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An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

Farmer Health Check Initiative – Outcomes and Recommendations



Danellen
Consulting



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1. Executive Summary

Overview of the Initiative

The Farmer Health Checks Initiative was launched to address significant health and wellbeing challenges faced by the farming community.

Funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM) under the Farm Safety, Health, and Wellbeing Projects scheme, this initiative operated from late September to mid-November 2024.

It provided on-site health checks at livestock marts and agri-events across the country, aiming to bridge healthcare access gaps and promote proactive health management.

Services included preventive health checks, a mental health questionnaire, and tailored educational resources for farmers, farm workers, and their families.

Key Findings and Results

The initiative exceeded its targets across the board, demonstrating measurable success in raising health awareness, encouraging proactive health behaviours, and improving access to essential health check information.

- ♥ **Direct Reach:** Delivered 1,224 health checks, surpassing the target of 1,000 by 22%, and distributed 12,089 health promotion packs, exceeding the target of 10,000 by 21%.
- ♥ **Health Risk Insights:** Nearly 50% of participants presented with elevated blood pressure or cholesterol levels, highlighting the need for accessible health checks, early intervention and preventative approaches.
- ♥ **Mental Health Support:** Farmers valued opportunities to discuss mental health concerns such as stress, anxiety, and depression, with initial data suggesting that anxiety levels may be higher than anticipated.
- ♥ **Participant Feedback:** Farmers appreciated the convenience and accessibility of on-site health checks and related services, which provided a supportive environment to discuss health concerns with professionals. Many reported plans to follow up with their GP or make lifestyle changes based on the findings.

Digital and Media Engagement

- ♥ A dedicated Farmer Health Check hub on the IFA website received 30,000 page views from 20,000 unique users, becoming the most visited section during the project period.
- ♥ Educational videos promoting the initiative achieved a combined total of over 200,000 views on YouTube, with high engagement and favourable ratings.
- ♥ Extensive media outreach, including radio advertisements and interviews, supported the project's visibility, reaching farming communities across Ireland.
- ♥ 7.2m individuals were reached through the digital media campaign with 14.8m impressions measured.

Challenges

The project's overwhelming demand highlighted the need for more resources – human, funding and time.

At some venues, queues exceeded capacity, and some farmers could not be accommodated due to time constraints. Additionally, limited time and funding meant not all areas could be covered.

Recommendations for Future Initiatives

- 1 Establish a National Farmer Health Check Programme:** Develop a longer-term programme based on this initiative's success and provide sustainable access to essential health checks for farmers, farm workers and farming families.
- 2 Enhanced Digital Engagement:** Build a centralised digital platform offering continuous health education and tailored resources, expanding outreach beyond in-person services.
- 3 Expand Holistic Services:** Include comprehensive assessments of cardiovascular and mental health, ensuring tailored interventions for farmers' specific needs.
- 4 Collaborative Stakeholder Forum:** Create a national rural health forum to bring together agricultural and healthcare stakeholders to raise awareness of farming related health issues and increased risk factors, rural specific challenges in terms of accessing support and promote positive health and wellbeing behaviours in the farming community.

Conclusions

- The Farmer Health Initiative has met its primary goals by delivering essential health checks and raising health awareness among farmers, particularly in relation to their increased risk levels.
- Findings reveal urgent health risks with nearly half of participants having elevated blood pressure and high cholesterol.
- Mental health support gaps also emerged, with many farmers valuing the opportunity to discuss stress and wellbeing in a supportive environment. Addressing these physical and mental health needs has broad implications for the farming sector and rural communities.
- The IFA Farmer Health Checks initiative has proven the value of accessible, community-based health check interventions. By identifying critical health risks, promoting preventive care, and holding open conversations about physical and mental health in a safe and compassionate environment, this initiative has laid the foundation for improving the health and wellbeing of the farming community.
- Sustained investment and multi-stakeholder collaboration will be essential to build on these successes, ensuring that farmers receive the ongoing care and support they need in a rapidly changing economic environment.
- IFA and the project partners wish to extend their sincere gratitude to the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM) for funding this vital initiative, allow them to support the health and wellbeing of farmers across the country.



2. Introduction

Background Information

Farmers face distinctive health challenges because of the nature of their work, social isolation, and geographic location.

Physical demands, including heavy lifting and repetitive tasks, contribute to a high prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders and chronic pain. According to Teagasc, nearly 60% of farmers over age 50 report experiencing ongoing physical discomfort due to their work.

Cardiovascular disease is also a significant health concern. According to Croí, cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in Ireland, accounting for approximately 36% of all deaths.

Skin cancer is a rising threat, with farmers being at a higher risk due to prolonged exposure to the sun. Skin cancer is now the most common cancer in Ireland, with over 13,000 cases diagnosed each year, according to HSE figures.

Mental health issues are equally prevalent, exacerbated by factors such as financial pressures, animal disease, increased levels of red tape, succession issues, and excessive stress made worse by long working hours, and rural isolation. Studies by the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) indicate that over 30% of farmers report symptoms of stress and depression.

According to Teagasc, 30% of farmers report experiencing mental health difficulties, with isolation and loneliness being major contributors in what is being called an epidemic of loneliness globally by the World Health Agency.

The National Suicide Research Foundation highlights that rural men are 1.5 times more likely to die by suicide than their urban counterparts.

Research by the Health Service Executive (HSE) underscores that all of these issues are compounded by limited access to healthcare services in rural areas, resulting in delayed diagnoses, treatment and support.

Objectives of the Initiative

The Farmer Health Check Initiative was designed with three key objectives:

- 1 Health Access and Screening:** To provide comprehensive health check assessments, including checks for cardiovascular health, cholesterol, diabetes risk, and mental wellbeing.
- 2 Preventive Health Education:** To deliver preventive education around specific health risks, including cancer prevention including prostate, smoking cessation, alcohol risks and addiction awareness, musculoskeletal health, and managing work-related stress.
- 3 Community Engagement and Trust:** To foster engagement within the farming community by offering practical, accessible information and promoting the importance of seeking, as well as where to access support.



3. Methodology

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to assess the project's effectiveness.

Quantitative data from health metrics and attendance records provided measurable outcomes, while qualitative data from feedback and one-to-one interviews offered insights into participants' experiences and perceptions of the initiative.

Data Collection Methods

- ♥ **Quantitative Data:** Health screenings (blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose levels etc.), attendance at events, and distribution records for health materials.
- ♥ **Qualitative Data:** Interviews with farmers to gather detailed perspectives on the initiative's impact.
- ♥ **Specialist Input:** Healthcare professionals provided insights on clinical outcomes and validated the accuracy of health assessments.

