![Health and Wellbeing of Women in Farming logo]

Health and Wellbeing of Women in Farming Survey:

Preliminary Findings

January 2026

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Contents

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1. Introduction

This report summarises the preliminary findings[1] from a survey undertaken in Summer 2025 by the Centre for Rural Policy Research (CRPR) and The Farming Community Network (FCN) as part of the Health and Wellbeing of Women in Farming research project, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

The survey aimed to understand current levels of physical and mental health and wellbeing among women living and/or working on farms within England and Wales, and to begin exploring how these might be associated with a range of personal characteristics and aspects of life in agriculture. The response to the survey was fantastic, with over 2000 women from across the farming community completing the questionnaire. We analysed these responses using a variety of statistical techniques, providing unrivalled evidence about women in farming's health and wellbeing[2].

Subsequent phases of the research (2025-27) will add depth to these emerging findings through qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, and creative workshops.

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[1] The data presented in these preliminary findings is accurate, however analysis is ongoing and future publications may present them in alternative ways, as well as providing further detail. Full findings will be published at the end of the project and in academic publications.

[2] More detailed information about the methodology, including the statistical techniques we used, will be made available following academic publication(s). In the interim, further information is available upon request by contacting the research team via farmsurvey@exeter.ac.uk.

2. Method and response

Following an initial piloting phase, the questionnaire was made available online and in paper format between May and August 2025. The online link was widely promoted via social media and relevant farming networks, and paper copies were sent to 8,000 farm addresses (6,000 in England and 2,000 in Wales), as well as being available upon request and in-person at a selection of agricultural shows.

A total of 2,058 valid responses were received, with 54.0% of questionnaires being completed online and 46.0% returned by post. 81.0% were received from England and 17.9% from Wales[3]. Key respondent characteristics were as follows:

- Most responses (91.4%) were from women who lived on a farm, the majority (71.7%) of which were wholly or mostly owner-occupied. 15.8% were wholly or mostly rented and 11.9% were mixed tenure.

- The main farm types were broadly represented with responses from all major groups (Figure 1).

- Respondents lived/worked on farms of a range of sizes:
  - 5.3% were less than 20 hectares (ha),
  - 14.0% were between 20 and 49ha,
  - 22.6% between 50 and 99ha,
  - 27.3% between 100 and 199ha,
  - 23.8% between 200 and 499ha, and
  - 6.9% over 500ha.

- Respondents ranged in age from 18 years to 95 years (mean = 55.19, median = 57)[4]. See Figure 2.
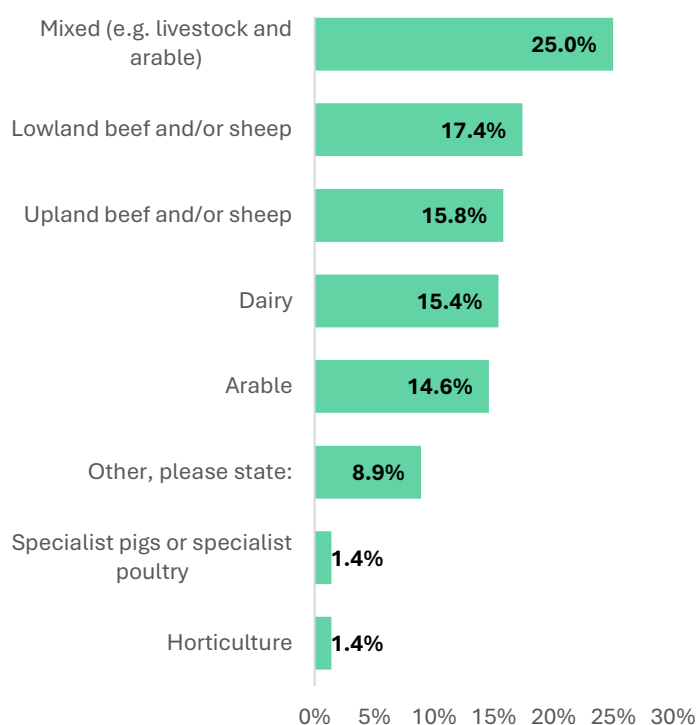
Figure 1: Main farm type (*n* = 2,053)

Figure 2: Respondent age (*n* = 1,869)

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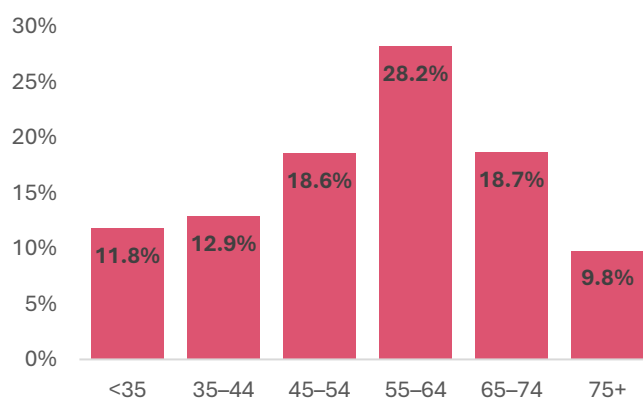
[3] 24 respondents did not declare a location 1.1%.

[4] 189 respondents did not declare their age: 9.2%.

3. Key findings

3.1 About being a woman in farming

3.1.1 What women love about farming...

When asked to rate positive aspects of farming, women expressed agreement with many of the options presented. For instance, most women (83.4%) selected 'being outdoors' as a positive aspect of farming, and this was the case across all the age groups.

Connection to nature (73.7%), working with animals (69.1%), providing a positive place to raise children (68.0%), working with family (58.5%) and 'being my own boss' (51.1%) were also all selected as positives by a majority of respondents (Figure 3).

Figure 3: What women find positive in farming (*n* = 1,962)
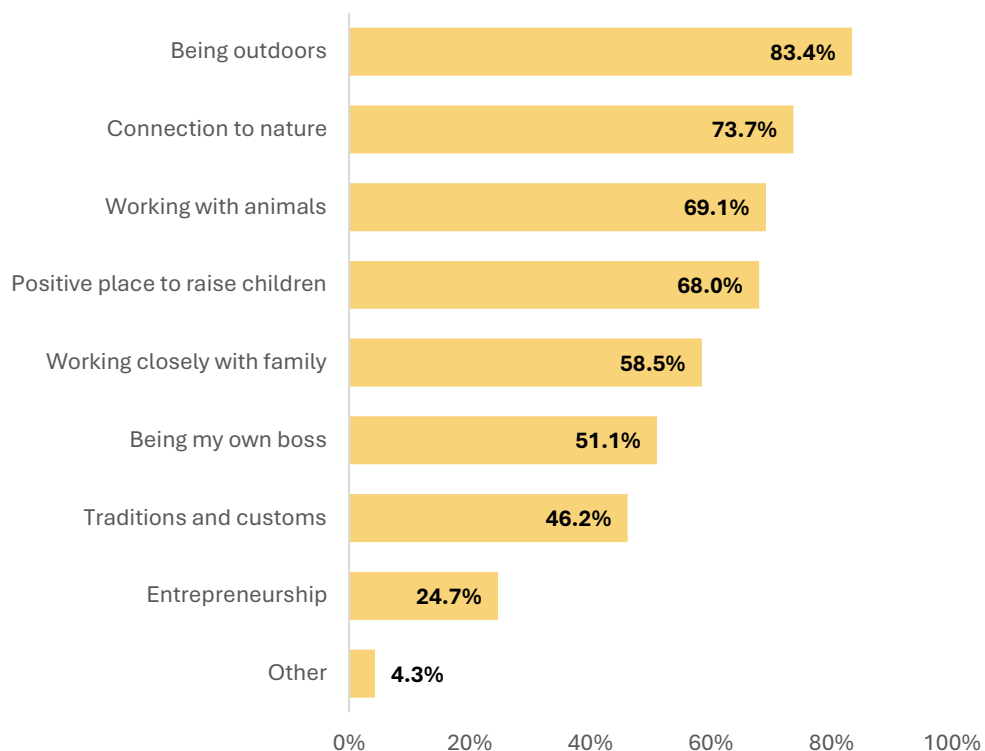
These positive aspects are also reflected in summary themes created from responses to our open question, 'What is the best thing for you about being a woman in farming?'.

The graphics (Figure 4) and quotes (Table 1) below show a snapshot of the most frequently mentioned themes, which we will explore in greater depth through future qualitative analysis.

