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Mental Health and Well-being in Farming Communities

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Chapter 1 - Systematic Review

What do farmers want from mental health and well-being support? A systematic review of preferences and barriers.

Prepared in accordance with the author requirements for the

Qualitative Health Research: Sage Journals

Author Guidelines

Abstract

This review aimed to understand farmers' needs and preferences from mental health and well-being supports. Rather than viewing help-seeking simply as a matter of access, this review explored how farming identities and social contexts shape perceptions of distress, preferences for support and barriers to engagement, with the aim of informing more effective, evidence-based approaches to supporting farming communities. A systematic search across 4 databases (PsychInfo, CINAHL, Scopus, SocAbs) and Google Scholar, identifying 14 qualitative studies. These were appraised using the CASP checklist and narrative synthesis. Six themes emerged: (1) Farming identity and cultural norms as central determinants of help-seeking, (2) Mental distress as an expected and cumulative feature of farming life, (3) Structural and contextual barriers limiting access to mental health support, (4) Experiences of support shaped by trust, understanding, and validation, (5) Preference for informal, flexible, and discreet support, (6) Gendered and relational influences on mental health help-seeking. Farmers' mental health needs and help-seeking preferences are shaped by a combination of cultural identity, occupational pressures, structural constraints and relational influences. Barriers to access are rooted in the social context of farming life rather than practical factors (e.g. time). Effective support therefore requires improved accessibility, culturally informed with the inclusion of community-led and lived-experience perspectives. Given the diversity of farming contexts worldwide, adaptable and locally sensitive models of support are required.

Key words: Farmers, mental health, help-seeking behaviour, barriers to care, stigma.

Introduction

The ‘agrarian myth’ which portrays farming as a healthy, wholesome and largely stress-free way of life, remains a contested concept (Brumby et al., 2012). This idealised view can obscure the significant pressures associated with farming work including financial uncertainty, long working hours and social isolation. In contrast, evidence suggests that farming is associated with substantial mental health challenges, with estimates that more than 200 million farmers worldwide may experience mental health difficulties each year (Hagen et al., 2019). This disconnect underscores the importance of understanding farmers’ experiences and preferences for seeking help that are accessible, acceptable and align with farming cultures.

Reluctance to seek help in farming communities is linked to several connected factors, including stigma shaped by a traditionally masculine farming culture, demanding workloads, limited access to health services, and a preference for practical problem solving rather than asking for help (Kennedy et al., 2016). In farming communities, social status is strongly influenced by ideas about what it means to be a ‘good farmer’. Those successfully align their identities with expectations that are more likely to gain respect within their own local community (Burns, 2021). They are commonly seen as hardworking, self-reliant and emotionally tough, to be able to push through difficulties without showing vulnerability (Burton et al., 2020). These expectations reflect overlapping rural, generational and masculine norms that present help-seeking as shameful, and stoic independence admirable (Hammersley et al., 2023). As a result, some farmers hide their psychological distress rather than seek mental health support, as this may be viewed as a weakness, or have a preference to rely on family and friends (Cleary,

2012, Stewart et al., 2015). These norms limit emotional expression, encouraging farmers to display positive and solution-focused attitudes, while discouraging reliance on supports due to fear of judgment or ridicule (Collins et al., 2009), and greater pressure to conform to male intergenerational gender norms and beliefs about help-seeking (Perceval et al., 2018). Whereas, female farmers are more open and likely to access support, mirroring more traditional female help-seeking behaviours (Hopkins et al., 2024).

Attitudinal barriers are strongly endorsed by farmers, closely followed by structural and time related barriers (Brew et al., 2016). Farmers often work long hours and describe themselves as 'time-poor', with farming men in particular prioritising farm duties above their own health (Laoire, 2005). Service availability is further constrained by shortages of mental health professionals based in rural areas, traditionally resulting in the need to travel long distances or forgo support altogether due to the time and financial burdens associated with time away from the farm (Smalley et al., 2010). Lack of anonymity and confidentiality in close-knit farming communities can also increase stigma and deter help-seeking (Staniford et al., 2009).