Analysis Methods

- ♥ Data was analysed using a combination of statistical analysis for quantitative metrics and thematic analysis for qualitative feedback.

Limitations

- ♥ Some constraints included logistical and practical challenges at certain locations, and demand exceeding supply across most regions.
- ♥ Farmers were encouraged to participate in all available health checks, though not all chose to do so, with some also not needing certain checks having recently been tested via their own GP.
- ♥ Nevertheless, sufficient data was collected across each check type to ensure statistically significant findings, allowing for reliable conclusions to be drawn.



4. Project Implementation Overview

Timeline and Activities

- ♥ **Project Launch:** Soft launch at the National Ploughing Championships in September 2024, generating initial awareness and engagement and official launch week commencing 23rd September.
- ♥ **Service Delivery:** Comprehensive health screenings, preventive workshops, and mental health support provided weekly at approximately 20 marts and agri-events across the country.
- ♥ **Stakeholder Engagement:** Partnerships with Croí, the HSE, and ICOS Marts facilitated streamlined service delivery and ensured that the process was tailored to meet the needs of the farmers.

Health Checks Conducted

As part of the initiative, each participating farmer was offered a series of health checks designed to assess key indicators of physical and mental wellbeing.

These included:

- 1 Blood Pressure and Pulse Check
- 2 Cholesterol Measurement
- 3 Blood Glucose Level
- 4 Waist Circumference Measurement
- 5 Mental Health Questionnaire

Implementation

A dedicated team, including representatives from the IFA, the Farm Family and Social Affairs Committee, and the Croí health team, visited 20 locations nationwide, beginning with the National Ploughing Championship on 17th Sept and concluding in Macroom, Co. Cork, on 9th Nov.

Farmers were warmly invited to participate, though in some cases, gentle encouragement was needed to ensure their involvement in these important health checks.

Steps of the Health Check Process

- ♥ **Consent and Initial Questionnaire:** Participants completed a consent form (see appendices) and responded to a general health questionnaire, which included an anonymous mental health questionnaire.
- ♥ **Health Measurements with a Croí Nurse:** Each farmer met with a Croí Nurse to undergo checks for blood pressure, pulse, and waist circumference.
 - » **Additional Tests:** Based on specific criteria, farmers were invited to have their cholesterol and glucose levels checked.
 - » **Criteria for Additional Tests:** Farmers who hadn't had a cholesterol check within the past six months or those recently started on statin medication were prioritised for this check.
- ♥ **Personal Health Record Card:** Each participant received a personal record card detailing their results, along with tailored follow-up advice. Farmers requiring immediate intervention were provided with additional support and guidance.
- ♥ **Educational Resources:** Participants received printed resources covering blood pressure and cholesterol management, dietary guidance, smoking and alcohol cessation, cancer prevention including prostate related disease, mental and emotional health and information on risk factor reduction.
- ♥ They were also signposted to further resources across the health and voluntary sector, including Croí Connects, Croí's free nurse support helpline, webinars, and virtual chats.

FREE HEALTH CHECKS VENUES & DATES

Visit ifa.ie/healthcheck to find out when our mobile health unit will be in your area.

Supported by **Croí** Fighting Heart Disease & Stroke

Funded by An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Operational Flow and Team Engagement

- ♥ The average health check, including all tests, took approximately 20 minutes, though complex cases required additional time.
- ♥ High demand often resulted in wait times, which were managed effectively by the IFA Farm Family and Social Affairs Committee members and Croí Co-ordinators.
- ♥ Mart and event staff across all venues were very helpful and available to assist with set up and a queueing system.
- ♥ The team was well received at each location, with many participants expressing gratitude for the critical service provided.
- ♥ Project Team members engaged proactively with farmers in line, assisted with questionnaires, provided project information, and offered updates to ensure a smooth and welcoming process.



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5. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Results

Participation Metrics

- ♥ **Health Screenings Conducted:** Over 20 agri-events and marts took part in the Farmer Health Checks Initiative across Ireland as indicated in the map and table below.
- ♥ 1,224 farmers and farm workers received health checks and related health promotion packs, with 85% of participants aged 45 or older.

Locations from Sep 17th – Nov 9th 2024

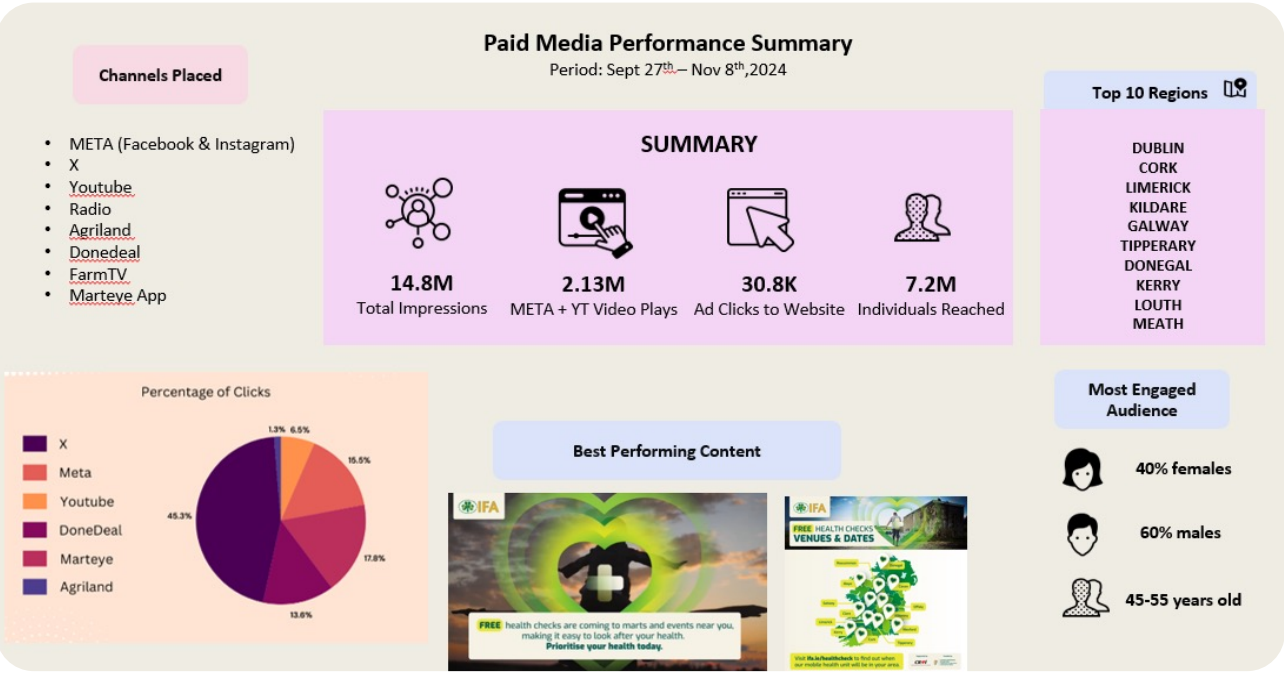
LOCATION	FARM CHECKS COMPLETED
Balla - Mayo	79
Birr - Offaly	52
Corrin - Cork	52
Ennis - Clare	67
Gort - Galway	51
Kilmallock - Limerick	57
Ploughing Championships	321
Thurles - Tipperary	59
Ballyjamesduff - Cavan	82
Castleisland – Kerry	58
Donegal	54
Enniscorthy - Wexford	58
Kilkenny	75
Macroom - Cork	43
Roscommon	47
Tuam - Galway	69