Table 1: Quotes representing positives

"The space and beauty of the countryside raising children with freedom to explore"

"Being outdoors doing something I see as very meaningful - looking after animals and the land"

"Being the glue that holds family and business together"

Figure 4: Thematic representation of positives in farming

3.1.2 ...And what's not so good

We also asked respondents to summarise which elements of farming they found challenging. Their most frequent responses to our open question about this ('What is the most challenging thing for you about being a woman in farming?') are summarised by themes in Figure 5. Women frequently reported challenges with maintaining a work/life balance and a lack of time. Many women also reported challenges with their husbands or men in farming, for instance as barriers to decision-making and/or through absence due to their work, or in relation to repeatedly having their capabilities compared to, or judged against, those of a man. Example quotes representing some of these challenges are shown in Table 2.

Figure 5: Thematic representation of challenges

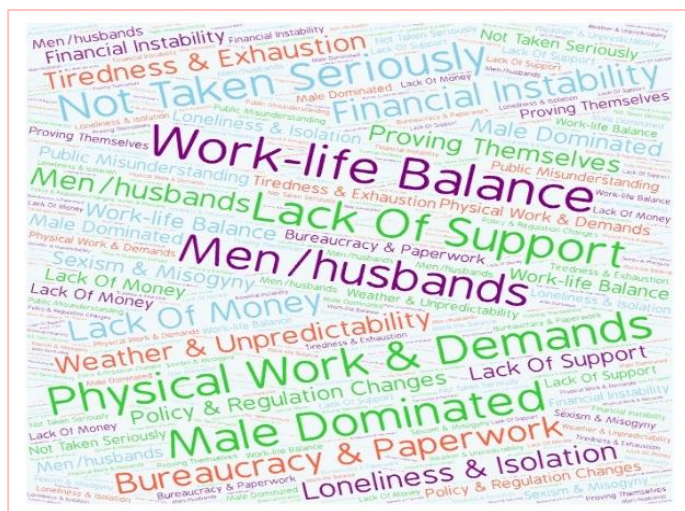**Table 2: Quotes representing challenges**

"... essentially being a single parent as he [husband] works such long hours that I have to manage all the childcare and domestic issues alone"

"Not being involved in the decision making/planning as it is a family partnership between my husband and his brother"

"The judgement and stigma of being weaker, less able. Farmers will speak to my husband and not me"

3.1.3 Perceptions of equal opportunities

When asked to rate whether they agreed they had experienced equal opportunities in relation to their careers in farming, we found that most women either disagreed (29.4%) or were neutral (37.1%). Just over a third (33.5%) of women agreed.

Levels of agreement with the statement varied between younger and older respondents (see Figure 6). For instance, 45.8% of women in the oldest age group (aged 75 and over) agreed (16.8% disagreed), compared to only 30.1% of those in the youngest age group of under 35 (37.7% disagreed). This finding potentially reflects a shift in expectations and career choices among younger generations of women in farming, rather than a decline in equal opportunities *per se*, but qualitative research is needed to investigate this further.

Figure 6: Perceptions of equal opportunities by age category (*n* = 1,671)
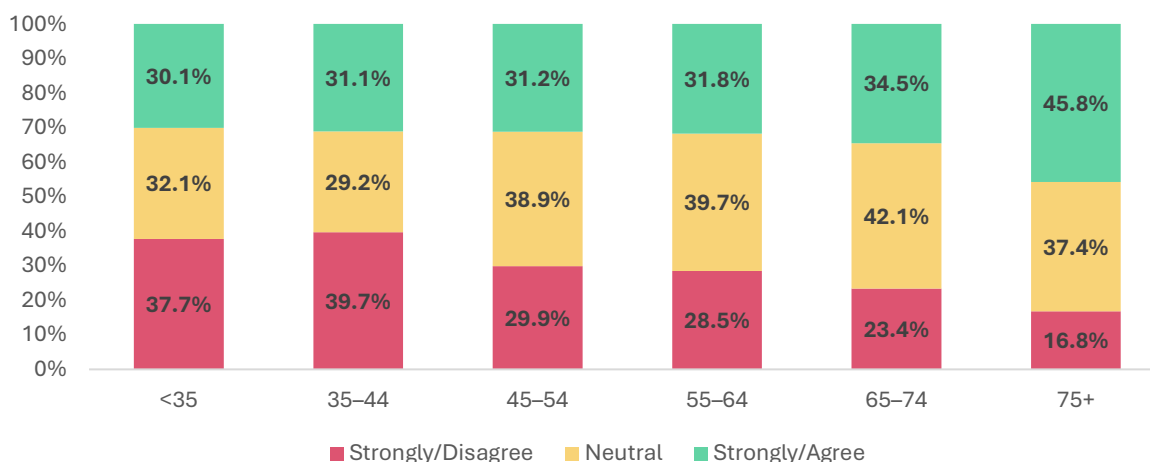
3.1.4 A juggling act? Roles and responsibilities on and off the farm

Roles and work tasks (related and unrelated to the farm)

We asked women to tell us which position(s) within their main farm they identified with, using a pre-defined list encompassing both work and family-based roles. Recognising that women in farming may manage multiple roles, respondents could also select multiple choices. On average, women identified with 2.6 roles (median = 2).

The majority of respondents (67.8%) identified as spouses or partners of a farmer, almost half (48.1%) were mothers and just over a third (36.0%) were daughters of farmers. Almost a third (32.2%) selected the 'member of a farming family' option (Figure 7).

These figures do not, however, fully reflect the roles that women themselves deem to be most important in terms of their identity. When asked which role they deemed most important to how they see themselves, 29.2% said being a farmer (either full time (18.9%) or part-time (10.3%)),

27.7% said being the spouse of a farmer, and 16.8% said being a mother. Figure 9 displays the full range of main identities, although notably, many women (5.0%) could not choose just one role, demonstrating the multifaceted nature of farming lives.

Figure 7: Roles identified with by women in farming (*n* = 2,055)

Role	Percentage
Spouse / partner of a farmer	67.8%
Mother	48.1%
Farmer's daughter	36.0%
Member of farming family	32.2%
Farmer full-time	32.1%
Farmer part-time	31.9%
Other	12.8%
Farmer's daughter-in-law	12.4%
Farm worker / employee	11.4%
Spouse / partner of a non-farmer	2.4%
Farm contractor	1.7%
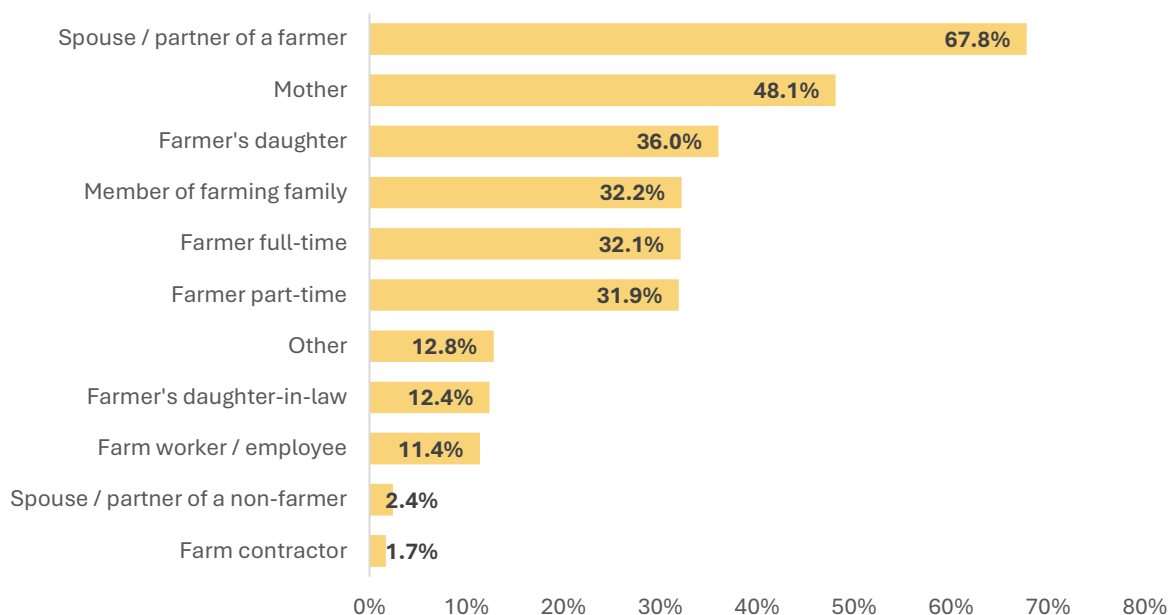
Figure 8: Main farming identity of respondents (*n* = 1,779)

