reduce even though Government is likely to become more dependent on it to provide a safety net.

**Map 1: The United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland**



## 4.2 The Republic of Ireland

Interviews identified many issues shared both north and south of the border. One common factor is the collapse of the construction industry and its serious knock-on effects in farming and in rural communities. As many farms in Ireland are small, off-farm sources of income have become increasingly necessary in recent decades. Much of this off-farm income formerly came from the construction sector. With the economic downturn, there has been less work and income and increasing levels of stress. Increasing levels of isolation have also been identified with many young people leaving the countryside to find work elsewhere. Brian Smith, of the Leitrim Development Company, has helped establish a men's group in north Leitrim working with rural men by means of Men's Shed, a non-commercial organisation open to all men and offering a place where men can gather and/or work on projects at their own pace and time in the company of other men. The primary objective is to advance men's health and well-being.

The economic recession, prolonged austerity and cuts in services in the Republic undoubtedly have put pressure on rural dwellers. Vulnerability is an increasing concern. When asked about emerging issues Brian says:

*I suppose like there is the general pressure. A lot people talk about the police services being reduced, police stations are closing, post offices are closing, local services being dropped. People feel more vulnerable but whether they are or not is a debate. Farming has been positive in many ways since the construction crash and that's been a good thing because at least farmers, when you have the land are not destitute because you have an asset, some stock, and a means to Survive.*

*(Drumshanbo, County Leitrim, February 2013)*

Some respondents argued that the entire social fabric of rural communities is changing, with rural decline in many communities and counter urbanisation in others. Kieran Walshe, Researcher & Deputy Director and Aine Ni Limme, Post Doctorate Researcher at NUI Galway University explain:

*The changes in rural areas across Ireland are immense and it's important to say that this is not just happening because of the economic recession but that have been there for the last twenty years in terms of the declining role of agriculture, the drop off in service infrastructure, the drop off in some populations. And then on the other side of that you have these other processes of counter urbanisation, people moving*



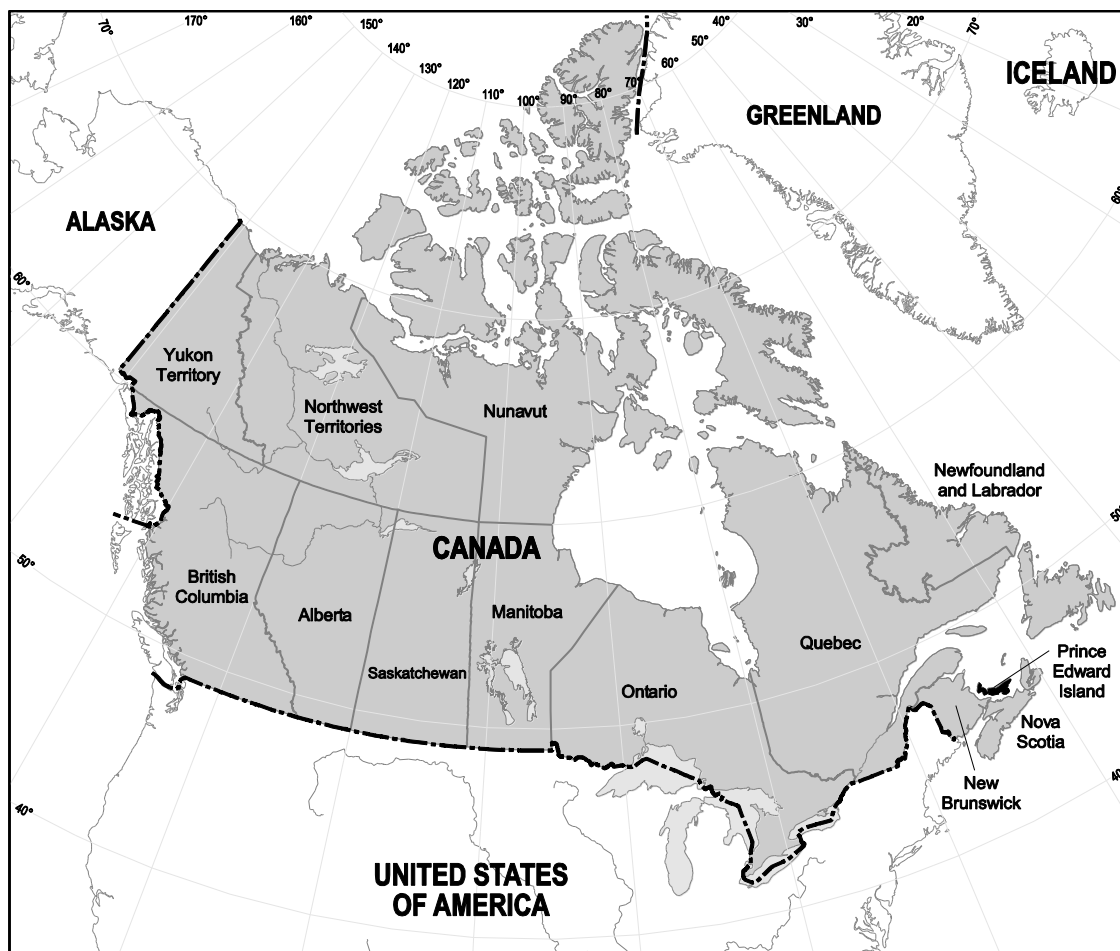
*into these areas and these areas are being developed. So ultimately our rural communities can be very changed and diverse.*

*(Galway, February 2013)*

### 4.3 Canada

Despite different geographies, scales and types of farming, many stress related issues are universal. Over the last twenty years, rural support and farm stress helpline organisations have emerged across Canada including in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. Farm and Rural Support Services Manitoba was established in 2000 to provide helpline support to farmers and rural communities. The organisation was set up after the BSE crisis and in response to its devastating effect on the agricultural sector. Interviewees stated that the threat of disease remains a worry for many farmers.