Health Metrics

- ♥ **Cardiovascular Health:** 40% of participants presented with elevated blood pressure levels, prompting follow-up care and educational resources on heart health.
- ♥ **Diabetes and Glucose Monitoring:** Elevated blood glucose levels were noted in 20% of screenings, demonstrating the need for proactive diabetes management.
- ♥ **Mental Wellbeing:** The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale was used to assess mental health in 506 participants, showing an average of 53.8% level of wellbeing which is in line for the average in the UK for people over 45 years. Scale attached in appendices.
- ♥ **Smoking:** 79 participants (6.5%) were smokers and were provided with information on smoking cessation and risk factors associated with smoking.

Engagement Metrics

- ♥ **Distribution of Health Materials:** 12,083 health information packs were distributed, both digitally and hard copy, offering information on managing high-risk health conditions and preventive care.
- ♥ **Digital Engagement:** The social media campaign reached over 7.2m individuals, while the IFA website saw a 20% increase in traffic during the project period. Further details are in the table below and included in the appendices.





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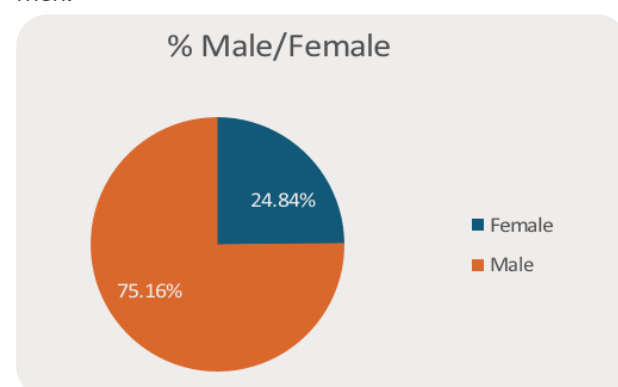


6. Analysis of Health Check Findings

Findings

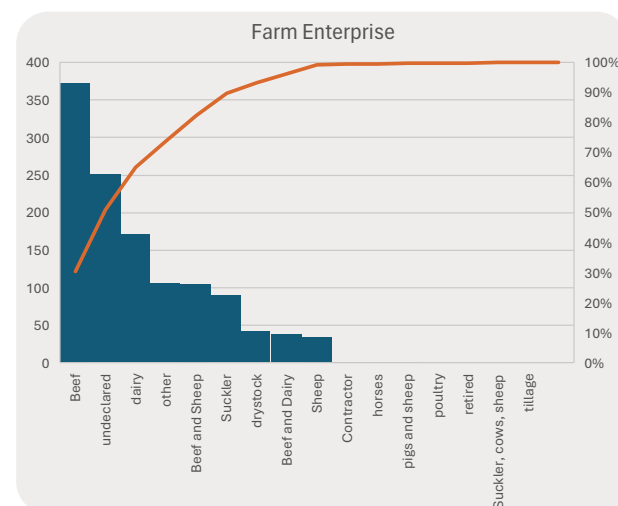
Total Participants and Demographics

A total of 1,224 individuals participated in the health checks, with an average age of 62.5 years. As expected for the farming community, most participants were men.



Farm Enterprise Split

- ♥ The table below illustrates the types of farm enterprises owned or operated by participants in the initiative.
- ♥ Of those who disclosed their enterprise type, 30% were involved in beef farming, 14% in dairy, and 9% in sheep farming.
- ♥ 20% of participants chose not to declare the type of farm enterprise they were associated with.



Blood Pressure Screening

Frequency of Prior Blood Pressure Checks

- ♥ 58% of participants had their blood pressure measured by a healthcare professional within the past 12 months.
- ♥ However, 39% had not been checked in over a year, and 2% had never had a blood pressure check, underscoring the importance of accessible, opportunistic screenings delivered in familiar settings.

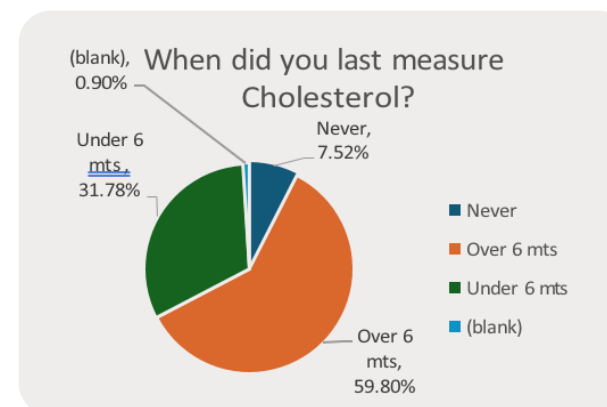
Blood Pressure Findings

- ♥ 41% (506 individuals) recorded elevated blood pressure readings above the general population target of 140/90 (with an optimal target of 120/80), suggesting a high prevalence of potentially uncontrolled hypertension in this group – requiring follow-up with a GP.
- ♥ Of particular concern, 4.5% (23 participants) exhibited dangerously high blood pressure levels (above 180/110) requiring immediate emergency care with a number being red flagged to hospital.

Cholesterol Screening

Frequency of Prior Cholesterol Checks

- ♥ Within the sample, 729 participants (59.5%) had their cholesterol checked during this initiative.
- ♥ Among them, 31.78% had been tested in the last six months, while 59.8% had not been checked in over six months. Notably, 7.2% (92 individuals) had never had their cholesterol checked.
- ♥ A significant finding is that 40% (487 participants) were unaware of their most recent cholesterol level, highlighting a need for greater awareness and routine monitoring in this population.



Cholesterol and Blood Pressure Risks

- ♥ Of those tested for both cholesterol and blood pressure (729 individuals), 18% (135 participants) presented with both elevated cholesterol (5 mmol/L or above) and high blood pressure, greatly increasing their risk for stroke and cardiovascular events.
- ♥ Nearly half (47%, or 577 individuals) of those who underwent cholesterol testing displayed elevated cholesterol levels above the target, indicating substantial unmanaged high cholesterol within this community.