Identity	Percentage
Spouse / partner of farmer	27.7%
Farmer full-time	18.9%
Mother	16.8%
Other	13.1%
Farmer part-time	10.3%
Member of farming family	7.3%
Farm worker / employee	3.1%
Farmer's daughter	2.4%
Farm contractor	0.2%
Farmer's daughter in law	0.1%
Spouse / partner of non-farmer	0.1%
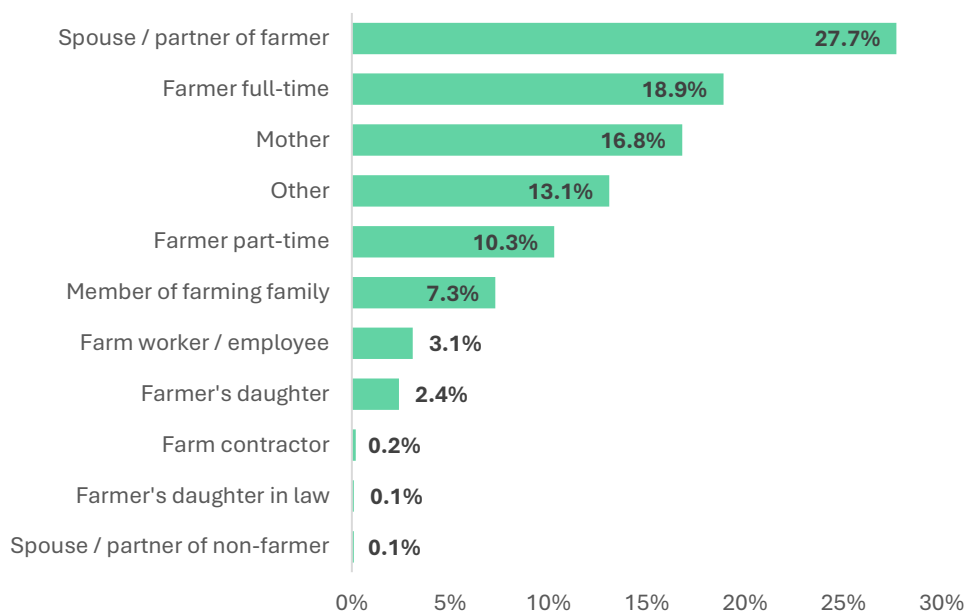
We also invited women to select all the work duties they were involved with from a list we provided. Our respondents were involved in a striking number of types of work, both on (Figure 9) and off (Figure 10) their primary farm, with women juggling an average of 4 different tasks (mean = 3.8, median = 4).

In most age groups, practical animal or crop work constituted our respondents' main work activity. For those aged 45 – 54 years, employment outside of agriculture was their main work, whilst those aged 75 and older reported "other" activities most frequently. These included being retired and supporting family members. We found that 57.4% of respondents reported carrying out work unrelated to their main farm.

Figure 9: **Type of work respondents were involved with, related to the main farm** (*n* = 2,057)
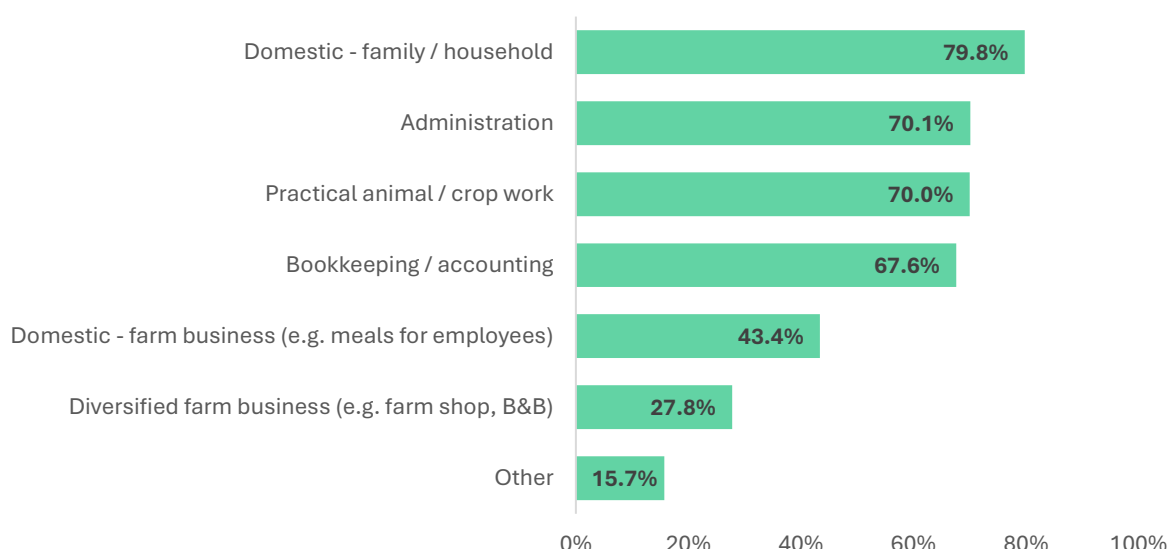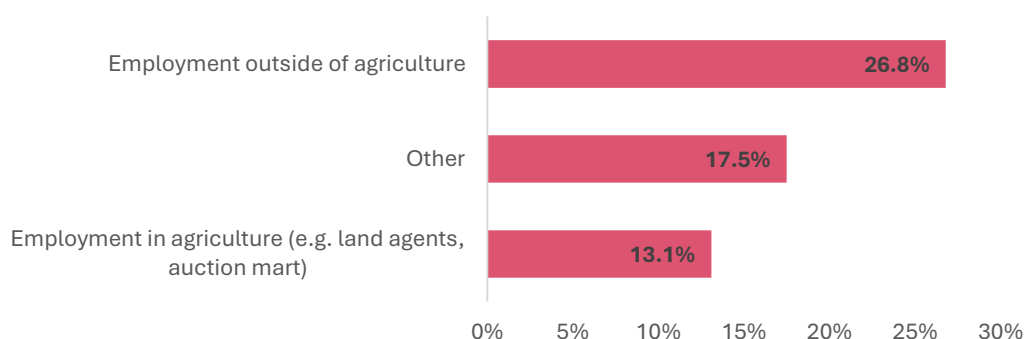

Figure 10: Type of work respondents were involved with, unrelated to the main farm (*n* = 1,104)

Despite the multiplicity of task-types that respondents were carrying out, the majority were either satisfied (51.7%) with the balance of farm and non-farm work they undertook, or neutral (23.5%) about this. A quarter (24.8%) were dissatisfied with this balance. We found that women

who felt satisfied with the balance of their farm and non-farm work reported significantly less perceived stress.

> Being satisfied with their balance between farm and non-farm work is associated with lower perceived stress.

Decision-making and feeling valued

The majority of respondents said they were a main decision-maker on the farm, either alone (5.7%) or together with someone else (60.7%). Almost a third (32.1%) of respondents had little or no decision-making role on the farm[5].

When asked whether respondents were satisfied with their level of decision-making, we found that 39.2% who were excluded from decision-making wanted more responsibility. Conversely, 20.4% of those who were the only decision-maker wanted less responsibility. The highest level of satisfaction was among those who had joint decision-making responsibility, 84.9% of whom were satisfied.

Importantly, we found that women who had little or no decision-making abilities also reported higher levels of loneliness. Women in farming unable to contribute to farm decision-making might feel excluded from family or farm business conversations and may feel that their voice is unheard. Such restrictions on their autonomy may contribute towards feeling isolated.

> Having little or no say in decision-making on the farm is associated with higher levels of loneliness.

When asked whether they felt their contribution to the farm was sufficiently valued by others, most women responded positively, with 60.5% agreeing. However, a notable minority (23.2%) disagreed and a further 16.3% gave a neutral answer. This is important because our statistical modelling found that feeling their contribution to the farm is sufficiently valued by others was positively associated with mental wellbeing. Feeling valued for their contribution was also associated with lower levels of loneliness. This suggests the importance of recognition and how a sense of being valued may play an important role in women's wellbeing. We will investigate further what being 'valued' looks like to women in farming throughout the rest of the project.

> Feeling valued for their contribution to the farm is associated with higher wellbeing and lower loneliness.

[5] 1.5% of respondents were unsure or chose n/a

Care-giving

We also asked women to consider their care-giving responsibilities. We defined care-giving as encompassing both childcare and care for other family and/or non-family members who need extra support due to frailty, health conditions or disability. Respondents stated if they had informal care-giving responsibilities for children, parents and in-laws, other family members, non-family members or none.