**Map 2: Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Canada**



Financial related problems generate most calls to Farm and Rural Support Services, but as Janet Smith, Programme Manager explains:

*[Callers] also come along with a lot of relationship problems, addictions, interfamily lack of communication, some domestic violence. A lot of farmers carry huge debt loads related to extreme weather conditions the last few years. Government policies and markets are squeezing the farmers and that hurts them. They tend to work very independently. We are seeing a lot of rural depopulation – we used to have a farm on ever quarter section now the smaller towns are finding it very difficult to survive.*

*(Brandon, Manitoba, July 2013)*

Rural isolation and loneliness are undoubtedly major contributory factors in rural Canada. Farms continue to get larger, rural populations are declining and services are being withdrawn from many rural communities. The Canadian organisations visited all provide a free-phone helpline and Janet Smith highlights the importance of removing barriers to help, saying:

*People who call generally just want a listening ear, someone with empathy and who is non-judgemental.... Reaching out for help on issues that are people's innermost issues is already a barrier. We try to remove as many barriers as we can. Online councillors are a way for the future – the US is way ahead of us. Youth and men who particularly at risk of self-harm but we need to reach out to everyone in different ways.*

*(Brandon, Manitoba, July 2013)*

Some rural communities, however, have seen significant population increases in recent years. Brandon, Manitoba, for example, has experienced large scale in-migration to work in the food industry. New migrants have come from many countries including Russia, the Ukraine, China and South America. These migrants bring important economic and social benefits but may stretch limited health and education resources. Language barriers are sometimes a difficulty and new arrivals with limited or no English can and do often feel extremely isolated and vulnerable.

Manitoba Farm and Rural Support Services recently completed a one year pilot study providing counselling services on-line with instant messaging. In Canada, it has been found that men are often reluctant to pick up the phone to call helplines and are more willing to chat online, via the web, instant chat or text messaging. New ways of connecting with

people using new technologies appears to be the way of the future particularly, perhaps, with the young.

In Manitoba meetings with Farmers with Disabilities also highlighted the connections between increased levels of stress and the number of serious accidents on farms. Its staff and volunteers have focused their efforts on awareness and education with projects that assist farm families in teaching children about safety. This, it is believed, will help reduce farm accidents and highlight the connections between good mental and physical wellbeing.

#### **4.4 Australia**

Research suggests that, in rural Australia, males, youth, farmers, and Aboriginal people are at a high risk for suicide. A recent report entitled *Suicide in Rural and Remote Areas of Australia* (2012) found that greater recognition of the potential stressors associated with living and working in rural contexts is needed by federal and state governments, health-service providers, and the academic community. Some potential strategies that were highlighted to combat risks for suicide in rural contexts included:

- Providing greater social and economic support to persons experiencing difficult circumstances (e.g., drought, floods) in rural areas. This could help in alleviating financial stress;
- Facilitating further education and training of persons in rural contexts. Expanding the skill-base of persons residing in rural areas can allow greater social mobility and increase employment opportunities;
- Addressing the lifestyle risks associated with suicide in rural localities, including problems in balancing the competing demands of work and family, the inappropriate use of alcohol, and recognising and seeking help for mental or physical signs of stress;
- Encouraging the development of culturally appropriate and flexible sources of support. This may include “upskilling” key members of the community to provide treatment and/or referral services. This strategy would also include encouraging persons in rural contexts to seek help for mental distress and suicidality.

What is clear from the findings of the report is the importance of recognising the unique experience associated with suicide in rural Australia. Certainly, not all suicide risk and protective factors are unique to one region, locality or context; however, there were factors which appeared to impact more significantly in rural areas.

As part of this research fellowship a focus was given to the work in New South Wales Australia by the Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health (CRRMH) based in Orange (see map 3). This is a major rural initiative of the University of New Castle and the NSW Ministry of health. The organisations aim is to bring quality education and research programmes to all rural areas of NSW through effective partnerships.

The Centre endeavours to improve the mental health of rural and remote communities through academic leadership, collaboration and achievements in research, education, service development and information services. The Centre also works in close collaboration with rural Area Mental Health Services, rural communities and a wide range of organisations and agencies in the design and delivery of its programs. One key programme that was outlined by Senior Programme Manager (Trevor Hazell) that could be adapted for Northern Ireland and indeed the UK is the Act-Belong-Commit (ABC) initiative.

Act-Belong-Commit is a comprehensive health promotion campaign that encourages individuals to take action to protect and promote their own mental wellbeing and encourages organisations that provide mentally healthy activities to promote participation in those activities.

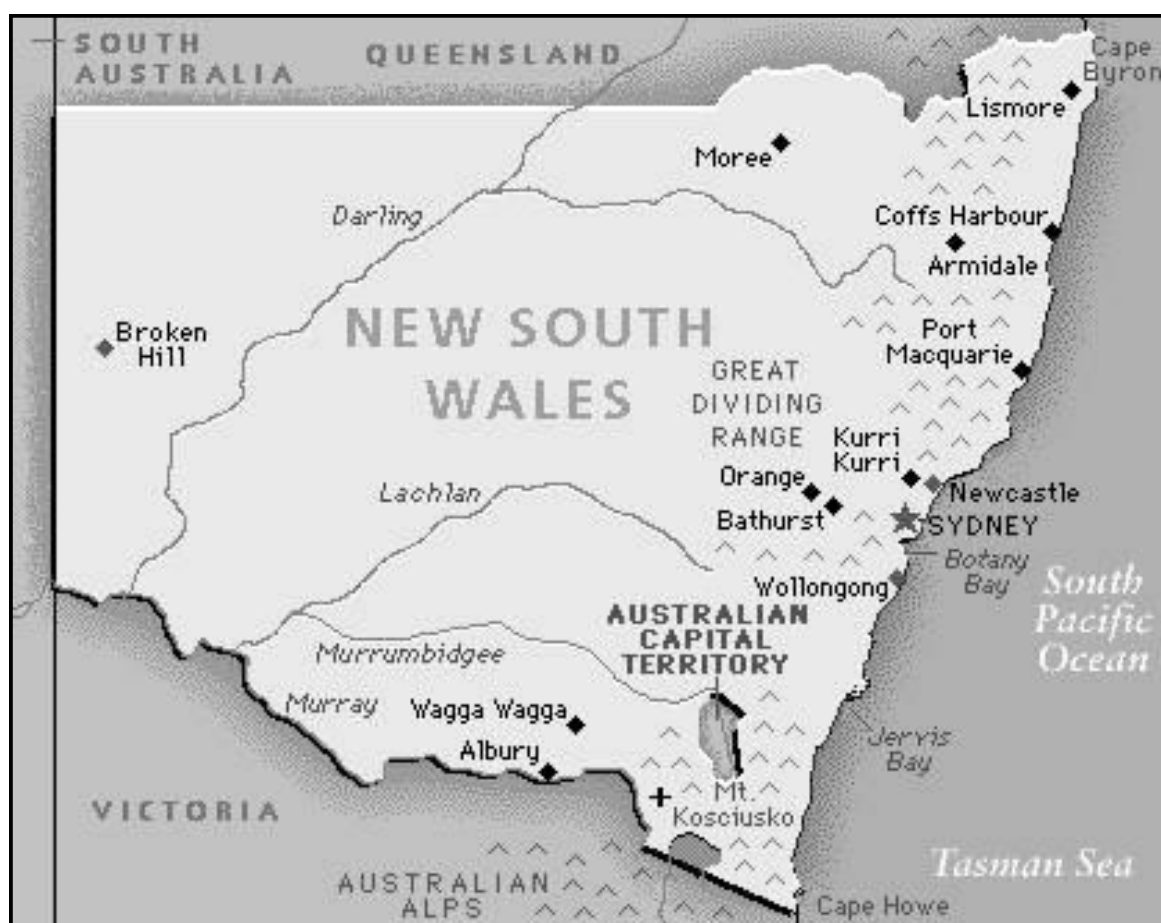
Act-Belong-Commit was developed primarily from research undertaken by Curtin University in Western Australia into people's perceptions of mental health and the behaviours they believed protected and promoted good mental health. Following on from Act-Belong-Commit's state-wide success in Western Australia, the CRRMH has successfully rolled out the program to NSW.