Recently, access to help has potentially improved through the delivery of digital mental health services such as video or phone consultations. These are widely recommended for farmers as they can be accessed remotely and reduce barriers associated with location, time and stigma (Bradford et al., 2015). Evidence suggests that these services are both clinically effective and cost-efficient, however, uptake remains low with only a quarter of all those assessed proceed to engage with them (Titov et al., 2017). Uptake may be further limited by barriers including attitudes towards mental health care, digital literacy, and poor internet connectivity, all common in rural areas (Handley et al., 2014). Although digital supports are frequently promoted to overcome barriers there remains a limited understanding of how and why farmers decide whether to use them (Meurk et al., 2016).

Farmers' help-seeking is influenced by confidence in health professionals and the quality of interactions with practitioners who understand farming culture. Expectations around access, continuity and quality of care also shape engagement, highlighting the importance of locally designed, culturally informed services in rural communities (Staniford et al., 2009, Wilson et al., 2015). It has been recognised it is essential that intervention research meaningfully involves the farming community in collaboration with engaging mental health supports (Batterham et al., 2020). Training programmes have been found to improve farmers' mental health understanding, confidence and peer support skills. As higher mental health literacy is linked to increased help seeking, a wider roll out of training programmes may help reduce adverse mental health outcomes among farmers (Hagen et al., 2020). Trusted "community champions" can promote positive attitudes towards mental health by modelling help-seeking, encouraging engagement, particularly among older and male farmers, and challenge stigma. Their impact may be strengthened when they share lived experiences, helping to normalise support seeking within farming communities (Kennedy et al., 2018, Kennedy et al., 2016).

Rationale and Objectives

Given global research into farmers' mental health and barriers to care, it is essential to understand farmers' perceived needs, their experiences of available support, and what they value to identify implications for clinical practice, service design and local community development. 'Perceived needs and wants' are defined in this review as what farmers believe they require based on their experiences and cultural context (Kazdin, 2025).

This systematic review aimed to synthesise qualitative evidence to better understand what farmers want from mental health and well-being support, addressing the following research questions:

- What are farmers' perceived mental health and well-being needs?
- What are farmers' experiences of mental health support?
- What are farmers' preferences regarding the type and delivery of mental health support?
- What are the barriers that affect farmers from accessing mental health support?
- To provide evidence-based recommendations for engaging farmers in mental health support.

Methods

Protocol registration and reporting standards

The protocol for this systematic review was registered with the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO) on 5th December 2025 (CRD420251237194) and reported in line with PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021) (Appendix 1.1). The review also follows The Enhancing transparency in reporting the synthesis of qualitative research (ENTREQ) guidelines (Tong et al., 2012) (Appendix 1.2) to ensure transparency of reporting throughout the review.

Search Strategy

Data sources

A pre-planned systematic search was conducted in December 2025. Searches of peer reviewed literature were undertaken via databases based on their coverage of literature relevant to the review topic: PsychINFO, CINAHL, Scopus and Sociological Abstracts. Additional searches were conducted through Google Scholar to identify grey literature, with the first 100 results reviewed, to reduce publication bias, increase comprehensiveness and offer a balanced picture of available evidence (Paez, 2017). Reference lists from identified articles, relevant systematic reviews and meta-analyses on similar topics were hand searched.

Search terms

Search terms were formulated using the SPIDER framework (Cooke, et al., 2012). Boolean logic was used to increase the sensitivity and specificity of the search. Support developing the search strategy was sought from the College of MVLS librarian at the University of Glasgow.