Unsurprisingly, care-giving responsibilities varied across the life-course (Figure 11). The percentage of respondents caring for children *only* was highest in the 35-44 age group, with the 45–54-year-old age group reporting more of a mix of caring for children and/or others, whilst the older age groups' caring responsibilities were more centred around non-children. Respondents aged under 35 or 75+ were most likely not to have any caring responsibilities at all (54.1% and 50.9% respectively).

Positively, most respondents (63.7%) were satisfied with the amount of time they spent care-giving.

Figure 11: Caring responsibilities by age category (*n* = 1,698)
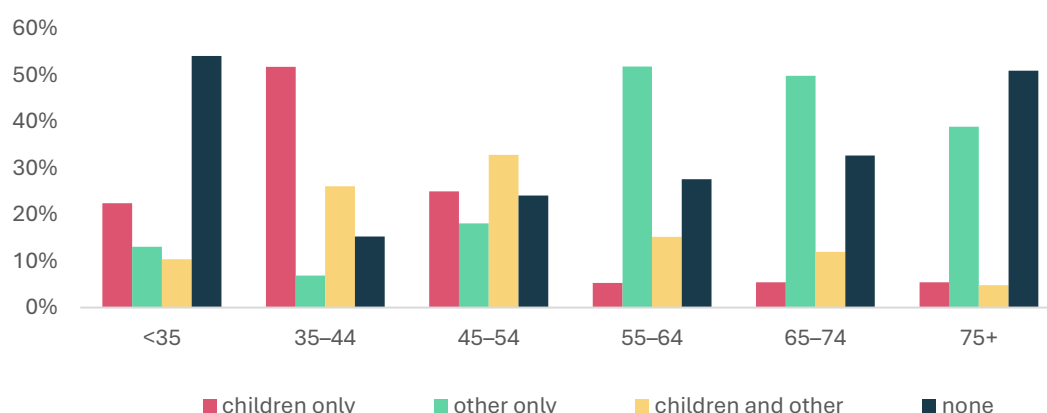
3.2 How are women in farming?

3.2.1 Self-rated general health

We asked respondents how they would rate their health in general. Compared with figures for the population of England[6] [1], notably fewer women in farming reported "very good" health (23.6% vs 47.1%), while more reported "good" (46.5% vs 34.2%) and "fair" health (25.1% vs 13.2%). Proportions of those rating their health as 'bad' or 'very bad' were similar to the population of England (Figure 12). On one hand, it is encouraging that the majority of our

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[6] Age-standardised proportions were calculated using the 2013 European Standard Population Weights. National population figures are for England only because combined figures for England and Wales were unavailable.

respondents felt their health was either good or fair, but the comparatively small number reporting 'very good' health suggests that many are not thriving in the way that we would expect and hope for, and this deserves further attention.

Figure 12: Self-rated general health, women in farming survey (2025) and population of England (2021) (*n* = 1,779)
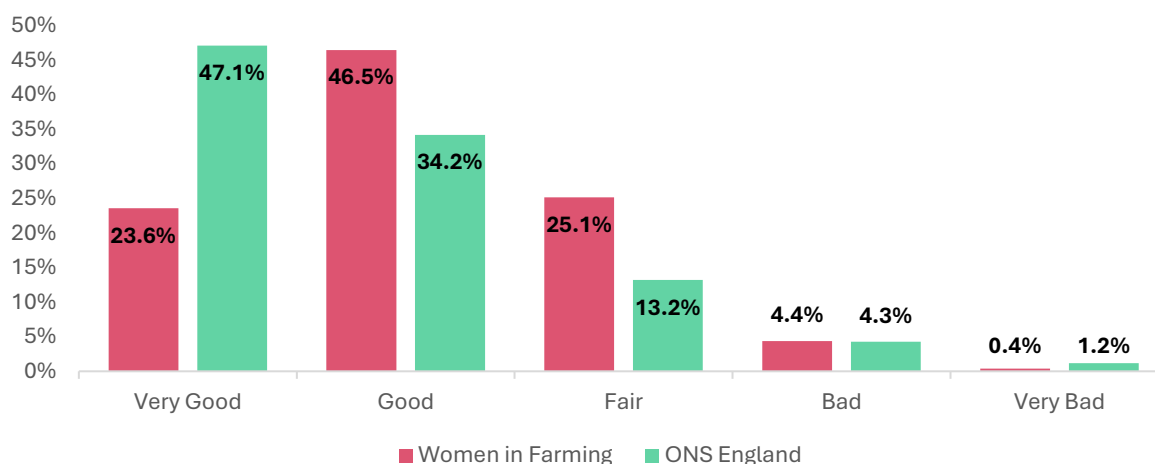
In line with national population norms, we found that women's rating of their health significantly declined with age. Younger women were more likely to rate their health as "very good" or "good" while older women more often reported 'fair' or 'poor' health.

> Most respondents said their general health was fair or good, but they were less likely to report very good health than women in the wider population.

3.2.2 Health conditions

In relation to physical health, half (50.2%) of respondents reported living with at least one physical or mental health condition that was expected to last 12 months or more. This appears to align with women in the UK general population, where 50.1% report having a long-standing health problem [2][7].

Of those women reporting long-term health conditions, 16.3% reported being limited 'a lot' in their daily activities due to their health condition(s), with a further 61.5% being limited 'a little'. This amounts to 77.8% of those with a condition - and 35.4% of *all* respondents - being limited to some extent by at least one long-term health condition.

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[7] Data have not been age-standardised. Future analysis will investigate these findings in greater depth.

In terms of the conditions reported by women who were living with a long-standing health issue, 'arthritis or any other musculoskeletal condition' was most prevalent (41.0%). 'Low back disorder or any other chronic back defect' (24.2%) and 'depression, anxiety or other mental health condition' (26.1%), as well as 'high blood pressure' (22. 5%) were also highly ranked (Figure 13).

<u>**Figure 13**</u>**: Conditions reported by women in farming** (*n* = 947)
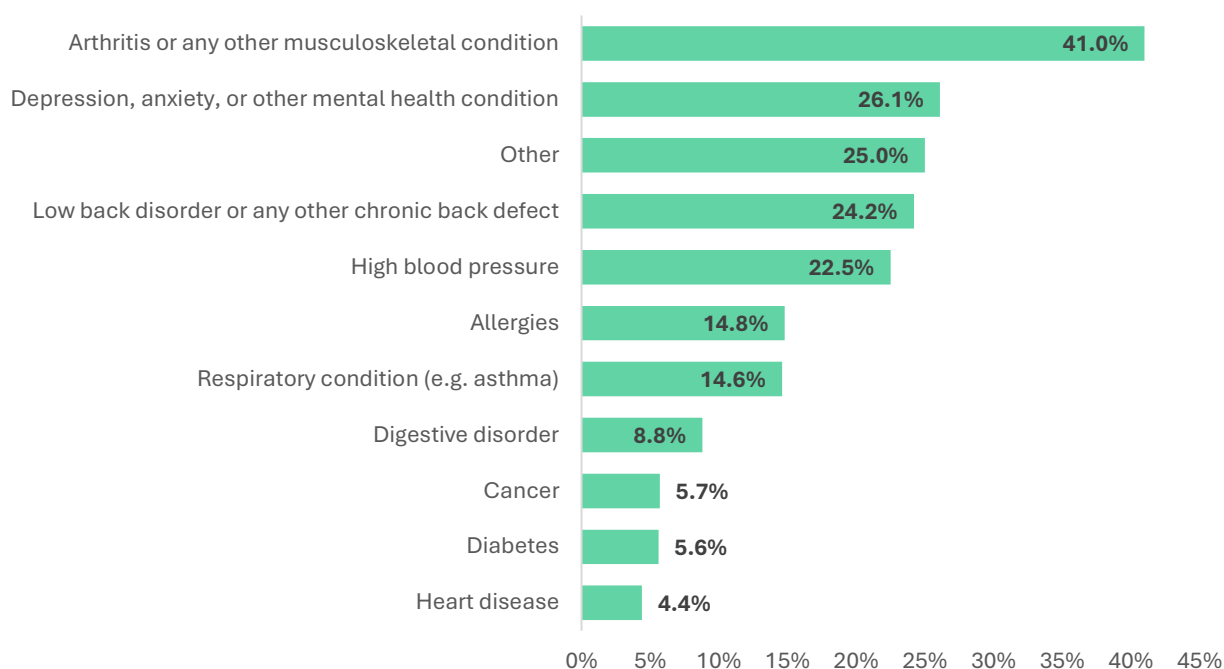
Over a third (35.4%) of all respondents said they were living with a health condition that limits their daily activities a little or a lot.

