

# STRATEGIC PLAN

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## OUR CHARITY'S FUTURE 2019-2024

# OUR STORY

Rural Support was established in the autumn of 2001. The aim was to help farmers and other rural residents impacted by the severe foot and mouth crisis which was plaguing the agricultural industry. In 2002 Rural Support was registered as a charitable company. The severe impact foot and mouth disease was having on farming and on the rural community as a whole was soon realised. It was this awareness and the urgent need to address this distress that led to the establishment of Rural Support and its telephone helpline. Rural Support remains unique in that it is specifically designed to support the wider farming community, and that its volunteers who assist its helpline service all have rural backgrounds.

Initially set up to alleviate the stress, worries and concerns experienced in the face of foot and mouth, Rural Support has subsequently broadened its focus to include concerns related to financial problems, inheritance issues/succession planning, disease outbreak, and the burden imposed by farm paper, work and related matters. These increasing pressures are a result of changing circumstances. While retaining its core focus on issues such as stress and emotional distress, physical and mental health and the often-related risk of suicide, Rural Support now has extensive experience in handling problems associated with major incidents including animal diseases and major weather events; such as that experienced in the Spring of 2013 and more recently in the North West in 2017. Such incidents have highlighted the on-going needs of the rural community and the valuable service that Rural Support provides.

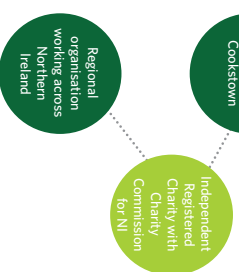
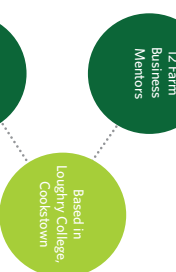


# ABOUT US

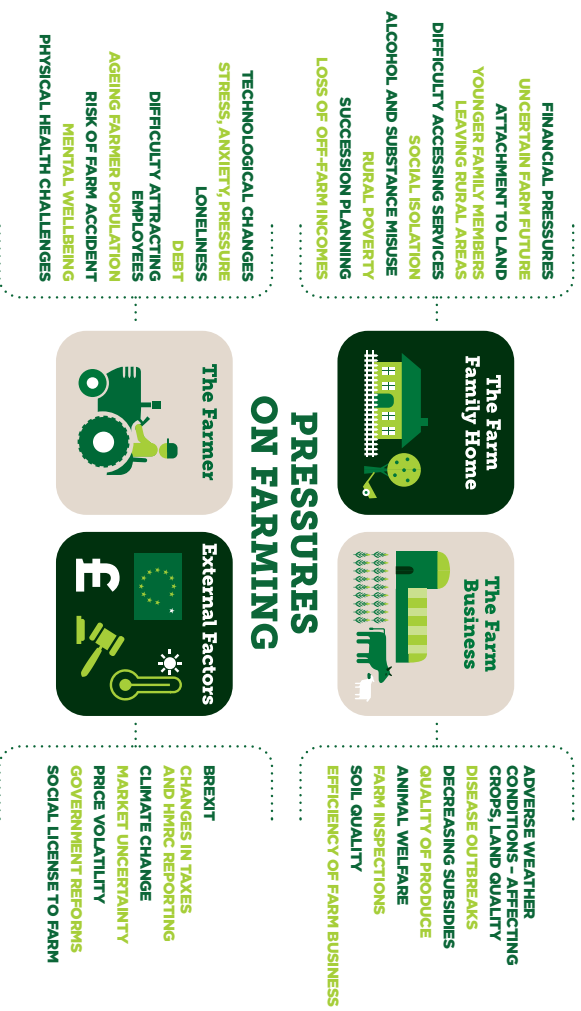
Rural Support currently has six staff members (four full-time and two part-time) based at Loughry College, Cookstown. It is governed by a Board of 11 members (who meet bi-monthly), representing a range of experience and skills. Members include farmers, current and former officials the local Farmers' Union's, members of the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster, business leaders, representatives from the community and voluntary sector, health professionals and a former DAERA representative.