The A-B-C guidelines for positive mental health provide a simple approach that we can adopt to become more mentally healthy:

- **Act** – Keep mentally, physically and socially active: take a walk, say g'day, read a book, do a crossword, dance, play cards, stop for a chat...
- **Belong** – Join a book club, take a cooking class, be more involved in groups you are already a member of, go along to community events...
- **Commit** – Take up a cause, help a neighbour, learn something new, set yourself a challenge, help out at the school or meals on wheels...

There is strong evidence highlighting the positive impacts across states in Australia that have implemented the ABC programme. Being active, having a sense of belonging, and having a purpose in life all to contribute to good mental health. This programme could be easily adopted and rolled out as a pilot project by Rural Support in targeted rural areas in Northern Ireland.

**Map 3: Orange, New South Wales, Australia**



## 4.5 New Zealand

### Background

New Zealand's rural population experienced radical change in 1984, when the Government implemented a series of sweeping neo-liberal reforms that included the removal of production subsidies. Within 12 months, virtually all subsidies were withdrawn from agriculture. New Zealand therefore provides useful insights for other western nations that may want to follow the New Zealand 'model'. While these policy shifts of 1984 and their implications left rural New Zealand in a state of shock, in many other western nations the reforms were viewed with admiration.

This policy shift prompted a rapid rural restructuring and a unique endeavour to reduce the role of the state in the economy through a process of corporatisation, privatisation, devolution and managerialism. In all of this, agriculture was a prime target. By the end of 1985, the structure of subsidies, tax and other fiscal incentives and price controls, which had been built up by successive governments to protect farmers, had been largely dismantled. The New Zealand agricultural sector had been effectively deregulated. Some farmers, perhaps somewhat cynically, have likened these political changes to a game, stating simply "they changed the rules". Deregulation turned into a crisis for rural New Zealand due to combined circumstances that included a simultaneous fall in world agricultural commodity prices.

### Impacts and Consequences

During the first decade of the reform period, the New Zealand agricultural sector was transformed from a relatively high income, protected, low risk environment, to a low income, unprotected environment in which the farm industry must protect itself against market fluctuations and climatic and other natural hazards, without state support or compensation. To a very large extent the agricultural policy context set by the reforms of 1984 remains intact to this day. Table1 on the next page does illustrate the breadth of consequences experienced by farmers and farm households and the impact on the land of the abrupt removal of subsidies in 1984.

**Table 1—Impacts and Consequences**

<b>Economic</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Environmental</b>
Loss of income	Inability to cope	Farms fell into disrepair
Farmers stopped spending	Damaged pride	Increased soil erosion
Interest rates soared	Loss of role as 'breadwinner'	Land returned to scrub
Financial uncertainty	Increased stress	Soil quality deteriorated
Farm labour laid off	Increased isolation and loneliness	Weeds
Forced sales of family farms	Women found jobs in town	Increase in pests (e.g. rabbits and possums)
Reduced fertilizer inputs	Less support and help at home	Lack of tree planting
Lack of availability of pesticides	Increased workload	
	Wives and children moved into town	
	Devastating for farmer left on their own	
	Children withdrawn from boarding school	
	Physically and mentally draining	
	Traumatizing (failed farmer)	

Not only were there enormous economic changes as a result of the 1984 reforms, but these had serious environmental and social impacts. The social impacts of the removal of subsidies were more severe and sustained. Many hill country farmers were still experiencing serious environmental, economic and personal problems directly related to the impact of the reforms well into the mid-1990s. Serious social and psychological impacts were also reported with stress and physical ill-health experienced by many farm families continued for close to two decades.

Sheep and beef farmers were undoubtedly worst-affected by the reforms, particularly by the removal of SMPs which in 1984 contributed almost 40% of their income. The subsidy schemes prior to 1984 supported hill country farmers to a greater extent than any other sector of the farm industry and consequently the social distress over the withdrawal was primarily concentrated in these areas. In total, 18 million hectares (70% of New Zealand) is described as hill country, primarily used for beef and sheep. Put bluntly, the geographical extent and scale of the social distress in the post-1984 period was hardly inconsequential.

### **Stress in Farming**

Where a farmer worked in partnership with his wife/her husband, they were often able to cope much better during the restructuring. More traditional farmers who operated their

businesses on their own with little sharing in decision-making with their partner found it more difficult to cope. If prior to 1984 an individual farmer had taken all the credit for his farm business and saw himself as the 'breadwinner', he felt he also had to shoulder the blame when things became difficult. While some relationships became stronger, others fell apart. Those partnerships that were already strong became more resilient. For some families however the difficulties became too much and marriages broke up. For some, the stress was overwhelming and they were forced off their farms. Some farm families resisted selling their farms until they had no other option. They battled on, only to exit with almost no assets at all. As is highlighted in this paper 'stress' is not unique to New Zealand, stress is perhaps inherent in farming. What is certain is that the trauma of the reform period compounded the problem and hit farmers and farm families hard. David, a Rural Support Trust Coordinator, sums up the situation that faced many in the post-1984 period stating:

*There were quite a number of farmers who exited farming at that period. There were also other agricultural businesses that exited. The government put in a scheme to help farmers out of agriculture. I was responsible for helping about 90 farmers to exit on the New Start grant basis. There were others who exited who didn't need a New Start grant because whilst they exited they still got enough maybe to buy a new house or retire. There was a lot of stress and depression. In North Canterbury there were five farmers that I knew of who committed suicide. I employed a psychologist. We had meetings in all the main areas and anybody we thought was at risk was invited to the meeting. The area had a major drought as well as low prices, and the fallen land values. It just hit some people harder than others.*

The fact that in the immediate aftermath of the reforms, relatively few farmers were forced to sell their farms, hides the social distress that was endured by many farmers and their families. This is confirmed in the interviews conducted for this research. The economic and social difficulties of farmers and their families continued long after the reforms were introduced and for many, continued well into the 1990s.