Blood Glucose Levels

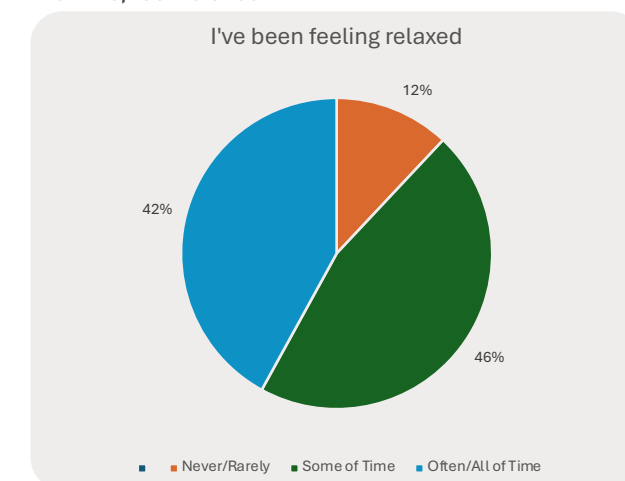
- ♥ Blood glucose testing was conducted for 60% of participants (729), with an average reading of 6.1 mmol/L, which just falls within recommended guidelines for non-fasting blood glucose levels.
- ♥ 25% of participants measured over 7 mmol/L.
- ♥ Blood glucose levels can be raised for various reason including whether the individual was fasting or non-fasting.
- ♥ Readings, taking into consideration other health check information, helped the healthcare team to make recommendation for further support or checks when required.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

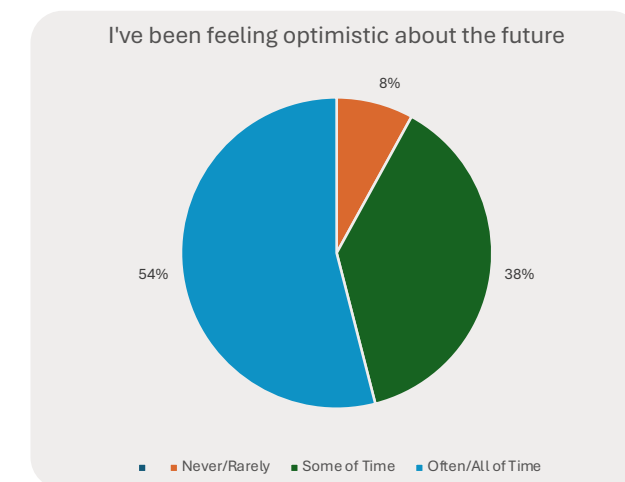
- ♥ The initiative helped reduce stigma around mental health, encouraging open conversations on stress, anxiety, and depression. Farmers found the mental health assessments beneficial, with many stating that it was the first time they had openly discussed their mental wellbeing.
- ♥ The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale was used to assess mental health in 506 participants, showing an average of 53.8% level of wellbeing (Mean = 53.8, SD = 11.3).

Drilling down into the data areas of note are below:

58% of farmers surveyed never, rarely or only some of the time, feel relaxed.



46% are never, rarely or only some of the time optimistic about the future.





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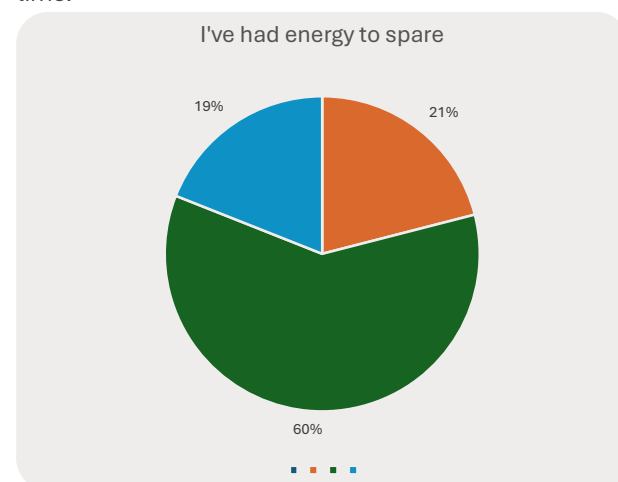
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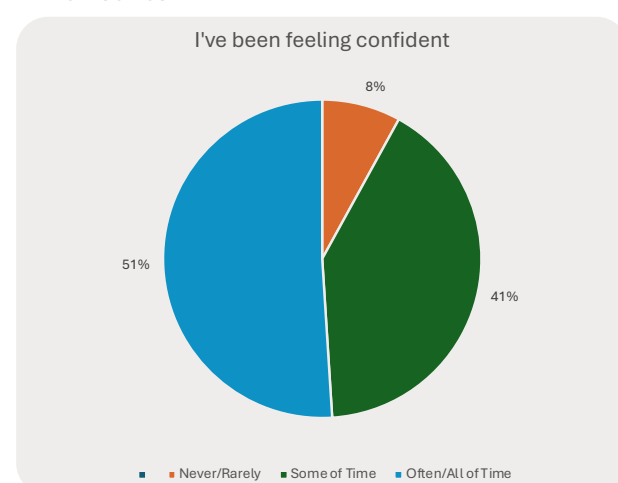
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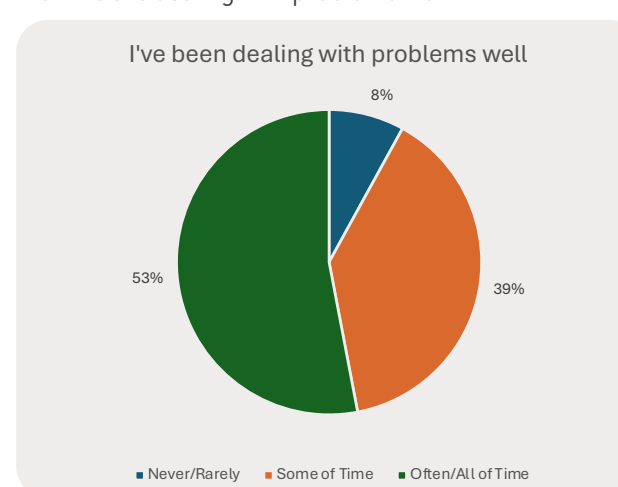
21% rarely or never have any energy to spare with a further 60% only having energy to spare some of the time.



49% never, rarely or only some of the time feel confident in themselves



39% feel that they either never, rarely or only some of the time are dealing with problems well.