Currently 35 volunteers give their time, knowledge, expertise and experience to those who call the helpline. As and when required, they provide support, guidance to contribute to promotion and outreach.

Rural Support has been proactive in developing programme to tackle rural stress and promote positive mental health within farming community. By drawing of the knowledge and skills of twelve farm business mentors, farmers are supported to tackle farm business issues such as finance, debt or paperwork through our on-farm business support. Furthermore, we endeavour to build capacity within the farming community through our farm resilience programme focusing on general business areas such as finance and business planning, making efficiencies and looking at new opportunities, as well as preparing for the future such as succession planning and change management.



# WHY WE DO OUR WORK



# OUR APPROACH

Proactive	Understanding	Confidential	Caring	Professional
We are proactive in our approach. We offer bespoke support which intervenes at the earliest opportunity and maximises the impact on those who we support. Our focus is always on providing hope to every situation and identifying the best possible options.	Volunteers, mentors, staff and boards members have an intimate understanding of the challenges facing the farming community based on their own experiences.	We value the trust that people put in us. We also understand how challenging it can be to seek support in the first place. We repay that trust by providing a service which is entirely confidential.	We care passionately about the farming community. We are sensitive to their specific needs and always maintain a caring, non-judgemental and respectful approach in everything we do.	We bring extensive knowledge, skills and experience to our work with the farming community. We offer practical and meaningful support at no cost to those who seek our assistance.

# OUR STAKEHOLDERS

Our Beneficiaries	Our Partners	Our Investors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farm Businesses</li> <li>• Farm Family Members</li> <li>• Retired Farmers</li> <li>• Social Farming Participants</li> <li>• Wider Rural Community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteers</li> <li>• Farm Business Mentors</li> <li>• Farmers Union's</li> <li>• CAFFE</li> <li>• Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster</li> <li>• Rural Support Networks</li> <li>• AdviceNI</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs</li> <li>• Public Health Agency</li> <li>• Princes Countryside Foundation</li> <li>• NPD Mutual Charitable Trust</li> <li>• Other Charitable Donations</li> </ul>

"I can't thank you enough for your help. I felt so trapped and overwhelmed by the whole issue. You made a huge difference to my ability to cope and to break things down into chunks. You gave me the confidence and the contacts I needed." (Farmer)

"I was glad to have someone there just to listen and understand exactly what I was going through." (Farmer)



**OUR VISION**  
Our vision is of a vibrant, healthy and resilient farming community in Northern Ireland.

**OUR MISSION**  
Our mission is to provide professional and practical support to farmers, farm families and farm businesses throughout Northern Ireland.

**OUR VALUES**  
We **listen and understand**.  
We **value** every individual.  
We **bring hope** and positivity.  
We **empower** people.

"I have never been so happy in a long time. I am tired when I get home but it's a nice tired. I feel like I have contributed something and that feels good." (Social Farming Participant)

"I have found it very personally rewarding. I didn't think when I started that I would have enjoyed being involved as much as I have. It has been good for me." (Social Farmer)



## WHY WE DO OUR WORK

- 1 Helpline Support
- 2 Farm Business Mentoring
- 3 Promoting and Coordinating Social Farming
- 4 Outreach Support and Referrals
- 5 Emotional and Technical/ Practical Support
- 6 Promote Positive Mental Health

### Below is a summary of the key outputs of Rural Support each year:

Over **400 people** access support through our confidential telephone support helpline

**150 people** avail of specialised mentoring support through our On-Farm Business Mentoring Programme

**2500+** people develop increased knowledge and skills in key areas relevant and important to their farming business including but not limited to financial management, succession planning, change management and mental health

**50+** farmers are supported to explore or sustain Social Farming delivery as an option for their farm

**50+** Volunteers, mentors and staff supported on an ongoing basis to build capacity within rural sector and ensure sustainability of services

# IMPACT OF OUR WORK

- ▶ Improving the well-being of farmers and farm family members
- ▶ Helping to build more resilient farm businesses
- ▶ Supporting farmers to deliver a Social Farming service and supporting service users to participate
- ▶ Enhancing the social inclusion, mental health, physical health, and personal development opportunities for farmers and participants of Social Farming
- ▶ Increasing awareness and understanding of needs of farming community
- ▶ Enabling partnerships between rural stakeholders to deliver better outcomes for farming community

Clients experienced a 58% improvement in mental well-being.