Terms were searched utilising terms and synonyms for:

1. Mental health.

2. Farmer.

3. Needs, access, barriers and help-seeking.

See appendix 1.3 for the full search strategy.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Table 1: Systematic Review Inclusions and Exclusion Criteria

	Inclusion	**Exclusion**
Participants	Farmers working in agricultural settings (including self-employed, family, and employed farmers. Over the age of 18 years old	Those not defined as a farmer and or working on a farm/agricultural settings. Under 18 years old
Study Focus	Studies focused on exploring farmers' experiences of mental health and interventions, use of formal mental health services and informal supports, barriers and facilitators to services	Studies focusing on outcomes and/or effectiveness of interventions of mental health. Studies focusing on physical health. Mental health professional experiences.
Outcome	Identified mental health needs, contact with mental health services and supports, engagement in recommended treatments and resources. Preferences for support, and barriers to accessing mental health support.	Studies solely focused on intervention outcomes, professionals' experiences of delivering interventions and/or physical health
Language and article type	Articles in English	Articles not in English. Systematic reviews
Publication Type	Journal Articles, grey literature	Book chapters, dissertations
Methodology	Qualitative studies	Quantitative studies or mixed-method studies
Timeframe	1990 – no end date	Before 1990

Review Progress

Study Screening

Search results were exported from databases into the reference management software EndNote 21. After duplicates were removed, the primary researcher screened titles and abstracts for relevance. To assess screening reliability, an independent reviewer (MB)

examined a random 10% sample of records. Full-text articles were then obtained and assessed against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine eligibility. During the full text review, a second reviewer (MB) independently assessed a random sample of 25% of the articles. Any disagreements between reviewers were resolved through discussion until consensus was achieved.

Data Extraction

A data extraction tool was developed by the primary author (Appendix 1.4), used to capture the key characteristics and results from each paper individually. The data was extracted by hand, including:

- Study characteristics: study title, authors, year of publication, research design, recruitment, data collection method, data analysis methods.
- Study sample: sample size, sampling method, age range, ethnicity, occupation.
- Study findings: text was extracted from the "results" or "findings" section of the included studies into NVivo 14 (QSR International).

Quality Appraisal

Eligible studies were appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme Qualitative Checklist (CASP, 2018), (Appendix 1.5), as recommended by ENTREQ guidelines (Tong et al., 2012). The ten-item checklist assesses key aspects of qualitative research, including aims, methodology, analytical rigour and relevance. CASP was appropriate due to its' focus on reflexivity, interpretive depth and methodological coherence. The primary reviewer rated each study and assigned an overall subjective quality judgement, with 25% independently assessed by a second reviewer (MB) and

discrepancies resolved by consensus. Quality ratings informed interpretation rather than inclusion, reported in the results (Table 3).

Data Synthesis

This review aims to synthesise the existing literature to better understand farmer's needs, preferences and barriers of mental health and well-being support, by summarising qualitative findings without generating new theories. Data were synthesised using a narrative synthesis approach, informed by the framework developed by Popay et al. (2006). This involved four interrelated stages: development of an initial theoretical framework, preliminary synthesis, exploration of relationships across studies and assessment of synthesis robustness. Findings were synthesised to address review questions, with focus on experiences, preferences and barriers to support. Supervisory input from a second researcher supported reflexivity and strengthened the development of findings.

This approach was appropriate given the qualitative, heterogeneity evidence base and focus on experiences and context, rather than effect sizes. The structured, staged framework enhanced transparency and rigour, supporting reflexive assessment, credibility and transferability of findings.

