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**Ref: 8862/25**

*To ask the Minister for Health for an update on the strategy to develop a suicide prevention intervention for farmers in Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the matter.*

Dear Deputy,

The HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) has been requested to respond to your question above, and this response speaks to multiple stakeholder initiatives in this space, including for example, HSE Health and Wellbeing.

**Background**

'Dying to Farm: Developing a Suicide Prevention Intervention for Farmers in Ireland' – is a project from the [UCD Agri Mental Health Group](#) and funded through HSE NOSP [grant scheme for collaborative research projects](#) on priority groups in Ireland, since 2020.

The aims of this research project were twofold;

- To investigate risk factors of mental health and suicide among farmers in Ireland.
- Identify acceptability/format/type of interventions to support mental health among the farming population in Ireland.

A [full summary of the research is available online](#). The HSE NOSP is also supportive of the current (Phase 2) of the 'Dying to Farm' project. This phase is to test the feasibility and effectiveness of a scalable mental health intervention for farmers in the Irish context. This has involved working with the UCD Agri Mental Health Group to co-create an evidence based six-session psychological intervention protocol – informed by principles of mindfulness, values clarification, and emotional

acceptance – for delivery by a clinical or counselling psychologist to farmers in the Irish context to reduce stress and promote psychological flexibility.

This will integrate elements of suicide awareness and prevention into the '[Farming Minds](#)' intervention. 'Farming Minds' will be piloted in Q1 of 2025 and is two-session training that will be delivered by psychologists to farm advisors. In line with advisor feedback, the training focuses on equipping advisors with skills to support farmer wellbeing while maintaining professional boundaries. The incorporation of suicide prevention training will support advisors to build their capacity and competence to have conversations on the topic of suicide should they become concerned for the welfare of a farmer. The training details real-world challenges faced by farmers and advisors.

The associated Stakeholder Steering Group is presently refining the intervention and assessing its feasibility, cultural competence, and outcomes to inform larger-scale implementation in the Irish agricultural sector.

'Farming Minds' is primarily funded by The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. It is a collaboration between the UCD Agri Mental Health Group interdisciplinary team, South East Technical University ([National Centre for Men's Health \(NCMH\)](#)) and 'On Feirm Ground'.

## **On Feirm Ground 2**

The Department of Health, Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine and HSE Health and Wellbeing have worked together in recent years to improve Farmer Health and Wellbeing. While it is acknowledged that not all farmers are men, there is inclusion of an action to improve farmer wellbeing in the recently published [HSE National Men's Health Action Plan, Healthy Ireland - Men, 2024 – 2028](#):

- Task 1.6 *Develop a plan to support farmer health and wellbeing, including the coordination of existing programmes (e.g. Farmers Have Hearts, Cardiovascular Health Programme, On Feirm Ground, FarmConnect, Farming Minds, FarMHealth) as well as the development of new programmes.*

This work will include in 2025 working to target farmers and farm families with priority health and wellbeing messaging and programmes where available. One of the programmes developed with the Men's Development Network supported by the Departments of Health, Agriculture Food and Marine and HSE Health and Wellbeing is the *On Feirm Ground 2* programme, launched at the National Ploughing Championships in 2023. This is a bespoke training initiative designed to equip

agricultural professionals and service providers with the skills and knowledge to support farmers' health and well-being.

A key focus is on building agricultural professionals' confidence to support and signpost farmers in relation to their overall health and wellbeing. Now in its second year, the programme has reached over 900 agricultural professionals and service providers. It aligns with Connecting for Life, Ireland's national suicide prevention strategy, by fostering early intervention and linking farmers with relevant support services.

I trust this information is useful for you. Please do revert if you require anything further.

Yours sincerely,

Mr John Meehan

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