

By a Farmer Who Has Been There

Spring – when a young man's fancy turns to thoughts of love.

Half his luck! We Taranaki dairy farmers are distanced from this delightful dream by the stresses and strains another calving season brings.

Like dairy farmers all over the country, we too can get caught up in the need to meet efficiencies and achieve profit margins – often that can mean working harder and longer, sometimes to the detriment of our own health.

The scene is easily set for the unwary to fall into the trap of thinking that they alone are overwhelmed by a myriad of farming problems like demanding calves, inadequate pasture recovery and inclement and variable weather patterns.

This can cause stress (which is a natural part of everyday life), but when we are unable to cope with stress we can become rundown, tired, feel tense, impatient and irritable. It can be hard to concentrate and we might feel a loss of confidence. Stress can also be a precursor to anxiety disorders and other illnesses that can affect our mental health and wellbeing.

But help is available. Often it's just a matter of getting yourself through the difficult time and you may need some guidance to see it through. Talk your worries over with a friend, your partner, or your local GP. Your GP will be able to recommend more specialized help from a counsellor or psychiatrist.

Society today accepts that mental disorders like physical disorders, are treatable. This is a reversal from the thinking as recently as ten years ago when any mental illness was seen as dementia. If society feared any group more than those experiencing mental illness, it was those who treated them.

Limit your expectations. You cannot do absolutely everything you may have planned or that people expect of you. Eat well and take some time out if you can. Give yourself a breather now and again.

Remember that feeling stress and anxiety is a normal part of life and like physical illness you can recover and get back on your feet with support and medical advice. The important thing to remember is that recovery is in your hands.

For dairy farmers and their families wanting local help there is Like Minds Taranaki, which coordinates an anxiety disorders support group. This group meets on the first and third Wednesday of each month and consists of people from all walks of life who support each other through their common empathy with these disorders.

You could also ask for information from the Mental Health Foundation in Auckland or Wellington, check out their website www.mentalhealth.org.nz or do some of your own reading on the issue. Your local bookshops or the library will have relevant information.

Or contact: **Like Minds Taranaki**

Tel: 06 759 0966 or 0800 454 536

Email: mental.health@xtra.co.nz

Web: www.likemindstaranaki.org.nz

Other helpful sites: www.depression.org.nz www.thelowdown.co.nz