### **Figure 2: Bart (Central North Island)**

*In 1984 Bart was forced to sell his farm as he couldn't make the mortgage repayments that had reached 33%.*

*When asked how the experience impacted upon his family he says, "Well, the children weren't aware of what was going on, they were hidden from it. When the guys came to seize my livestock I told my wife to put the kids in the car and take them into town. My wife*



*died a few years later with cancer and a brain tumour, they were hard times, we had got a lot of publicity, front page of the local newspaper and stuff like that, it was hard for her to take it, it was stressful, it probably finished her off in the end. I was left with four kids, the youngest a nine year old daughter but we came through it.”*

*When discussing the impacts of the reforms on rural communities, Bart says, “It destroyed a lot of families and a lot of people. A lot of people committed suicide over it. It tore communities up. What I would like to mention here is that these Douglas reforms ushered in some nasty things into New Zealand, for instance when you borrow money at 8 % and they ask for 33%, now that’s loan sharking, in the US that carries a jail sentence of more than 20 years, it was common amongst the mafia. It was theft here in this country, a lot of those things that were criminal activities made their way into the NZ business sector under the disguise of variable interest rates. There were no restraints put in place on the financial institutions. With all of this then came a total disregard for your neighbour. As usual it was the guys on the poorer quality land who suffered the most, because you haven’t got the residual fertility that is required. Once they took away the livestock that was you finished, this is the system they used, they were ratbags, they knew that without the stock you would be forced to sell and get out. They were shockers, they were nasty b……s. It was a pretty shameful chapter in New Zealand history. It wasn’t necessary”.*

Suicide, perhaps the ultimate expression of stress, social isolation and despair, became a tragic outcome for many of those hardest hit by the removal of subsidies in the post-1984 period, although no data are available in New Zealand recording suicide by occupation. Bart (Figure 2) highlights the anger of many at the deaths which occurred and Figure 3 characterises the human toll taken throughout so much of the country.

### **Figure 3: Distress among farming communities**

Things got worse by the day because we were in the downturn phase. I never saw so many tears from grown men. In fact the sane ones in many families were the wives. Women were great in the downturn. Women held it together. Men had been the head of the family and here was a problem that they couldn’t handle. There were some suicides and amazing sickness. (Keith -retired Farmer and former Regional President of Federated Farmers)

The withdrawal of subsidies has made farming a lot more vulnerable to pressures from things like emergencies, catastrophes and extreme events. It has made farmers more vulnerable to extreme events so if we get a drought, we can’t subsidise those farmers out of it so how do we handle it. (Terry - Regional Council Official, East Cape)

Suicide was and is definitely a serious problem in this industry. It was a very vulnerable time in the mid 1980s. Even the rural doctors were affected with the social stress that was widespread in the rural populations. We had one doctor that said he couldn’t stand the stress of the rural scene and the farming community. He said it was just too depressing, so he moved up to the city. I used to ring quite a few of the rural doctors and let them know that we were there as another lifeline for people. We did get quite a few referrals... But we went through some very tough times. It wasn’t only the subsidies you see it was the share market crash as well. (Donna - Rural Support Trust Coordinator, Canterbury)

Just as inevitably, the impacts of the withdrawal of subsidies on individual farmers impacted upon the whole farm household, so the tragedy of individual suicides cut across families and whole communities. The cliché that ‘no man is an island’ used by one farmer’s wife concisely conveys this point. The farm business was also the family home and a lifestyle. Commonly the whole family lived and worked together, to the same purpose.

The vulnerability of farmers and farm households to the extreme stress imposed in New Zealand is reinforced by the fact that farmers in the UK are among the most vulnerable professional group and are described as “high risk suicide group”. Stress and mental illness is an increasing concern and suicide, stress and other mental health problems are now recognised as endemic in rural communities. In the UK, Australia and Canada, stress has been compounded in recent years by extreme weather, BSE, FMD, crop diseases and the closure of export markets.

In interviews as part of this research with farmers and Rural Support Trust staff across New Zealand it is apparent that many of these same stress issues continue to exist in New Zealand farming today. Stress, depression, isolation were all recurrent themes.

#### Figure 4: Stress and Isolation

I think stress and depression in the farming sector is more rife than we give it credit for. Even today, depression manifests itself in many ways and with people and friends that I know you see some of that are angry; they are not quite outward enough. There was a survey recently that said that 68% of farmers’ wives were earning the incomes of the farm. We are the same; we need to do that to maintain our standard of living, so there are huge numbers of farmers who muddle on by themselves all day doing their work. The human condition by itself is a gregarious animal, can you imagine yourself going from day to day not talking to anyone. It’s not necessarily healthy and there are many people in that situation. We aren’t too bad, we are relatively close to town but you take people further out, you have to wonder. A lot of guys I think have trouble getting out of bed in the morning because it is socially uncomfortable for farmers doing it by themselves every day. There is no one to discuss things with. (Ian – Farmer, Central North Island)

Farming is very, very stressful, you are held to the land and the animals, you are on constant call. . . Oh yes it is, definitely. You have to be on call for your farm and animals 24 hours a day. If you want to go away for a week’s holiday you have to work for a month to get your stock in the right places and get them enough feed. Then it takes a whole month again when you get back to undo what has already been done. (Melanie - Farmer, Napier)

## Rural Support Trusts

Rural Support Trusts are a nationwide network which assists rural communities and individuals across all of New Zealand and aim to help people in the wider community who experience an adverse event including climatic(droughts and floods), financial or personal pressures to more effectively meet and overcome these challenges. Services are free and confidential. The Rural Support Trusts that were established in the wake of the reforms have proven to provide crucial support to farmers and families in times of crisis. In recent years this has included severe drought and major earthquakes. The services that trusts provide vary depending on funding and focus, but in general they offer:

- Help during and after an adverse weather or environmental event: The trusts work with local Civil Defence and can provide information, and assist in emergency and ongoing help. This may include rescue and movement of stock, financial support, labour or other needs.
- Support during personal and/or financial difficulties: The trusts can help rural people by either providing or facilitating referral to professional counselling, financial advice, and farm management expertise. Help can also include mentors or colleagues from rural backgrounds to talk to, facilitation or financial assistance, Work and Income support, and labour assistance. The trusts' members are local people who have themselves faced the challenges that rural life brings.