♥ Challenges in relation to mental and emotional wellbeing impact on several factors for farmers, their families and the wider industry – health, relationships, farm business success and sustainability, farm accident levels and incidences of suicide and suicidal ideation.

♥ The WEMWBS provided valuable data on farmers' stress levels, enabling the team to offer tailored support.

Follow-Up Recommendations

- ♥ 11% (136 individuals) were advised to seek immediate follow-up with their GP or visit A&E.
- ♥ 37% (448 individuals) were recommended to follow up with their GP within one month.
- ♥ 40% (492 individuals) were advised to schedule a follow-up with their GP within a year.

Service User Feedback

On-Site Feedback

- ♥ A series of on-site interviews were held with patients/service users.
- ♥ Most farmers spoken to expressed appreciation for the convenience of having health checks available on-site, noting that they often prioritise their work over personal health appointments.
- ♥ Delivery Teams and Co-ordinators observed that a significant number of farmers seemed surprised by certain health metrics (such as blood pressure or cholesterol levels), with several mentioning they had not had a check-up in years.
- ♥ Several farmers shared that the health checks encouraged them to consider making lifestyle changes and discussed plans to follow up with their own doctors for further evaluation.
- ♥ There was a positive reception to the friendly and approachable manner of the health staff, which seemed to make farmers feel more comfortable discussing health concerns.
- ♥ Overall, the health checks appeared to foster a sense of community care, with farmers expressing gratitude for the initiative and for recognising the unique demands of their work on their health.

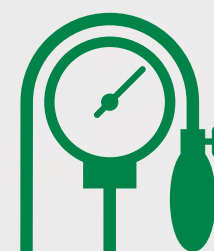
Feedback Post Checks:

- ♥ A series of post-check interviews were held with service users throughout the life of the project. (Questions asked are included in the appendices).

Standout Moments from Project Delivery

Several impactful examples noted below illustrate the significant impact of accessible health checks and the trust built during the short period of the project.

These examples are provided to illustrate the need for this type of health checks programme in rural areas and the strong engagement and trust from farmers when healthcare is made available in familiar, supportive settings where they are already comfortable.



Critical Intervention in Donegal

A 55-year-old farmer presented in Donegal with dangerously high blood pressure (195/123) and was advised to contact his GP urgently. Initially given an appointment several days later, a Croí nurse contacted the GP directly, explaining her findings. He was seen within hours and started on medication immediately. Remarkably, this man did not recall ever having had his blood pressure or cholesterol checked.

Immediate Response in Balla

In Balla, a farmer who had not checked his blood pressure in 4-5 years had an alarming reading of 198/100 and a blood sugar level over 20. He was immediately advised to contact Westdoc, where he secured a same-day appointment. This occurred on a Saturday, underscoring the importance of accessible healthcare during non-standard hours.



Social Engagement in Macroom

Health checks were not only valued but became social gatherings. Farmers were willing to wait and chat, creating a supportive atmosphere. In Macroom, four couples over 60 travelled for two hours and stayed overnight locally to attend the mart specifically for health checks, reflecting both the demand for these services and the sense of community they fostered.


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Sample outcomes:

I hadn't been to my GP in over a year. I am 64 and I know I should have gone sooner! When I attended the conference in Kilkenny, I availed of a heart health check offered by Croí & IFA. I was shocked to discover that my blood pressure was very elevated, and my cholesterol was very high too. They referred me urgently to my GP for review. I'm now on medications for both blood pressure and cholesterol—I've done a bit more reading since I spoke that day with Norah, the lovely nurse who talked me through the importance of 'knowing my numbers' and the importance of managing blood pressure and cholesterol, both risk factors for heart disease and stroke. I also had an ECG, because I had some palpitations, thankfully it was normal. I'm being monitored to ensure my blood pressure and cholesterol reach target guidelines. I'm delighted I availed of the health check; otherwise, I wouldn't have known about these issues. I'm now actively advising my friends and family to do the same.

Female, 64, Co Cork

I've never been one for going to the doctors. At 69 years old, I wasn't on any medications and felt just fine. But one day at the mart, I decided to take advantage of a health check offered by Croí & IFA. To my surprise, they found my blood pressure was dangerously high, and my blood sugars were very elevated. They referred me to the doctor, and I've since started medication to manage my blood pressure. We're still looking into the high blood sugars, and I've got another appointment next week. I'm really thankful they had the health checks at the mart; otherwise, I would've never known about these issues. I'm glad I attended that day, and now I'm looking forward to celebrating my 70th birthday soon.

Male, 70, Co Mayo

I attended the health checks in Ennis mart. My cholesterol was raised on the day, which was a surprise, I have taken the advice on board from the Croí nurse. I have started to do some exercise, walking, and I have reduced the number of sweets and biscuits, that I eat in a day. I have started to make sure I eat more fruit, vegetables and having a healthy breakfast. I have cut out the fry for everyday breakfast and will only have it on a Saturday or Sunday from now on. Since seeing the nurse and beginning to make changes I am feeling much fitter and healthier. I have only just started with the changes, but I am determined to keep them going. I am waiting on my bloods to come back with my cholesterol results but hopefully they will not be too bad. If they are I know what I need to do and I can follow up with the free helplines recommended anytime I need a chat.

Male, 45, Cork

I recently attended a community health check offered by Croí heart and stroke charity & IFA. During the check, they found that my blood pressure was elevated. They advised me to see my GP urgently, which I did that very same day. Now, my blood pressure is being monitored closely. I had a 24-hour monitor completed and am currently waiting on the results, along with my blood tests. I'm grateful and very appreciative of the health checks. They were so accessible and really prompted me to follow up and get to know a bit more about looking after myself and my heart. Without chatting to Caroline the Croí nurse, I might not have realised there was an issue. It's made a big difference, and I'm glad I took the opportunity to attend.

Male, 55, Roscommon

I recently attended a health check at Balla mart. It was great because I could go in my farming gear, which made me feel comfortable. During the check, they found that my blood pressure was elevated. They referred me to my GP, and after seeing the doctor, I'm now being monitored for my blood pressure and had some blood tests taken. I've started making some of the recommended changes and I have to say I'm already feeling better because of them! I've begun exercising, cut down on salt, and reduced the amount of alcohol I consume. I've even lost 6 pounds so great incentive to keep going. I'm really grateful for the health check since I hadn't been to my GP in about 15 years. It was important to me that I could get a health check at the mart while in my everyday farming clothes. Without it, I might not have known about my health issues.