All clients said mentoring support had a substantial impact on their personal situation. Respondents had very positive feedback on mentors. They were described as: having credibility, able to empathise with challenges facing the farming community and non-judgemental. They were perceived to have expertise.

100% of respondents who used Rural Support services said that the service was excellent or good.

Positive Changes in Social Farming participants\*:

1. Improved mood
2. Increased motivation
3. Increased confidence
4. Increased physical fitness and improved dexterity

\*Participants of Social Farming Taster Sessions 2016

"I changed our lives. Our mentor had excellent knowledge and understanding and helped us to focus and decide on a clear direction. My husband is like a different person now we have no business debt." (Farmer)

"I had severe depression and stress with financial pressures. I knew I needed to do something but I couldn't bring myself to do it. The mentor gave me the pointers and encouragement." (Farmer)



## OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



## OUR OBJECTIVES

Rural Support has developed a number of key objectives which will allow us to work towards achieving our goals.

### **Strategic Priority 1.** **To improve health and wellbeing of farmers and farm family members.**

#### Key Objectives

- 1.1 Provide a confidential helpline which is serviced by staff and volunteers who are appropriately trained and supported in their role.
- 1.2 Develop and deliver interventions which contribute to positive mental health and wellbeing of farmers and farm family members.
- 1.3 Contribute to local, sub regional and regional initiatives which focus on developing positive mental health and ensure that farmers benefit from wider services.

### **Strategic Priority 2.** **To help build resilient farm businesses that are adaptable to ongoing change and challenges.**

#### Key Objectives

- 2.1 To develop and support a pool of experienced/competent farm business mentors who bring key knowledge and specialisms which are valuable to farmers and farm businesses.

- 2.2 Promote and deliver on farm support through a range of focused interventions designed to inform, educate and support farm businesses through challenging issues and difficult circumstances.
- 2.3 To develop bespoke tailored programmes in response to complex and challenging issues which farmers and farm families may face as a result of changing legislation and farming practices.

### **Strategic Priority 3.** **To promote socially inclusive services that the farming community can deliver for people in need of additional support.**

#### Key Objectives

- 3.1 To champion the value, opportunities and impact of Social Farming in Northern Ireland amongst key stakeholder;
- 3.2 To support farmers in the development and provision of a social farming service on their farms.
- 3.3 To promote farming and the farm environment as a public good that can be utilised to support those in need.

### **Strategic Priority 4.** **To be a strong advocate and champion for farming community by contributing to a robust evidence base which helps inform future policy decisions.**

#### Key Objectives

- 4.1 To promote learning, sharing and development of best practice in relation to support for farming community at regional, European and international level;
- 4.2 To be a strong advocate for farming community amongst key stakeholders and enable cross sectoral partnerships to enhance outcomes for farming community;
- 4.3 To actively contribute to and develop research which helps articulate the unique needs and issues facing the farming community and potential solutions to address the challenges they face.

# POLICY IN CONTEXT







Rural Support  
The Estate Building,  
Loughry College,  
Cookstown,  
County Tyrone,  
BT80 9AA

E: [info@ruralsupport.org.uk](mailto:info@ruralsupport.org.uk)  
T: 028 8676 0040

Rural Support is recognised as a charity by HMRC (charity reference XR52802), is a registered charity in Northern Ireland (charity number 102591) and is a company limited by guarantee (registered number NI42579).