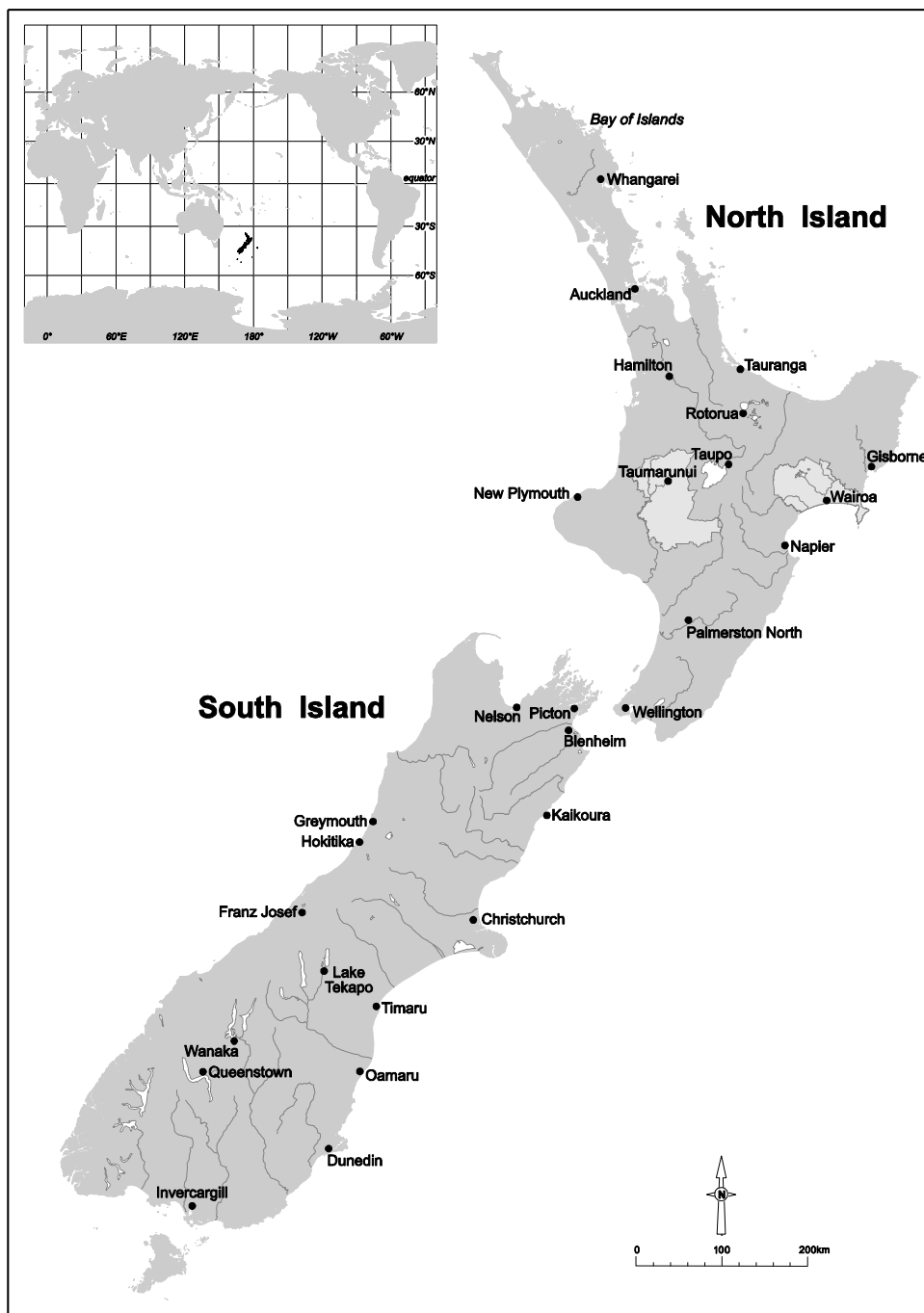
Key learnings from speaking to Rural support Trust co-ordinators was the need to provide experienced expertise in relation to farm management and debt issues. Staff are qualified and paid for their contribution through government funds from the Ministry of Primary Industries. Reducing the stigma of depression was also highlighted as key component in trying to encourage individuals to seek help. The success of the an online and media campaign targeting depression fronted by the form All Black Rugby player JK has been highlighted as an extremely powerful campaign that has helped to reduce mental stigma and prejudices.

## Conclusion

The restructuring in New Zealand in 1984 was presented to the New Zealand public as a necessary radical package of economic policies. The withdrawal of support to farmers was abrupt and dramatic. The changes that occurred were compounded by a range of related economic circumstances and adverse climatic events. However, as documented in this

chapter, the impact of the reforms extended well beyond any neat set of economic indicators and had dramatic social implications that in turn seriously impacted on the state of the New Zealand environment. These ramifications appear to have been more severe in the longer term. Organisations like Rural Support Trusts have proved instrumental (and continue to do so) in assisting farmers and farm families in times of major distress and in providing expertise and support.

**Map 4: New Zealand**



Despite different national contexts, rural stress problems appear universal and similar causes of stress were identified in the UK, Ireland Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Several points stand out:

What is apparent is recognition that it is most often a combination or culmination of issues that cause serious problems for individuals. It is in effect, when two or three or more issues arise that stress can become overwhelming, and in the countries examined there is a common acceptance that these are significant issues and an increasing need for rural support services. Equally, all the countries concerned believe that there is a need to monitor emerging challenges and potential improved means to respond to the needs of individuals and families to manage change. What is also clear is the necessity to focus not only on individual farmers but farm families, women, children, the elderly, the disabled and other isolated rural residents. In all areas there is a trend to fewer farms and increasing financial constraints.

Research has shown that men in particular are often hesitant to pick up the phone to talk to someone about their problems. They are more willing to go online or text via their phone. This is particularly the case with younger men but may well also extend to other groups. There is a need to find new ways of reaching and supporting people in ways they find most comfortable. This requires resources and further highlights the established value in Rural Support's own staff and volunteers. The organisational structure of other support agencies, particularly their financial structure is important. Long-term, secure funding allows and encourages more innovations in approach and increased funding is a prerequisite to meet expanding needs.