Male, 66, Sligo



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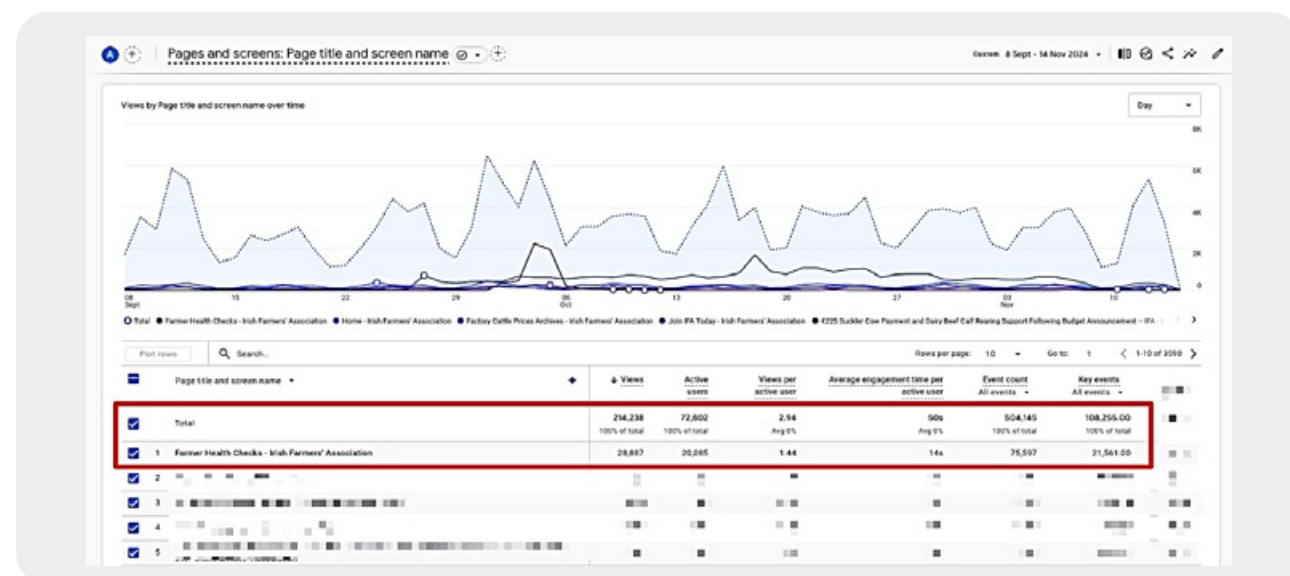


7. Health Information Dissemination and Outreach

- ♥ As part of the Irish Farmer Health Checks Initiative's commitment to increasing health awareness, a multi-channel outreach strategy was implemented.
- ♥ This included digital information on the IFA website, direct communications with IFA members, and collaborative distribution of health materials with stakeholders.
- ♥ Additionally, social media campaigns, a series of radio advertisements and traditional media interviews were conducted across the region to extend the initiative's reach and impact.
- ♥ Video link to visual of a sample of social media activity here.

• <https://youtu.be/wAAASToHHQI?si=6PH-iw8WfAru98bd>

Digital and Direct Communication Channels



- ♥ **IFA Website** Health-related information, including educational articles on topics like cardiovascular health, mental wellbeing, and preventive care, was made accessible through the IFA's website.
- ♥ To enhance outreach, a dedicated Farmer Health Check page was created on 6th September 6 and launched on 8th September: <https://www.ifa.ie/healthcheck/>
- ♥ Between 8th September and 14th November, the Health Check hub became the most visited section on the IFA site, with approximately 30,000 page views by 20,000 unique users.
- ♥ In addition, there were 922 downloads of health check resources, indicating high engagement with the content.

Page title and screen class	Views	Active users	Views per active user	Average engagement time per active user	Event count	Key events
Total	214,364	72,847	2.94	50s	3,846	108,304.00
1 Farmer Health Checks - Irish Farmers' Association	28,892	20,085	1.44	14s	922	21,544.00

♥ YouTube Analytics

Two promotional videos were hosted on YouTube, one with a voiceover and one without, both of which quickly became the most-watched videos on the IFA's channel.

♥ Video Without Voiceover

- ♥ Views: 130,000
- ♥ Total Watch Time: 970 hours
- ♥ Engagement: 290 likes with a 92% favourability rating
- ♥ Audience Demographics: 55% male, 45% female, primarily in the 35–44 age bracket

♥ Video With Voiceover

- ♥ Views: 82,400
- ♥ Total Watch Time: 572 hours
- ♥ Engagement: 110 likes with a 94% favourability rating
- ♥ Audience Demographics: Similar to the first video, with a 55% male and 45% female viewership, mostly aged 35–44

Page title and screen class	Views	Active users	Views per active user	Average engagement time per active user	Event count	Key events
Total	214,364	72,847	2.94	50s	3,846	108,304.00
1 Farmer Health Checks - Irish Farmers' Association	28,892	20,085	1.44	14s	922	21,544.00

- ♥ **Direct Member Communication:** IFA members received targeted information through newsletters and email communications, ensuring essential health content reached farmers directly.

- ♥ 21,807 pack downloads were issued via email with 9,873 opened and read through this route.

- ♥ IFA's extensive reach and robust network made it uniquely positioned to connect with and inform a large audience. With 940 branches nationwide, the organisation has direct access to farmers and rural communities across the country. Through county-level representatives, committees, and a strong media presence, including local and national radio interviews, newsletters, and social media platforms, IFA effectively disseminated information and increased engagement. This network ensured that initiatives like the Farmer Health Check Project can reach a wide audience quickly, creating a significant impact in promoting awareness and participation.

- ♥ County Chairs, the IFA President, and members of the Farm Family Committee have amplified the initiative through local and national radio interviews, emphasising the importance of health awareness for farmers. By engaging directly with members at the grassroots level and using its well-established branch structure, IFA has effectively spread the message, encouraged participation, and highlighted the benefits of early health interventions for the farming community.



Traditional and Social Media Campaigns

- ♥ **Radio Outreach:** A series of advertisements and interviews aired across multiple regional radio stations, aiming to reach a wide rural audience with messaging on the importance of regular health checks. *Example:* Radio interview with farmer who is a cancer survivor talking about the importance of health checks for farmers. **Video**
- ♥ **Media Interviews:** Project representatives and health professionals participated in interviews to discuss the initiative and share health tips, encouraging a proactive approach to farmer health. *Example above:* Feature in Tuam Herald re Initiative.
- ♥ Full report on coverage across various media sites is included in the appendices.

