

Gareth Lamberton - 'The impact our on-farm decisions have on society'.

Executive Summary

Farmers have always had a close connection to the area that they have come from.

The needs of crops and livestock have meant those that lived on the land did not travel too far from where they grew up, giving farmers a great sense of pride and appreciation for their local area.

Farmers have played their part in key leadership roles within their local communities. Through sports clubs, religious groups, school management or other voluntary/charitable roles, farmers have been intricately woven into the social fabric of their rural communities.

As the demographics of rural areas change, people from within the farming community have found that their influence and standing within their local area has diminished. They no longer know and come into contact with as many of their neighbours. Those whose farms have gotten bigger have less time to give to off-farm activities and pursuits. Others of lower scale are now farmed on a part time basis, with farm tasks completed evenings and weekends, to fit around a full-time.

Objective of the study

The agricultural community still has a major input on the social wellbeing of rural Ireland and across the world. The study's objective is to identify ways to encourage farmers and agricultural professionals to make a positive impact on the lives of those who live and work around them, to build up better relationships by involving members of the local community on their farms and by giving of themselves at local level to the betterment of their local communities.

This study hopes to further highlight opportunities for individuals to get involved in their local community, as a means to improve the standing and appreciation of farming in society at large, and to rebalance the urban-rural debate rendered at times so toxic by climate/environment related pressures.

Main findings from my research

Taking good care of yourself, your own family and your own farm or business are the first steps towards having a positive impact on your own community.

People observe what other people do and say and are influenced by these actions and words more than many would realise.

There are many practical ways for farmers to include neighbours and people from the community on their farms, and to involve themselves in the activities and pursuits of their local community, to mutual benefit.

Sharing information is a powerful way to increase trust and to build relationships with those from outside the farming industry. This can have important beneficial impacts on consumers' perception of farming, agriculture and food.

Main recommendations

1. Identify individuals who come into contact with farmers regularly – advisors, co-operative representatives, vets, etc. - and provide training for them to better identify the symptoms of mental health issues and give them the necessary information to be able to offer meaningful support

2. Include basic mental, physical health and wellbeing awareness in agricultural college curriculums and in Knowledge Transfer/Discussion Group programmes
3. Health and safety must remain top of mind and be included in college curriculums and KT/Discussion Group programmes. Financial support could be given towards the cost of completing high risk jobs by hiring trained professionals and/or appropriate safety equipment.
4. Promote a more positive, inclusive, informative debate about farming, rural communities and the environment in traditional and social media to avoid or correct toxic, dispiriting, or even harmful messaging from industry or NGO representatives, press, and other stakeholders interacting with farmers.
5. Through taxation or other forms of supports, reduce the cost of employing people in rural locations, in order to revitalise areas with declining populations while helping reduce the pressure on housing in more densely populated areas.