## 5 CONCLUSION: EMERGING ISSUES AND DRIVERS OF CHANGE

The evidence presented highlights that many of the current and emerging issues causing stress in rural communities are not unique to Northern Ireland. Certainly, other parts of the UK including England, Scotland and Wales are experiencing similar emerging issues:

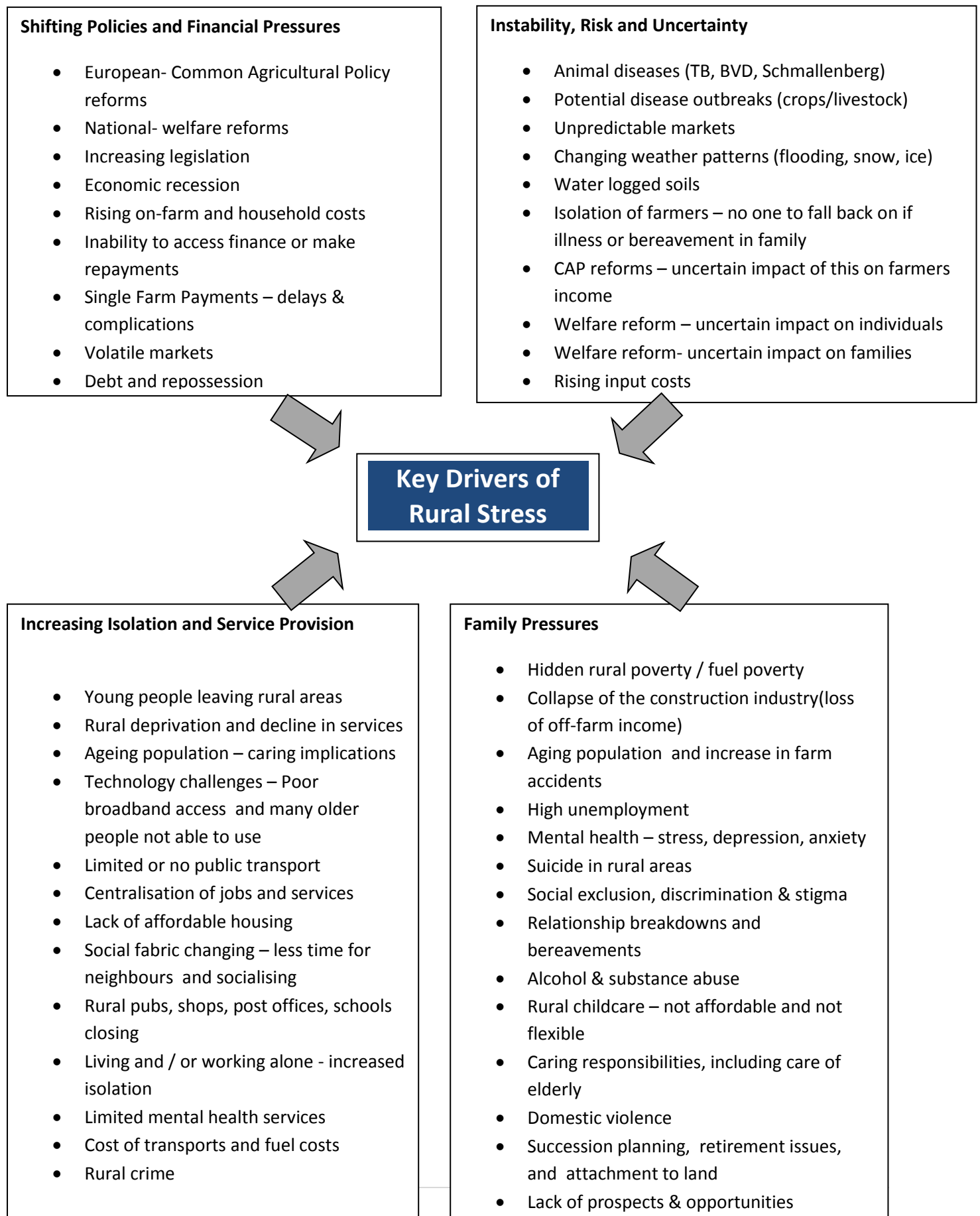
- Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Reform – dramatic decrease in single farm payments in future years
- Welfare Reforms – impacts on individuals and families
- Prolonged high levels of rural unemployment
- Increasing levels and often hidden rural poverty

Internationally, although political factors vary a number of emerging issues are common to Northern Ireland, other parts of Ireland the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand:

- Increasing debts and associated financial pressures
- Changing weather patterns / extreme weather conditions
- Difficulties in accessing services
- Increasing elderly/vulnerable population
- Increasing rural isolation
- Reduction in rural services

Figure 5 on the next page summarises the key drivers of rural stress that were identified. These have been grouped into four broad categories including; 1) Shifting Policies and Financial Pressures, 2) Instability, Risk and Uncertainty, 3) Increasing Isolation and Service Provision and 4) Family Pressures. Administratively convenient, what stands out is the inter-related nature of these drivers and their overlap. Many are already evident and well established others are emerging and expected to increase.

**Figure 5 Key Drivers of Rural Stress**



Challenges and stress will persist. It is equally clear that the issues involved are diverse, complex, sometimes hidden, and not necessarily well understood. The work of Rural Support since its establishment more than 10 years ago and its continued need is to some extent at least, self-evident. Many have been and continue to be assisted. But the drivers are changing, the pressures increasing and the need expands. As this paper has demonstrated, we are good at what we do, but “How do we know what we don’t know?”. The research conducted goes some way to fill that gap.

Current and emerging issues already challenge Rural Support’s staff, volunteers and resources. These have all been shown to be indispensable and capitalised upon. Meanwhile, expanding needs (and hidden problems – farm families as a whole, men, disabled and the like) demand innovative new approaches and further recruitment of staff and volunteers.

Rural Support must facilitate adaptive change. To do so, Rural Support must develop strategies and tools to empower its own staff and volunteers and those rural residents it serves to better cope with the pressure and stresses that change will bring.

Money is no simple panacea. But nor is “thinking smarter” in itself enough. Building staff and volunteer resources, adding value to those staff, maintaining what works and expanding with new approaches to reach those who are still not reached, will cost more money. Stability of funding would also help. But that money must be strategically used.

This paper has highlighted some of the key components of such strategic use – more financial management training for staff and volunteers, a better means to link with younger men, disabled and family groups. This will be fleshed-out in our Strategic Plan. What is clear and universally acknowledged is that reducing our suicide rate, minimising social harm and promoting positive change is a reward (impossible to meaningfully measure) that further investment surely justifies.



## **6 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1) Online resource tools (to promote Positive Mental Health, provide support and increase resilience)**

#### **Identification of need**

In recent years we have experienced a technological revolution taking place across the world which has impacted on the lives of many in rural communities. While the advantages and disadvantages have been disputed that facts remain that more and more individuals and families are regularly using the internet, using mobile devices and apps to do business and it has changed the way that people source information and seek support. It has been demonstrated in many countries including Canada, Australia and New Zealand that men in particular are often reluctant to pick up a phone and make calls to helplines. There is evidence to suggest that men and in particular younger men are using online resources on computers or mobile devices to seek help. Rural Support in Northern Ireland endeavours to be progressive and explore innovative ways of providing support. In New Zealand these new online resources are proving extremely popular and effective in getting people to carry out confidential online mental health assessments and providing accurate recommendations to clients as to the next steps to take. This online resource will in no way replace the helpline service that already exists but instead offer another means of communication between those seeking help and Rural Support staff. It will also provide a pathway for people wishing to explore if they have mental health concerns and what actions are needed.