3.2.3 Reproductive health

Respondents also reported their experience of reproductive health conditions (either current and/or in the past) (Figure 14). The three most reported conditions were:

- Hot flushes or night sweats (reported by 36.2% of respondents)
- Heavy menstrual bleeding (reported by 30.1% of respondents)
- Severe period pain (reported by 23.7% of respondents)

Our data is unable to tell us the extent to which these conditions may be affecting our respondents' daily activities but, since they were reported by around a quarter to a third women in farming, we believe this is worthy of further research.

We also asked respondents the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement, 'Being a woman in farming has influenced my reproductive choices'. Responses differed significantly by age, with younger women more likely to agree than older women. For example, almost half (43.6%) of the youngest respondents (aged under 35) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, compared to only 9.9% of the eldest respondents (aged 75+). 32.9% of those aged 35-44 also agreed or strongly agreed. The influence of farming on reproductive choices for many younger women is striking, but at this stage we can only speculate on the nature of this influence. This is something we will explore further in the subsequent stages of the research.

Figure 14: Reproductive conditions reported by women in farming (*n* = 1,876)
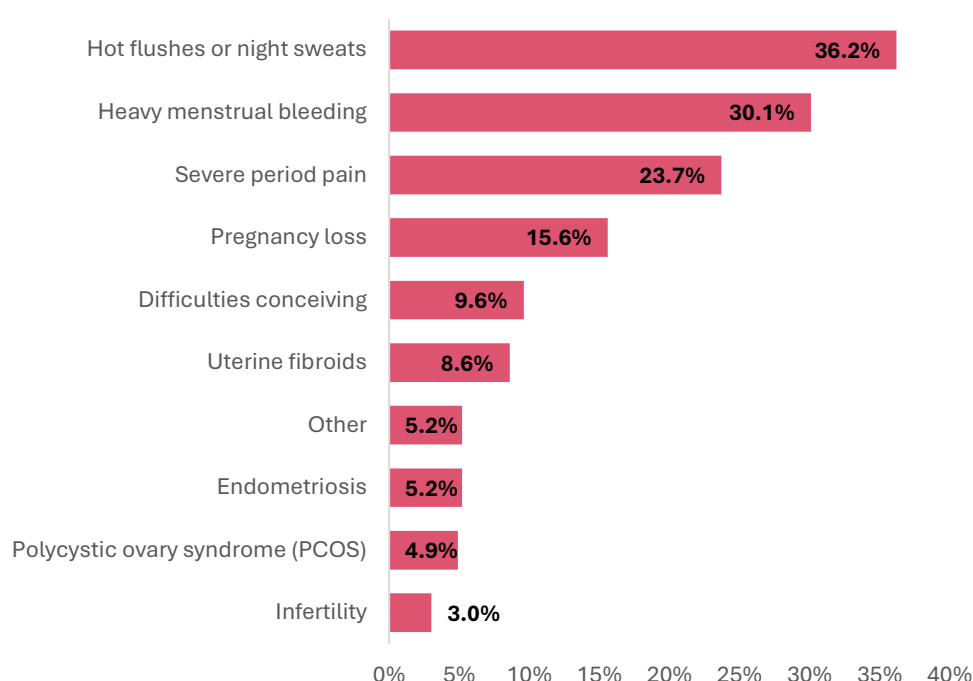
3.2.4 Sleep

As Figure 15 shows, our respondents reported significantly poorer sleep quality compared with UK population data[8] [3], with only 11.3% rating it as 'very good' (compared to 16.7% of women in the national population). 38.6% of respondents rated their sleep as 'fairly bad' or 'very bad', compared to the UK figure of 28.2%.

Women who reported higher levels of perceived stress reported lower levels of sleep quality and in turn, according to our statistical model, lower self-rated health. Farming-specific hazards of sleep disruption, such as calving cows or during lambing season, may need to be considered in relation to women's poor sleep quality.

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[8] Wave 13, female respondents only, weighted data to represent the UK population. Women in Farming data has not been weighted.

Figure 15: **Sleep quality compared to women in UK** (*n* = 1,951)

Women in Farming   UK Women

Women in farming report significantly poorer sleep quality than women in the national population.

3.2.5 Mental wellbeing

We measured subjective wellbeing using the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) [4] [5]. Results indicated that our respondents scored significantly lower than the UK population, and this was true across all age groups (see Figure 16).

Wellbeing significantly varied across the life-course, with women aged over 75 having significantly higher wellbeing than all ages under 65.

Using a benchmarking approach endorsed in SWEMWBS guidance [6], we categorised respondents' wellbeing scores into scores consistent with high wellbeing (>27.5), moderate wellbeing (19.5 – 27.5), and low wellbeing (<19.5). Using this approach, we would expect approximately 15% of respondents to have high wellbeing and 15% to have low wellbeing. However, our results indicated that, across our whole sample[9], only 4.4% reported scores in the high wellbeing range, with 35.9% reporting scores that were indicative of low wellbeing.

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[9] Whole sample includes women who did not declare their age and are excluded from age analysis.

Figure 16: The 'gap' in wellbeing scores between our respondents and the wider UK population *(n* = 1,602)
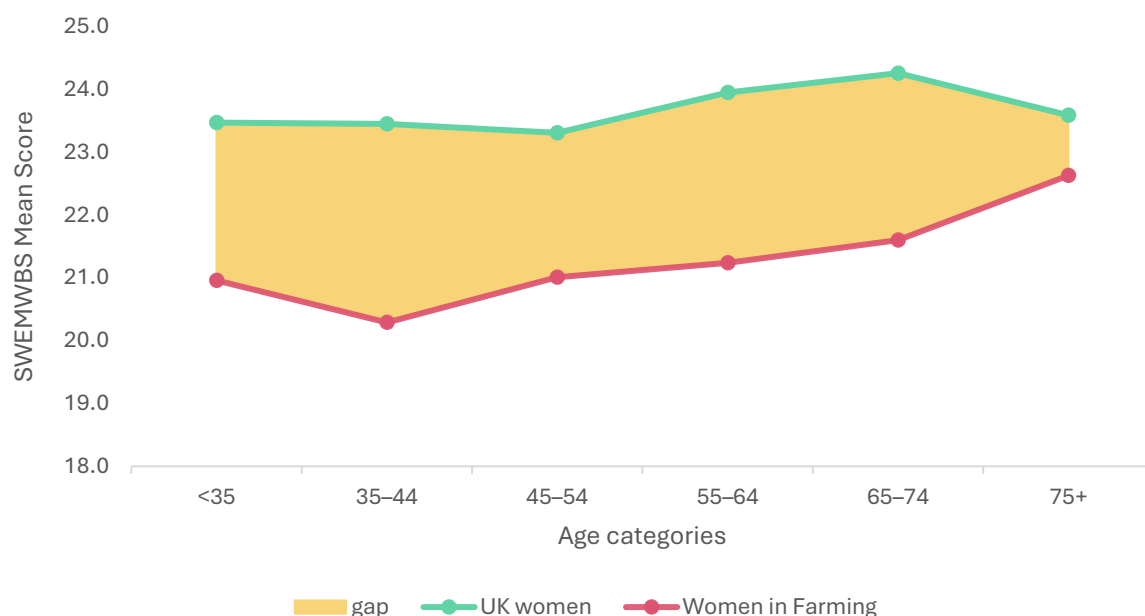
In every age group, women in farming had lower mental wellbeing scores than the national population. In our whole sample, 35.9% reported low wellbeing. Only 4.4% reported high wellbeing.

3.2.6 Anxiety

Anxiety was measured using a single question replicated from the ONS: 'On a scale where zero is "not at all anxious" and ten is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?'. Responses were then scored and categorised in to very low, low, medium or high anxiety. Among our respondents, 36.7% of women in farming reported 'high' anxiety, compared to 26.1% of women in the UK population[10] [7] (Figure 17). We found women who reported higher levels of perceived stress also reported higher rates of anxiety.

We also found that anxiety significantly differed across the life course: the mean anxiety score, (where higher scores indicate higher ratings of anxiety) for women aged 75+ was 4.0, but for younger age groups ranged from 5.0 to 5.7.

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[10] Anxiety by age, sex, UK country, and English region in Quarter 1 (January to March) 2025. Women in Farming data has not been age-standardised.