Health and Wellbeing Talks and Outreach Events

- ♥ In response to the high demand generated by the Farmer Health Checks Initiative, additional health and wellbeing talks were held for approximately 150 IFA members, including the Women in Agriculture Conference, though these were not part of the original project.
- ♥ Led by an IFA healthcare expert with extensive farming knowledge, these sessions provided direct engagement on essential health topics affecting the farming community in Ireland, encouraging proactive health management and offering farmers a supportive environment to discuss their health concerns.
- ♥ The events included interactive Q&A sessions and distributed resources for further reading and follow-up care. These included:
 - » IFA Kerry AGM Meeting – 100
 - » Waterford County Executive – 100
 - » West Clare Mental Health Association – 30
 - » IFA Sligo Executive Meeting – 80
 - » Women in Agriculture 2024 – 600
- ♥ Overall, these events reached a further 1,000 people and helped to promote the objectives of the project as well as creating an energised conversation about health and wellbeing among the farming community.

Tuam Herald

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Keeping farmers' hearts in check

By Mark Walsh

FREE health checks that normally cost €200 were provided at Tuam Mart on Monday of last week.

The Croí heart and stroke charity, based in Galway city, have joined forces with the IFA to run the 'Farmer Health Checks Programme' in 15 marts nationwide across six weeks for the month of October and into early November.

The first health check clinic was done in Ballyjamesduff in Cavan on October 1. Tuam Mart was the third stop on the list, where the 'Saw Doctors' Leo Moran and Gailway foot, hailer Eileen Leonard were on hand to provide their support to the pilot programme.

Minister of State Martin Heydon has approved funding worth €200,000 for the initiative.

Teresa Roche, Chairwoman of the IFA's Farm Family Committee, was at the National Ploughing Championships for the launch of the Farmer Health Checks Programme and was also in Tuam last week.

"The checks are being done on blood pressure, cholesterol, mental health and other matters related to farmers' health," said Teresa Roche, from Abbey in South Galway.

"We'll be at the Women and Agriculture Conference next week (Thursday October 24) as well."

It's just great that we've been able to partner with an organisation based in the West of Ireland such as Croí. They are doing research on the prevention of cardiovascular disease."

Participants in the health check clinic in Tuam received a health information and advice pack. The Farmer Health Checks Programme concludes at Macroom Mart in Cork on Saturday November 2.



TUAM Mart Manager Marion Devane, Walter Keady, Mart Committee and Teresa Roche, Chair of the IFA Farm Family and Social Affairs Committee, at the Croí Farmer Health Checks at Tuam Mart.



AUCTIONEER Peter McDonagh, Pollinore and Enda Monaghan IFA, Caherlistrane at the Croí Farmer Health Checks at Tuam Mart.



MADELINE Rabbits, Croí with Eddie Dembo, Athlery at the Croí Farmer Health Checks at Tuam Mart.



MICHAEL Murphy, Moneen having his blood pressure checked by Caroline Dermody, Croí at the Croí Farmer Health Checks at Tuam Mart.



CAROLINE Dermody, Croí checking Joseph Heaverty's blood pressure at the Croí Farmer Health Checks at Tuam Mart. PHOTOS: JACQUETTA



8. Challenges and Lessons Learned

Challenges Faced

- ♥ A key challenge in delivering this initiative was managing expectations among an overwhelming demand that exceeded available resources.
- ♥ At each venue and event attended, queues of farmers and farm workers waited for health checks, and regrettably, some had to be turned away due to time constraints.
- ♥ As word spread, additional marts and regions expressed strong interest in hosting the project. However, limited time and budget required difficult decisions, resulting in some areas being left disappointed.
- ♥ Managing these expectations was essential as we balanced the enthusiasm for the initiative with logistical realities.
- ♥ Due to the short nature of the project and the significant targets to be met, liaising with stakeholders outside of logistical and practical matters was a challenge at times.
- ♥ Once the information in this report is released by DAFM meetings will take place with stakeholders to discuss the outcomes of the project and next steps to bring key partners together and build in the momentum created by the initiative.

Lessons Learned

- ♥ The success of the mobile health checks model highlights the need for adaptable community focused healthcare focused on meeting farmers where they are – both logistically and emotionally.
- ♥ Flexibility in scheduling and increased use of digital resources can improve participation. Positive and co-ordinated collaboration with local stakeholders and consistent communication is essential.



9. Recommendations

Key Findings and Insights

High Prevalence of Health Risks

- ♥ Nearly 50% of participants were flagged for elevated blood pressure and high cholesterol. This statistic reflects the broader health challenges faced by farmers across Ireland.
- ♥ The findings emphasise the need for accessible health checks and ongoing outreach in rural farming communities.

Importance of Education and Awareness

- ♥ Significant health risks in this group underscore the urgent need for education on blood pressure, cholesterol and mental health.
- ♥ Providing accessible information and resources can help farmers to:
 - » Recognise the importance of regular health check-ups.
 - » Proactively manage their health, reducing the likelihood of serious health events.
 - » Encourage farmers to open up in relation to their emotional health and the pressures and stresses they face.

Gaps in Healthcare Engagement

- ♥ Although many farmers engage with healthcare services, gaps in meaningful health interactions remain, demonstrated by the number of farmers who have never had their blood pressure taken, despite the average age of participants being over 45 years.
- ♥ Farmers often lack opportunities for in-depth conversations about their health.
- ♥ During the screenings, farmers valued the interaction with a nurse, as it provided a supportive environment to voice concerns and ask questions and opportunities to explore their health needs and fears openly.

Recommendations for Future Initiatives

Irish Farmer Health Checks Programme

- ♥ Continuing this project, develop an ongoing Farmer Health Check Programme for Ireland and establish partnerships to facilitate ongoing health checks nationally.
- ♥ The Farmer Health Initiative and Northern Ireland's Farm Family Health Checks Programme both address farmers' health needs by providing accessible, on-site services.
- ♥ Northern Ireland's programme, delivered by the Department of Health and Northern Trust, has successfully improved health outcomes over the past 10 years, with increased early detection of cardiovascular issues and diabetes and greater awareness of mental health, reducing stigma.
- ♥ The initiative similarly offered health screenings but adds education on high-risk areas like cancer prevention and addiction.
- ♥ It also incorporated mental health assessments (SWEMWBS) and digital resources, creating a holistic, community-focused approach for sustainable farmer wellbeing.
- ♥ The model is now here and has been proven to be very useful in a relatively short timeframe. There is an opportunity to build on the results and continue the valuable work that has been started.



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Enhanced Digital Engagement

- ♥ Use digital platforms to provide ongoing education and support for farmers unable to attend in-person events.
- ♥ Create a dedicated website or linked site to create a one-stop shop for healthcare and related information.
- ♥ Using a collaborative approach bring stakeholders together on a regular basis to widen the conversation around the importance of health and wellbeing to the future of farming in Ireland.

