

Farmer cardiovascular health study

Diana Van Doorn (pictured) and John McNamara



A major study of farmers' health was published in June, as part of men's health week. The research found that 74% of male farmers have four, or more, risk factors for cardiovascular disease. This means they are three times more likely to have an acute cardiac event (stroke or heart attack) compared to those with fewer risk factors. Seventy-five per cent of all farmers participating in the research were advised to visit their GP to get further support and advice.

The lead author of the study, Diana van Doorn, a PhD Walsh Scholar at Teagasc and the National Centre for Men's Health at IT Carlow, said that while the top line figures paint a worrying picture there are positives.

She found that the majority of farmers reported having visited their GP in the past year, fewer farmers smoke or drink compared to the general population and farmers, by virtue of their occupation, get a lot of physical activity. There are, however, areas of concern identified by the study.

Results show that the majority of farmers (85.9%) are either overweight or obese. This is substantially higher than the national average for Irish men (68%). Four in five (80.5%) farmers were classified as having an "at-risk" waist circumference of ≥ 94 cm (37 inches). Abdominal weight is a major risk factor for heart disease.

Fit Farmers initiative

Examples of initiatives encouraging farmers' health are particularly welcome. As just one example, Laura Tully, a nurse at Athlone Institute of Technology, created a novel health promoting lifestyle intervention for farmers in 2019 called the "Fit Farmers" programme which aims to improve the nutrition, strength and wellbeing of Irish farmers.

The programme is delivered locally to farmers via a series of expert led workshops and workouts over a six-week period. To date, supported by Roscommon Sports Partnership, 76 farmers have undertaken Laura's



Fit Farmers equips and empowers farmers to make healthy swaps, embrace physical activity and sustain changes and improvements in their own health into the future.

programme with outstanding results in terms of weight loss, increased strength, improved cardiovascular fitness, increased physical activity as well as positive gains in mental and social health.

Peter Naughton (55) is one of the farmers who has undertaken Laura's programme. Until the death of his mother, Peter was her full-time carer and opportunities to exercise were rare.

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Peter used to drive to the local filling station for his newspaper daily and usually grab a breakfast roll as well.

Peter admits he ate the "odd apple" but getting his recommended daily intake of fruit and vegetables was never even a consideration. Following the six-week Fit Farmers programme, Peter lost more than 8Kg, shed 10cm off his waist and has gone from couch to 5k and now regularly walks and cycles.

Peter says the frying pan is redundant except for making a healthy omelette.

He feels the overriding benefit of the

programme was the sense of comradeship that the farmers developed during and beyond the programme, "having peer support throughout meant you were more likely to continue to engage with the programme and the banter between us all made it fun".

All of the farmers who have undertaken the programme report an enormous sense of positive wellbeing and regularly commented that they feel less fatigued and stressed.

"Fit Farmers" essentially gives farmers the toolkit they need to look after their own health and wellbeing. Laura keeps the delivery simple and straightforward and uses a reliable evidence base to impart health information in a practical way. From showing farmers recommended portion and plate sizes and helping them understand their cholesterol and blood pressure, to taking them on walks in their locality, they are equipped and empowered to make healthy swaps, embrace physical activity and sustain changes and improvements in their own health into the future.

Some farmers have had undetected high blood pressure picked up and treated during the programme which can be a lifesaving intervention.

A programme such as Fit Farmers has the potential to be scaled nationally, to help farmers develop a healthy attitude to their health and wellbeing into older age.

Visiting Teagasc Grange

Before the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, the UK's Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, visited Teagasc Grange during a visit to Ireland. The couple were met and welcomed to Teagasc by Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Michael Creed and Liam Herlihy, chairman of Teagasc. They were introduced to Gerry Boyle, director of Teagasc, and members of the Teagasc Authority. To get your very own VIP tour of Teagasc Grange and what's going on there please join us online from 6 to 10 July for the Teagasc Virtual Beef Week 2020.

– Mark Moore



Edward O'Riordan and Paul Crosson with the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge.

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Recycle that bucket

COVID-19 hit, so it was a perfect time to get the sheep shed cleared of unwanted clutter. Haylage wrappers and netting were brought to the local collection point for recycling as normal. My mother noticed that the loft in the shed was starting to fill up with plastic buckets. Some were broken and mucky and others had gathered years' worth of dust.

We try to recycle as much as possible so the first thing to be done was to clean the buckets. My father spent a day power-hosing all buckets and lids and we sorted through them to see what might be worth keeping. In the meantime, my mother was trying to find somewhere to recycle the buckets, but nowhere would take them. The only alternative was to go to landfill which

no one wanted.

Eventually, we made contact with the Irish Farm Films Producer Group (IFFPG). It is the same organisation that collects silage wrappers and netting. It will take buckets once they are cleaned and gathered in a half-tonne bag. It collects nationwide.

– Grace Driver



New Teagasc YouTube channels

Recently, each of the 12 Teagasc regional advisory units have established their own YouTube channels to showcase videos produced around the region by advisors. Every week, new videos are being published covering enterprise areas such as beef, dairy, sheep, business management, diversification, tillage, health and safety, grass, environment and schemes.

YouTube is a video-sharing service where users can watch, like, share, or comment on videos they see. The video service can be accessed on a computer, laptop, tablet or mobile phone. To view the videos just do an internet search for YouTube on your device. Once you have found YouTube search for any one of the Teagasc regions and you will find their channel. You don't have to download the YouTube app on your phone to view videos.

Users do not need to sign-in to access the website or to view videos. all videos are public and available for anyone to see. If you have your own YouTube or Gmail account, please subscribe to your regional channel to be notified on your phone or computer when new videos are published. And remember you can share our videos on your own social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

– Sean Doorley