Figure 17: **Percentage of levels of anxiety, Women in Farming survey and UK women** (ONS 2025) (*n* = 1,933)
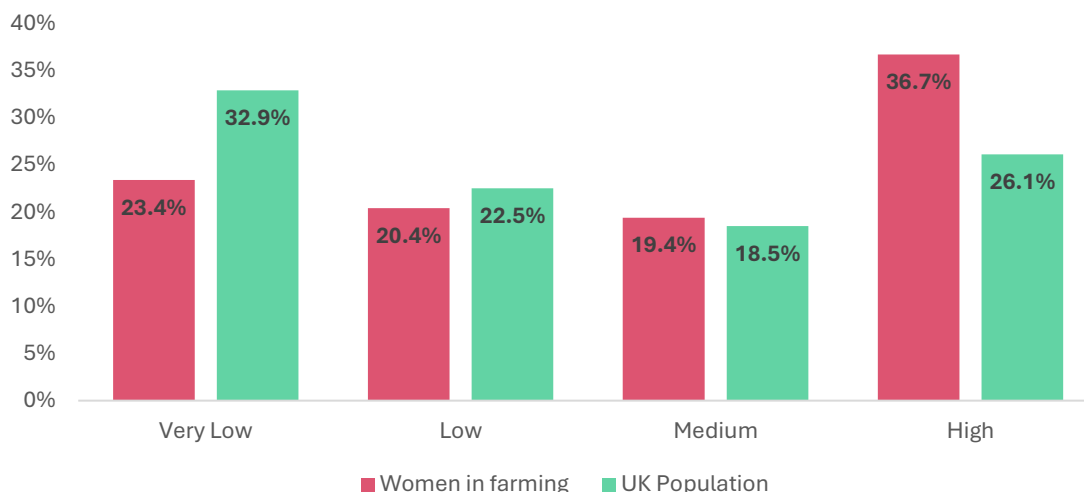
Among our respondents, 36.7% of women in farming reported 'high' anxiety, compared to 26.1% of women in the UK population.

3.3 Factors associated with mental wellbeing

To explore mental wellbeing outcomes in more detail, we used a statistical modelling technique to test whether certain factors were able to explain the variation among respondents. Our model helps us explain over three-quarters (77.7%) of the differences in wellbeing among the women we observed. We found that perceived stress and loneliness were significant negative predictors of mental wellbeing.

We also found that resilience, receiving emotional social support, giving instrumental support, and feeling valued (for their contribution to the farm) were all positive predictors of mental wellbeing.

Levels of perceived stress and loneliness were significant negative predictors of mental wellbeing.

Resilience, receiving emotional social support, providing instrumental support and feeling valued were significant positive predictors of mental wellbeing.

3.3.1 Causes of farm-related stress

We presented respondents with twelve common farm-related issues which are known to have the potential to cause stress [8]. Respondents were asked to report how frequently each issue had caused them to feel personal stress over the last 12 months. We categorised and measured the percentage of respondents reporting the cause as 'often' and 'all' of the time (Figure 18). This revealed the top three stressors to be:

- 'A lack of support and understanding (from the public, media and those in power, including the government)'. Reported as a stressor by 64.6% of respondents. Mean score (out of 5) = 3.9.
- 'Bureaucracy and red tape (including administration, paperwork, inspections, compliance with scheme and government policies)'. Reported as a stressor by 55.6% of respondents. Mean score (out of 5) = 3.7.
- 'The pressure to succeed / the future of the farm (including succession and legacy issues)'. Reported as a stressor by 53.0% of respondents. Mean score (out of 5) = 3.6.

These findings may reflect to some extent current topical issues around changes to agricultural policy, notably agricultural inheritance tax.

We found the frequency with which farming related issues caused stress to be significantly higher in women aged 35 – 54 compared to those aged over 75. This may reflect their more active role in the farm business, including undertaking work directly with animals or crops.

Figure 18: Frequent causes of stress on farms (*n* = 1,889)
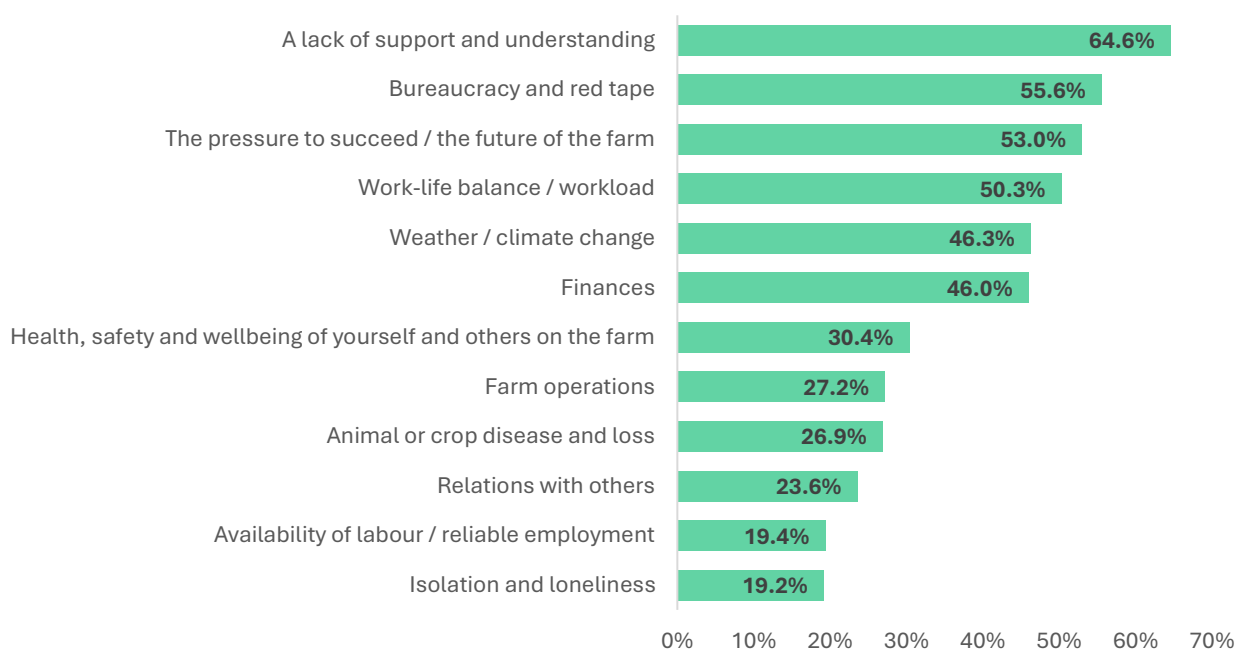
We also performed statistical tests to investigate which farm stressors best helped to explain mental wellbeing outcomes, and this revealed the following stressors to be significant (in order of their strength as a predictor of wellbeing):

- Isolation and loneliness
- Work-life balance / workload
- Relations with others
- Finances
- The weather / climate change
- A lack of support and understanding

These factors may not be as frequently reported sources of stress as other factors (e.g. 'bureaucracy and red tape' and 'the pressure to succeed / the future of the farm'), but they are more strongly associated with mental wellbeing. They may, therefore, be more important to focus on in terms of designing interventions to reduce stress and improve wellbeing.

> The three most frequent sources of farm stress were 'a lack of support and understanding', 'bureaucracy and red tape' and 'the pressure to succeed/the future of the farm.
>
> However, 'Isolation and loneliness', 'work-life balance/workload', and 'relations with others' were the most significant predictors of mental wellbeing.

3.3.2 Perceived stress

Perceived stress (i.e. an individual's personal interpretation of how much stress they are experiencing) differed significantly across age categories, with younger women under 45 years reporting higher levels than older women aged 75 and over. The frequency with which women experienced farm-related issues was a significant predictor of women's overall perceived stress. Higher perceived stress was also associated with providing more instrumental support; that is, we found that women giving higher levels of practical help to others reported higher levels of stress.

We also compared our sample mean against available norms for females in England and found that women in our sample reported significantly higher levels of perceived stress [9]. The mean score in our sample was 7.0 compared to 6.4 in women in England[11].

Perceived stress was a significant negative predictor of wellbeing, anxiety, and sleep quality. However, several factors were protective against perceived stress, including higher levels of

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[11] Data have not been age-standardised.

resilience, receiving practical support from others, feeling satisfied with social connections, and satisfaction with balance of farm/non-farm work.

> Women in our sample reported significantly higher levels of perceived stress than women in the wider UK population.

3.3.3 Loneliness

We used the UCLA-3 measure of loneliness to ascertain how lonely each participant reported feeling [10]. Scores were first categorised into groups of 'least often lonely' (scores of 3 – 4), 'sometimes lonely' (scores of 5 – 7) and 'most often lonely' (scores of 8 – 9). The percentages of 'most often lonely' decreased with age, with 24.0% of those under 35 feeling 'most often lonely', compared to 13.5% of those aged 65-74, and only 7.9% of those aged over 75. This was a statistically significant association. Overall, across all ages, one in four (42.9%) reported feeling 'sometimes lonely' and a further 18.0% were found to be 'most often lonely' – more than double the proportion reported elsewhere for women nationally (8.8%)[12] [3]. See Figure 19.