Reflexivity

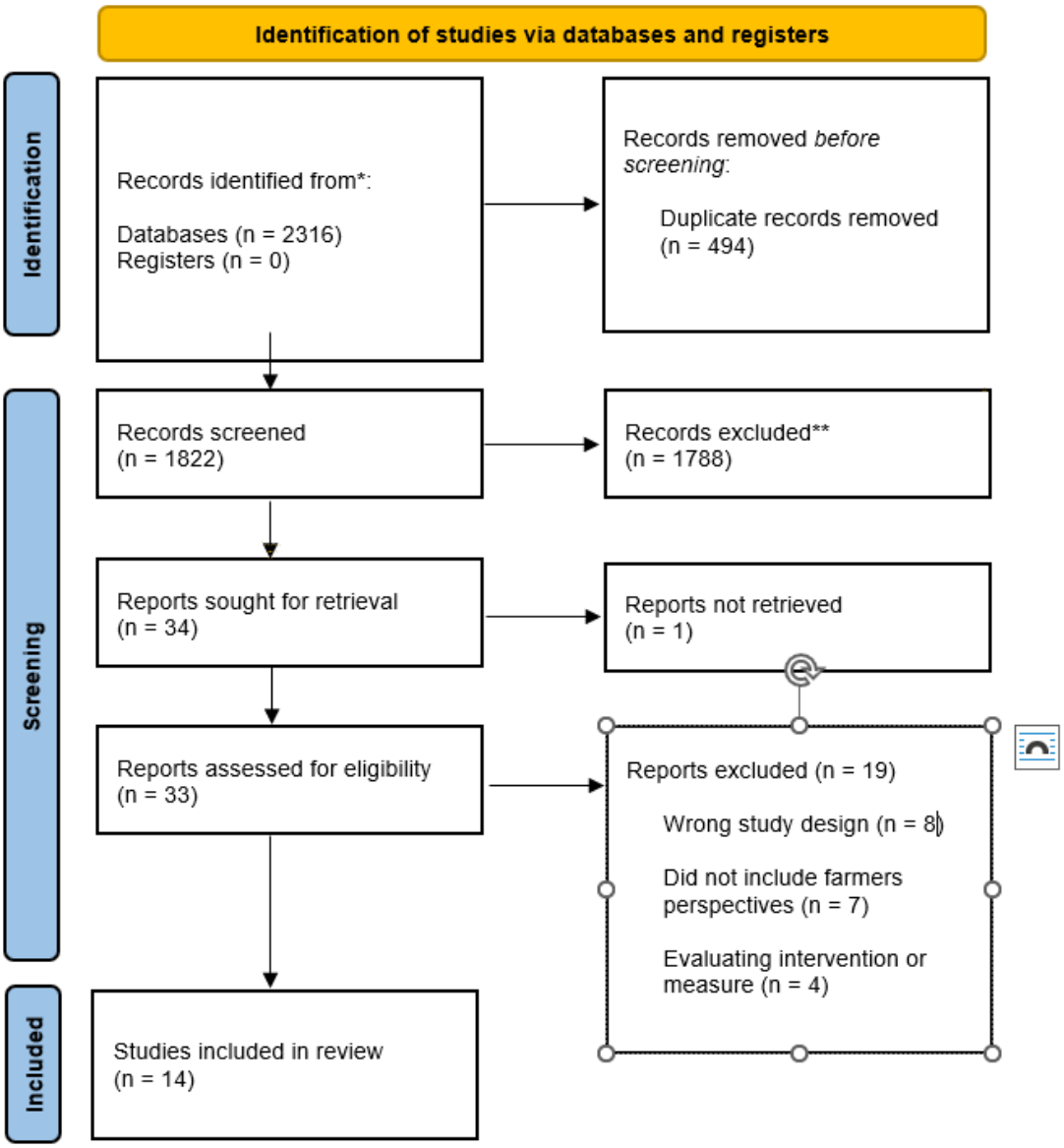
The researcher is a trainee clinical psychologist with training in mental health, bringing valuable insight into psychological support but also potential bias towards clinical models over community or culturally embedded supports. The researcher has no lived or professional experience of farming, with limited indirect contact, which may risk assumptions about farmers' help-seeking stigma, resilience and engagement with support. To address this, reflexivity was maintained throughout the review, with careful consideration of how professional identity and assumptions might influence study selection and interpretation. Emphasis was placed on farmers' own perspectives, alongside transparency and reflective analysis, to support a balanced and respectful interpretation of findings.

Results

Outcome of the Study Selection Process

The search process initially identified 2316 articles from electronic databases. After removing duplicate records (n = 494), title and abstracts of 1,822 records were screened for relevance. A further 1788 articles were excluded following the initial screening, with 34 articles eligible for full text retrieval. Not all articles could be retrieved (n=1) via the library, and 33 articles were assessed using full eligibility criteria, excluding 19 articles. At the title and abstract screening stage, reviewers initially agreed on 90% of records. At the full-text assessment stage, initial agreement was also 90%. At both stages, full agreement was achieved following discussion. In total 14 studies were included in the quality appraisal and data synthesis. Results of this process is outlined in a PRISMA (2020) diagram in Figure 1.