#### **Purpose**

As a result of this research, introducing new methods of communication to provide support to individuals who contact rural support has been identified as a key component of our future strategy for Rural Support. The importance of broadening the organisations focus from not just farmers but to farm families, young people, women, elderly, migrants.... is an issue that needs to be addressed. It is proposed that this new online resource tool will help in increasing resilience through Positive Mental Health Promotion and will reach a much wider target audience across the farming and rural community.

## **Service Outline**

As well as the current helpline that has existed since the organisations began it is planned that the Rural Support will introduce a new instant online support system within the existing rural support website. When people visit the website, via messaging and via email they can be invited / prompted to talk with a support worker. A similar approach will be taken as the Manitoba Farm and Rural Stress Helpline who are coming to the end of their first year pilot. In addition it is recommended that a new online resource be established and developed a self-help resource similar to ([www.depression.org.nz](http://www.depression.org.nz)). This will be most likely a new website that will be managed by Rural Support and provide people with a confidential way of sourcing information, carrying out a self-assessment and understanding what personal actions that they need to take.

## **Initial stage**

Design a project brief and prepare a tender to IT companies who will compete to provide the service of a new website and software that would enable instant messaging and support mechanisms to be incorporated into existing web resources. Identify local celebrity to be the face of the new website and/or explore animation options.

## **Outcomes and Monitoring**

This online resource tool has proven extremely popular and effective in New Zealand and provides a confidential interactive assessment of individuals' mental health. It can then be used to inform individuals of suggested actions for example; contact your GP or contact Rural Support to arrange counselling. It can be used to collect data (individual details would always remain confidential) that would allow valuable research to be undertaken. Limited research has been carried out in Northern Ireland specifically looking at the mental health of farmers, farm families and rural dwellers.

## **Administrative and Budget considerations**

This new online resource tool once established would be managed by current Rural Support staff. An annual fee for website management may be incurred.

An estimated cost of £5,000 would be sought to develop these new online resource tools. This includes new software, design of new website, filming editing and launch.

## **6.2) Develop an improved function of delivery and monitoring of services, reporting of issues, outcomes and policy recommendations**

### **Identification of need**

Currently Rural Support provides a signposting service to its clients. There exists an unquantifiable number of constantly changing services, initiatives and intervention programmes available to clients which differ across regions, counties, council areas and health trusts. Problems and barriers related to accessing information about services is a persistent issue in rural areas.

### **Purpose**

There is potential for developing and improving how Rural Support informs, refers and signposts clients to the agencies delivering these services across all of Northern Ireland. This role would involve the development of information resources aimed at service users, volunteers, stakeholders and referral agencies including a central database/ portal for information access and research. Such a resource would improve service provision by facilitating better awareness among staff, volunteers and service users about existing initiatives and services and could facilitate the promotion of consultation engagement or partnership working on future initiatives.

Provide additional resources for a part time Development Officer to enable operational development of the existing service. This role would resource the development of an improved function for the delivery and monitoring of services, reporting of issues, outcomes and policy recommendations. This would improve provision to continuously develop the service, carry out research and inform policy.

The Development Officer role would facilitate the strengthening of stakeholder engagement, cross referral and partnership working and thus improve service provision and awareness of Rural Support's service as well as improving the promotion of rural issues to the public and within a wider stakeholder context.

### **Administrative and budget considerations**

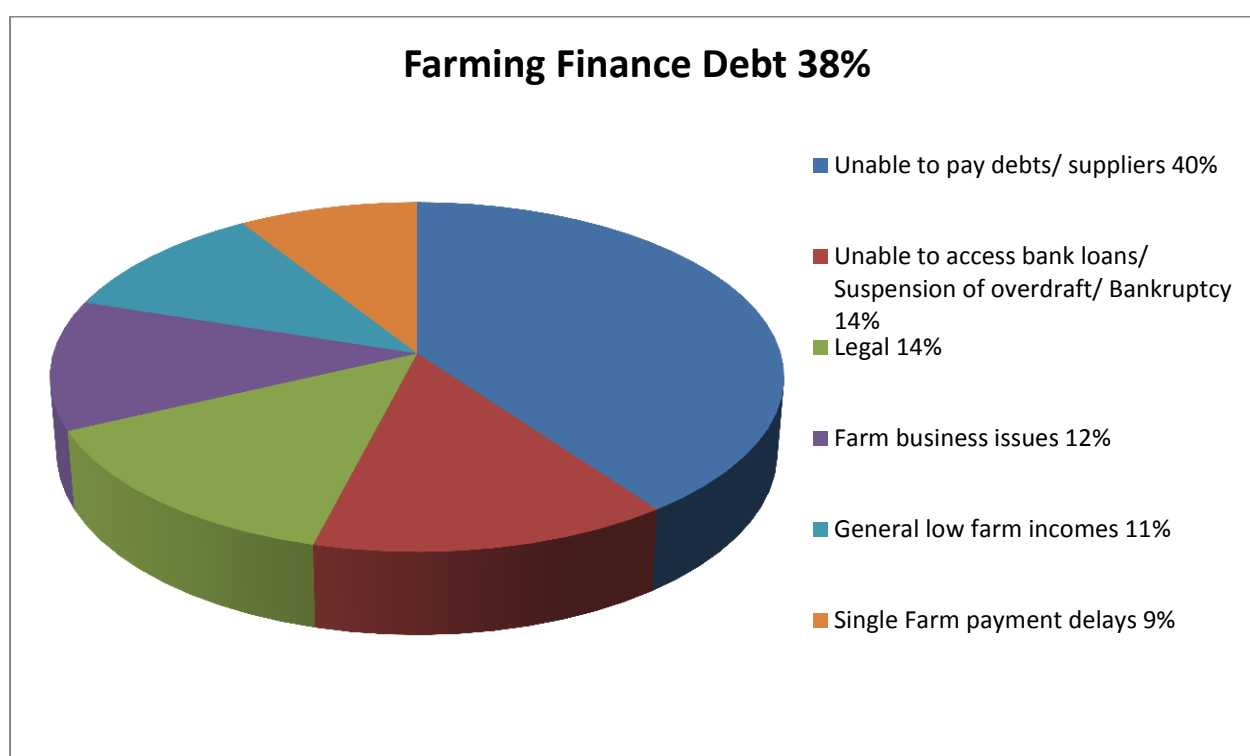
Recruitment of additional member of staff as a Development Officer (Part-time) annual salary £25,220 pro rata.