In our statistical modelling, higher levels of loneliness were associated with having little to no decision-making role on the farm, and with experiencing farming-related stressors more frequently. We also found that women who felt their contribution to the farm was sufficiently valued, and those who were more satisfied with their social connections, reported lower levels of loneliness.

Figure 19: Percentages of women per age group categorised as lonely most often (*n* = 1,711)
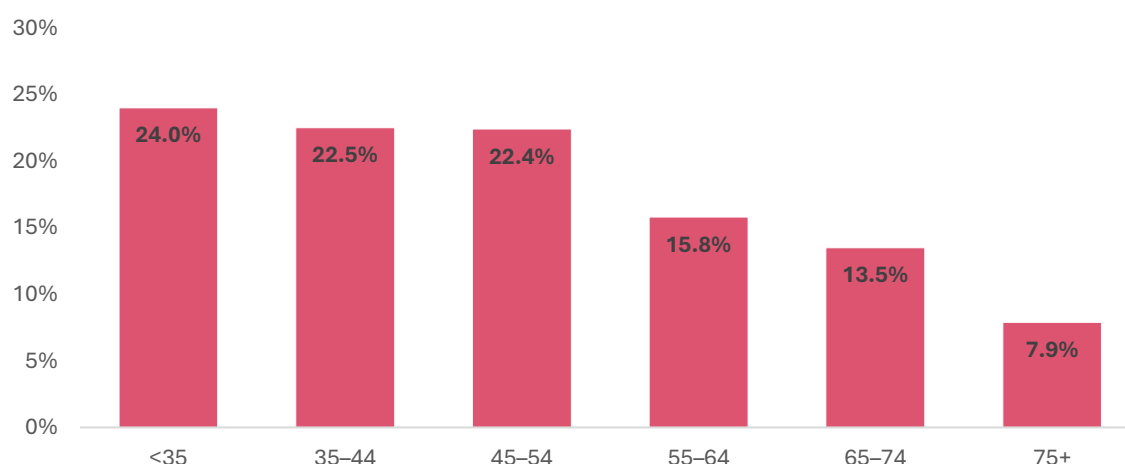
> Just over 3 in 5 women (60.9%) report feeling lonely some or most of the time.

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[12] Wave 15, female respondents only, weighted data to represent the UK population. Women in Farming data has not been weighted.

3.3.4 Resilience

Resilience was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS), which is a self-report measure designed to assess an individual's ability to bounce back or recover from stressful events [11]. The mean resilience score across the whole sample was 3.2, which is considered to be within the 'normal' or average resilience range (scores of 3.00-4.30) [11].

In our statistical model, we found that being satisfied with socialising both within and outside farming, along with a feeling of belonging to their local community and farming community was a significant positive predictor of resilience. Women who reported higher levels of resilience also reported higher levels of wellbeing, self-rated health and lower levels of perceived stress. Maintaining and building resilience appears therefore to be vital to women in farming. That is not to say that women should tolerate or put up with stressful events, but rather that they should be supported to learn positive coping mechanisms for when times are tough.

3.3.5 Connection with others

Social support

Respondents rated the levels of social support that they both provided to and received from others, both emotionally and practically [12]. Overall, we found that the amount of support provided to others significantly declined with age, with those over 75 providing less than those aged 45 and under. The levels of support received also declined steadily with age, until respondents reached 75+ where levels showed a slight, although statistically non-significant, increase.

Looking in more detail at the types of social support that respondents provided and received, we found that higher levels of _received emotional_ support, such as having someone taking the time to listen to them, were associated with higher levels of mental wellbeing. This is perhaps unsurprising, but it underscores the importance of this type of support for women in farming, suggesting that spouses, family members, friends, and the wider community can make a real difference to women by ensuring they feel heard, valued and supported.

Interestingly, our statistical modelling showed that _providing practical_ support was also associated with increased mental wellbeing, despite also being associated with increased levels of perceived stress. This may appear counter-intuitive, but we hypothesise that whilst the time and energy required to help others by women in farming can add to their levels of burden, offering support may also provide them with a sense of connection, value or accomplishment.

Socialising and Belonging Satisfaction

Respondents rated how satisfied they were with the amount of time they spend socialising with others in farming. We found 43.7% were satisfied (strongly agree/agree), 31.6% neutral and 24.8% dissatisfied (strongly disagree/disagree).

Similarly, when asked the same question regarding socialising with others outside of farming, 43.7% were again satisfied, 22.0% neutral and 34.3% dissatisfied.

When asked whether they agreed or disagreed that they felt they belonged to the local community, 48.1% agreed compared to 22.8% who disagreed. With regards to the farming community, the percentage of those agreeing increased to 58.9%. Women who were satisfied with their level of social integration reported higher resilience, lower perceived stress, and lower loneliness.

> 58.9% of respondents felt they belonged in the farming community, but only 48.1% felt they belonged to the local community.
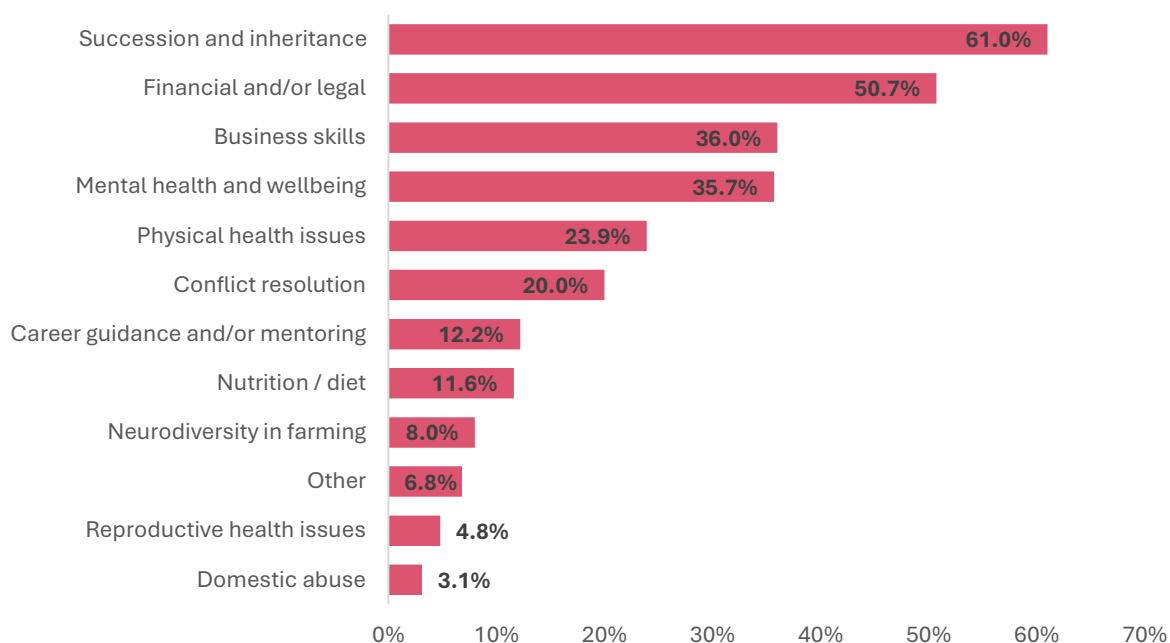>
> Being satisfied with levels of socialising and belonging were associated with higher resilience and lower loneliness.

3.4 Help-seeking and support

3.4.1 Issues requiring greater support

We asked women which areas of support, if any, would be most beneficial to them based on their past and/or current experiences. The list of potential areas we provided, along with the proportions of respondents identifying them as beneficial, is shown in Figure 20.

Figure 20: Issues women would like support and guidance with (*n* = 1,809)

Issue	Percentage
Succession and inheritance	61.0%
Financial and/or legal	50.7%
Business skills	36.0%
Mental health and wellbeing	35.7%
Physical health issues	23.9%
Conflict resolution	20.0%
Career guidance and/or mentoring	12.2%
Nutrition / diet	11.6%
Neurodiversity in farming	8.0%
Other	6.8%
Reproductive health issues	4.8%
Domestic abuse	3.1%

The five most commonly selected areas of support were:

- Succession and inheritance (identified by 61.0% of respondents)
- Financial and/or legal issues (50.7%)
- Business skills (e.g. leadership/management) (36.0%)
- Mental health and wellbeing (35.7%)
- Physical health issues (23.9%)

An open text box was also provided for respondents to further describe the type of support they felt was needed. These responses have not yet been fully analysed, but will be prioritised in the next stages of the research.