Expand Holistic Health Engagement

- ♥ Introduce a comprehensive evaluation of overall well-being in the farming community, especially related to cardiovascular health and mental health.
- ♥ Conduct in-depth one-on-one interviews with a subset of participants to gain further insights.
- ♥ Enhance Mental Health Support
- ♥ Investigate the mental health impact on physical wellbeing more fully and how it affects efficient and safe farming practices on Ireland's farms.
- ♥ Address observations from the Croí team that suggest anxiety levels may be higher than initial assessments indicated among the target sample.
- ♥ Offer tailored mental health resources to address potential underlying anxiety and stress factors in the farming community.

Community Impact and Building Resilience

Strengthen Community Connections

- ♥ Continue the significant impact of this project by funding a continuation project to bring health check services and/or related health and wellbeing campaigns to farmers within their daily environments.
- ♥ Reinforce the social aspect of the farming community, enhancing trust and the value of peer-to-peer support around health and wellbeing.

Establish a Stakeholder Initiative to Focus on Health and Wellbeing in Rural and Farming Communities

- ♥ To further strengthen the impact of health and wellbeing initiatives in Ireland's rural and farming communities, a dedicated Stakeholder Initiative should be considered.
- ♥ Models such as the Northern Ireland Agri-Rural Health Forum and similar global initiatives would unite key stakeholders—including agricultural organisations, agri-industry leaders, healthcare providers, government bodies, and rural community leaders—to address unique health challenges in rural areas. The forum could:
 - » **Promote Collaborative Solutions:** Build partnerships among stakeholders to identify and address health priorities specific to rural communities.
 - » **Raise Awareness:** Through coordinated campaigns, bring greater public attention to the physical and mental health needs of rural populations.
 - » **Support Policy and Resource Development:** Advocate for improved policies, funding, and resources that recognise the unique pressures faced by farming communities.
 - » **Enhance Service Accessibility:** Facilitate the delivery of mobile health services, mental health support, and wellness education to isolated areas.
 - » **Build Resilience and Community Engagement:** Encourage a proactive approach to health within rural communities, creating a supportive network that cares about farmers and their family's health.

10. Conclusion

The Farmer Health Initiative successfully met its primary objectives, addressing the pressing health and wellbeing challenges faced by Ireland's farming community.

By delivering accessible, community-based health checks and health education, the initiative effectively bridged gaps in healthcare access and delivered a proactive approach to health management within rural and farming communities.

The evaluation results highlight both the successes and the areas requiring further attention to ensure the long-term sustainability of farmer health and wellbeing in Ireland.

Key Achievements

- ♥ **Improved Health Awareness:** The initiative increased health literacy among participants, providing vital information about key health risks such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and mental health issues. Nearly half of participants were identified as having elevated cardiovascular risk factors, prompting further medical follow-up and lifestyle changes.
- ♥ **Accessible Preventive Health Services:** Health checks were provided to 1,224 farmers and farm workers across 20 marts and agri-events, surpassing the project target. Additionally, over 12,000 health promotion packs were distributed, ensuring the dissemination of critical health information to the wider farming community.
- ♥ **Enhanced Mental Health Engagement:** Mental health support was a vital component of the initiative, encouraging farmers to openly discuss stress, anxiety, and depression. Many participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to address emotional wellbeing in a supportive setting.
- ♥ **Community Engagement:** The project created a sense of trust and connection within rural communities, with participants highlighting the convenience and value of the health checks being delivered in the marts and agricultural events.

Lessons Learned

The initiative underscored the need for sustained and scalable health checks tailored to the unique needs of the farming community. High demand at events often exceeded capacity, indicating the need for increased resources, time, and funding to expand the reach and maximise the impact.

Additionally, the success of the project demonstrated the importance of working together and developing further collaboration between stakeholders.

Recommendations

- ♥ **Sustained Programme Delivery:** Develop a long-term Farmer Health Check Programme to provide regular health services across rural Ireland, modelled on the success of the initiative and similar programs in Northern Ireland.
- ♥ **Holistic Health Services:** Expand the scope of services to include more comprehensive physical and mental health assessments, addressing both immediate and long-term health needs.
- ♥ **Digital Engagement and Education:** Build a centralised digital platform to extend the reach of health education, offering farmers access to resources and support beyond in-person events.
- ♥ **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Establish a national rural health forum to unite stakeholders in addressing farmer specific health challenges and access to support services.
- ♥ **Impact on Rural Ireland:** The initiative's results demonstrate how addressing farmers' physical and mental health needs can have far-reaching benefits. Improved health outcomes directly contribute to increased productivity and stability within the agricultural sector, benefiting Ireland's rural economy and food security. Healthier farmers are better equipped to run more sustainable farm businesses, reduce healthcare costs, and maintain resilience in the face of the challenges ahead.


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Call to Action

The success of the Farmer Health Initiative provides a clear roadmap on how to support farmers to develop positive health behaviours to improve their health. Continued investment and collaborative efforts are essential to build on the momentum created by this project.

Final Acknowledgment

The IFA, Croí, and project partners extend their sincere gratitude to the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM) for funding this vital initiative. Through this support, the health and wellbeing of farmers have been prioritised and improved.

To build on the success of this initiative, sustained investment is essential. By funding the expansion of the project, the government can support early detection, reduce long-term healthcare costs, and empower farmers to manage their health.

Integrating holistic physical and mental health services strengthens rural resilience, improves quality of life, and supports the longevity of Ireland's agricultural sector.

With financial backing Ireland could create a proactive, accessible health checks programme with ongoing collaboration with healthcare and industry stakeholder and dedicated resources that ensures farmers receive the vital care and support they need to thrive in a healthier farming community.

11. Appendices

- ♥ CROI/IFA signed Service Level Agreement
- ♥ Heart Health Check Consent Form
- ♥ Health Promotion Pack and examples of leaflets
- ♥ IFA Data Retention Policy
- ♥ Farmer Health Checks Protocol
- ♥ IFA Health Checks Feedback Form
- ♥ IFA Farmer Health Checks Media Report
- ♥ Mental Wellbeing Scale
- ♥ IFA Farmer Health Check Campaign Media Report

12. References

- ♥ Teagasc Coping with the Pressures of Farming publication
- ♥ Irish Farmers' Association Mental Health Survey (2021)
- ♥ HSE Reports on Rural Health Access (2023)
- ♥ Peer-reviewed articles on musculoskeletal health (Van Doorn et al., 2017), mental health (Kennedy et al., 2014), and combined health impacts (Lobley et al., 2019)
- ♥ CROI Web Resources
- ♥ HSE Health Promotion Information
- ♥ Teagasc Research on Farmer Health (2022)





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