### 6.3) Rural Support Case worker (provide technical expertise in terms of farm management issues and financial management)

#### Identification of need

As is demonstrated in sections four and five of this report financial pressures are the major issues that are causing pressure among clients who call Rural Support. 38% of respondents identified finance and debt as their primary cause for calling the helpline. 12% of callers also identified Farming specific as their main issue and this was followed by paperwork / government schemes at 10% and inheritance succession issues also at 10%. To understand these often complex and multifaceted issues in more depth these farm finance / debt issues have been analysed further and are shown in the chart below.

Figure 10 Farming Finance / Debt



While similar issues have been identified in many organisations in Canada, Australia and New Zealand their responses differ. The Rural Support Trusts employ casual staff with expertise in technical or economic issues. Through conversations with the Farm Stress Line director in Saskatchewan Canada the importance of having staff with this particular

expertise and knowledge was instrumental in meeting the needs of clients who may be experiencing serious pressures and stress.

### **Purpose**

Rural Support depends heavily on a small core number of volunteers who have farm business experience and technical knowledge that clients often require with regular longer term assistance needed. While these volunteers with specific skills have provided excellent support and extensive volunteering time- it is apparent that the organisation cannot solely depend on these specific volunteers for this function. This part-time position requires someone with farm business knowledge, farm financial management experience, technical knowledge as well as empathy for people in distress. This role would support in assisting the increasing numbers of clients who are experiencing serious financial pressures, managing major change or who may be considering or being forced to exit farming. The large majority of calls as demonstrated in our recent issues paper are related to debt and financial difficulties.

Some of our volunteers are retired DARD employees and have been with the charity for many years. By their own admission they may not be up to speed with current policies, regulations and procedures as someone who is currently working in this environment on a daily basis would be.

It would also be advantageous to have a member of staff with knowledge of changing rules and regulations based in the office to follow up issues on behalf of clients e.g. in relation to maps or paperwork. This person would be responsible for assisting in the training of volunteers, building relationships with individuals within agencies and stakeholders so that issues could be addressed more efficiently. Many of our clients come back to us after their first contact and it would be beneficial for us to have the resources to follow up on the progress of clients and provide more long term support.

Rural Support volunteers are the core of the organisation and will continue to be so in providing support to clients however the volunteers have said that it would be highly beneficial to have a staff member who could assist in provide training to volunteers, keep them up date with current DARD schemes, have knowledge of CAP reforms/compliance

issues , help in meeting with clients in providing support in cases that require more technical or financial management understanding.

### **Service Outline**

Rural Support will employ a Facilitator part-time (1 day per week / flexible). This individual will:

- provide support to clients who require assistance with technical or financial difficulties.
- work closely with staff and volunteers in providing support to clients
- provide training to volunteers on technical issues, CAP reforms and compliance issues
- have expertise of the farming business and an empathy for those in distress

### **Initial stage**

-The client will be contacted by telephone initially to discuss the possibility of receiving technical support.

-The staff member will briefly discuss with the client their current situation and the potential benefits that this technical support may have.

-The client will then be invited to attend an initial assessment appointment at Rural Support's office, in their own home or a convenient safe meeting point as at a specified time.

- During the initial appointment the client's suitability for the service will be assessed by the facilitator. The case worker will outline the process detailing the boundaries and expectations in relation to both the client and the support worker. The client will then have the opportunity to continue or terminate the session. (If the client does not wish to proceed with the technical support and feels that service is not appropriate then he/she may be signposted to another agency/ organisation/ professional.

- If the client wishes to proceed with the technical support service then the contract will be outlined and an evaluation will be completed by the technical support worker and this will initiate the process.

- The first session will last a maximum of one hour.

### **Outcomes and Monitoring**

During the facilitation process it is hoped that the support will have provided the client with a safe space to explore and get a greater understanding of his/ her problems and to develop enhanced coping mechanisms to make decisions and take action independently. This is not an advice service.

Feedback from individuals will be monitored by ensuring the client has the opportunity to provide feedback to the support worker and/ or organisation at any stage of the process and that the client is made aware of the complaints procedure. Formal feedback will be requested at the conclusion of the process. Overall outcomes of service delivery will be monitored using an evaluation method.

### **Administrative considerations**

Brief client notes will be taken by the facilitator and will be locked securely and stored at the Rural Support office according to data protection legislation. Personal data will be kept separate from identifying information (names and addresses).

Initially it will be one staff member providing the service. This would be subject to a review.

Recruitment costs and management requirements must be considered.

### **Budget considerations**

Total cost for this one year pilot is £10,000(part-time one day per week).

## Appendix 1 International Itinerary

### July 29<sup>th</sup> - August 10<sup>th</sup> 2013 - Brandon, Manitoba and Regina, Saskatchewan - Canada

- Farm and Rural Stress helpline - Meetings with Janet Smith (Program Manager), staff and volunteers.
- Local farmer and health expert - Nancy McPherson
- Rural Development Institute out of Brandon University- Dr Bill Ashton
- Manitoba Agriculture and Rural Initiative - Jill Falloon and colleagues
- Manitoba Farmers with Disabilities - Justin Morison and board members
- Farm mentor - Gerry Freisan
- Farm family visits (beef and cereals)
- Canadian Agricultural Safety Association - Glen Blahey
- Farm Stress line, Saskatchewan- Ken Offman (Former Director)
- Local Consultant and former director of Regina Family Services - Florence Driedger
- Local Farmers and formers staff member of Farm Stress Line - Bernie Jones
- Local Farmer and assisted in the operation of Directory of Services - Betty Abrey
- Mobile Crisis Centre in Regina – John McFadden and colleagues

### 20<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> November 2013 - Orange, New South Wales - Australia

Centre of Rural and Remote Mental health - Trevor Hazell, Jenn Caine, Claire Elligett and Robyn Munro.

- Rural Adversity Mental Health Programme
- Farm Link – Wellbeing and suicide prevention programme – SCARF – Suspect... Connect...Ask...Refer...Follow up.
- ABC – Act Belong Commit
- Farm visits (orchards and beef)

### 25<sup>th</sup> November – 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013 - New Zealand

- Institute for Rural Health - Brent Neilsen
- Health pit stops with farmers
- Ag-research Hamilton – Dr Neels Botha and Toni White
- Dairy NZ – Jenny Jago
- Rural Support Trust co-coordinator Hawkes Bay - Richard Kingston
- University of Auckland - Professor Willie Smith
- Rural Women (NZ) Noelien Holt
- Farm visits (Dairy, sheep, beef and fruit/vegetables)
- Federated Farmers – Mark Ross and Kara Lok
- Ministry of Primary Industries – Steven Kelly
- Canterbury University – Dr Gareth Cant and Dr Malcolm Campbell
- Ministry of Health – Edward Griffin
- Rural Support Trust, Canterbury – Doug Archibald (Chairperson)