> Over half of respondents would like to see more support around succession and inheritance (61.0%), and financial and/or legal issues (50.7%).

3.4.2 Factors influencing help-seeking

Women rated their agreement with six factors that may influence their choice to seek professional help for a health condition. The factors were extracted from a longer scale developed specifically for Australian farming populations [13].

We categorised responses of 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' into one binary response and 'strongly agree' and 'agree' into another. Of the six factors, only one - 'my health problems are not bad compared to other people, so I do not want to waste my health professionals time' - was agreed with by more respondents than disagreed (40.9% vs. 35.4%) (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Factors influencing choices to seek help for health conditions (*n* = 1,910)

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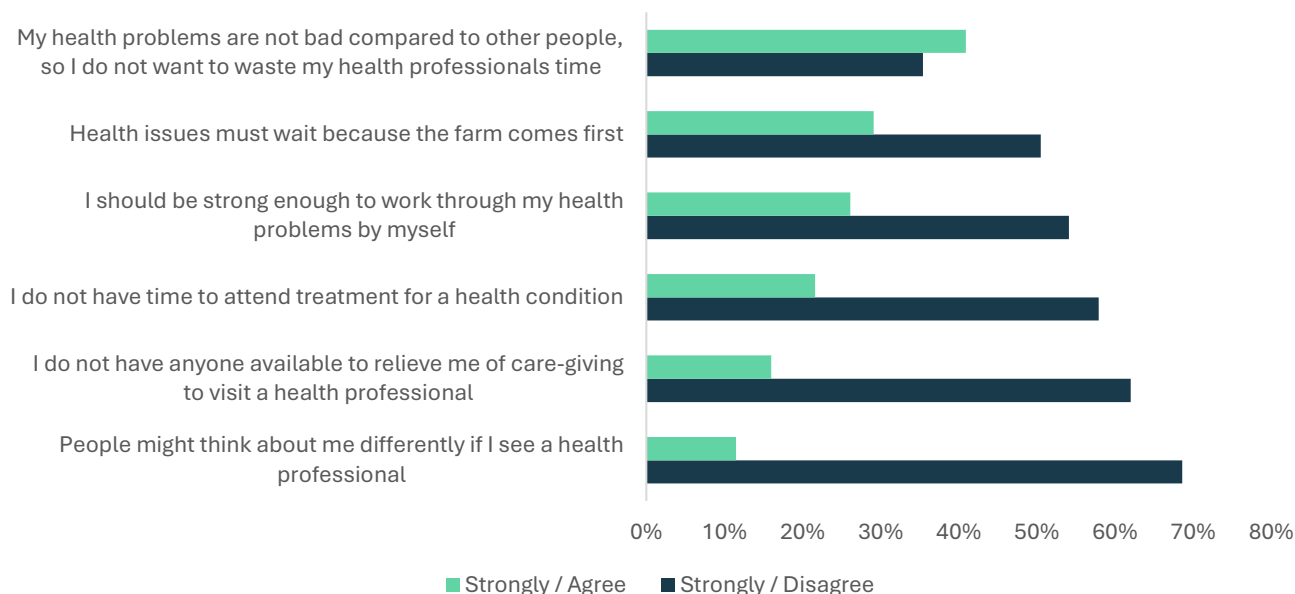
It is encouraging that most of our respondents did not see the other potential issues as barriers to seeking help, and appear willing to ask for help and make time to seek treatment where needed. Nevertheless, there is clearly a prominent perception among women in farming that their health problems are not bad enough (compared to other people) to warrant a health professionals' time, despite our other findings suggesting that that is not necessarily the case. Positive messaging to counter this type of misperception may therefore be beneficial, in order to encourage women in farming to seek help for health issues at an earlier stage.

> Most respondents were open to seeking help for health issues and making time to do so, but there is a (mis)perception that their health problems are not bad enough to warrant a professional's time.

3.4.3. Who women in farming confide in

We asked respondents who they would confide in if they needed to talk about something personal. Over half (62.6%) of women said they would confide in a spouse or partner, underlining the importance of supportive personal relationships. Other family members and friends (both farming and non-farming) were also selected by many women (33-45%). Less common were a health professional (selected by 17.4% of respondents) and a farm support organisation (just 6.1%). See Figure 22.

Whilst the fact that most women appear to have a trusted confidant is encouraging, the 12.8% of women who selected 'no-one, I prefer to keep things to myself)' warrant further attention. We found that the proportion of women selecting this option rose to 17.3% in the 75+ age category and was least likely to be selected by those aged 35-44 (9.0% of whom selected this option).

Figure 22: **Who women in farming confide in** (*n* = 1,924)
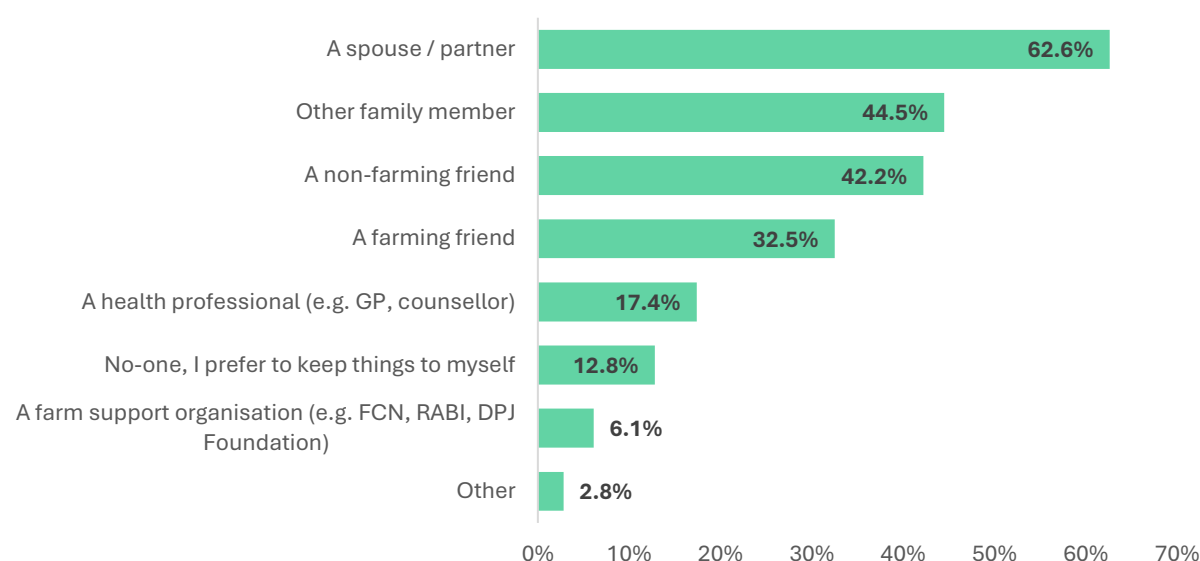
> Most respondents selected at least one confidant that they could turn to if they needed to talk about something personal.
>
> Farm support organisations were only selected by a small proportion of women, suggesting scope for greater awareness of how these organisations can help with personal issues at an early stage.

4. Conclusion and next steps

This survey aimed to thoroughly understand the health and wellbeing of women living and working on farms in England and Wales. While our initial results clearly reveal many concerning issues, we believe our research also provides clarity on actions that can positively influence women moving forward.

Our research identified significant challenges. Women on farms in England and Wales reported notably higher levels of stress and anxiety than the general population, along with lower subjective mental wellbeing. Of particular concern is the finding that women aged 45 and under experienced significantly worse psychological outcomes than their older counterparts in farming.

However, alongside these challenges, we have also pinpointed key factors that may improve future outcomes. We found that women fare better when they feel their contributions to the farm are valued, when they receive emotional support, are included in decision-making, and are satisfied with their level of contact with friends, family, and the community. We will use this information, along with data from future study phases, to begin recommending targeted support for those who need it most.

Our survey also aimed to understand women's general health. While we discovered that their overall self-rated health was lower than that of the broader population, we need to continue exploring the reasons behind this. The next stages of our research will build on the information gathered to examine how specific factors (e.g. exercise, diet, sleep health) might impact the health of women on farms. More focused research investigating the considerable complexities around these factors would also be valuable in future.

Overall, our research presents a complex picture where physical and mental challenges are interconnected, not only with women's multiple roles and work responsibilities, but also with the often-reported positivity derived from their connections with family and farms. Our findings lay a foundation for developing targeted, evidence-based support, which we will further refine throughout future research phases to recommend meaningful interventions that acknowledge the multifaceted nature of farming life.

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