Figure 1: PRISMA Study Identification and Screening Process



Study and Participants Characteristics

Table 2 summarises the study characteristics. The fourteen studies were published between 2014 and 2024, all qualitative design. Studies were conducted in Australia (7), USA (3), Canada (2), Ireland (1) and Scotland (1).

The total number of participants across studies was 343, aged 18-74. Three studies were by the same authors, with similar research design, participants and ethics number (Vayro et al., 2020, Vayro et al., 2021, Vayro et al., 2023). Three studies did not report the age of participants (Hopkins et al., 2023, King et al., 2023, Schlesser et al., 2024) and acknowledged this in their limitations. Ethnicity was not reported for 92% of participants. The reported ethnicity of participants was White (26). Occupation was reported for 98% of participants. Reported occupations included farmer (239), work with farmers (37), farmers' partners (33), and GP's (24). Only farmers' data was included in this review.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews (10), focus groups (3) and one study used both interviews and focus groups (1). Methods of qualitative analysis were thematic analysis (12) standard qualitative analysis for focus group interview (1) and General Inductive Approach (1).

Table 2: Summary of Study Characteristics

Study	Authors, Year & Country	Sample Characteristics	Data Collection, Method & Analysis	Author Assigned Themes
S1	Firnhaber et al. (2024) Ireland	Total: 28 Gender: interviews; male (9), female (9), focus groups; male (7), female (4) Age: interviews (m=41.5 years) focus groups (m=50 years) Ethnicity: Not reported Occupation; Farmer (17), stakeholders (11)	Qualitative design Semi-structured questions using a topic guide (TG) Online interviews and focus groups Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	Resilience Being a 'good farmer' Help-seeking stigma Slowly increasing mental health awareness
S2	Garrett-Wright et al. (2023) USA	Total: 26 Gender: male (14), female (12) Age: 26 – 80 years Ethnicity: White Occupation: Full time farmer (13), part-time farmer (13)	Qualitative descriptive design Semi structured questions (TG) Focus groups (3) Standard qualitative analysis for group interview data (Morgan and Krueger, 1997)	Multiple components of stress on the farm Continuing to farm because of the love of land/generational connections Strategies to lower occupational stress

S3	Gunn et al. (2023) Canada	Total: 18 Gender: males (11), females (7) Age: 24 – 67 years Ethnicity: Not reported Occupation: Farmer (18)	Qualitative design Semi-structured questions (TG) Telephone interviews Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Srivastava and Thomson, 2009)	Current internet use practices Preferred aesthetics Preferred language Preferred technical aspects Preferred content/focus Strategies to promote engagement Marketing/promotions suggestions
S4	Hagan et al. (2022) Canada	Total: 75 Gender: male (37), female (37), unknown (1) Age: 25 – 28 years Ethnicity: Not reported Occupation: Farmer (51), work with farmers (24)	Qualitative design Semi-structured interviews (TG not specified) Face to face and telephone Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)	Accessibility of mental health supports and services. Geographical accessibility of mental health supports and services Gender and accessibility of mental health supports and services Stigma around mental health in the agricultural community Anonymity and/or lack of anonymity in seeking support

S5	Hopkins et al. (2023) USA	Total: 15 Gender: male (14), female (1) Age: Not reported Ethnicity: Not reported Occupation: Farmer (15)	Phenomenological exploratory approach Semi-structured interviews (TG) Face to face Thematic analysis (approach not specified)	Triggers and help-seeking Accessing formal and informal support Barriers to ongoing support Relationships
S6	Hull et al. (2022) Australia	Total: 15 Gender: Male (12), female (3) Age: 27-67 Ethnicity: Not reported Occupation: Farmer (15)	Qualitative design Semi-structured interviews (TG) Face to face and telephone Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)	Independent and private Farm-related barriers Health system barriers Family and friends support my health needs
S7	King et al. (2023) Scotland	Total: 21 Gender: Male (15), female (6) Age: Not reported Ethnicity: Not reported Occupation: Farmer (6), Farmer's wife (3), Other (12)	Qualitative design Semi-structured interviews (TG) Telephone interviews Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)	Everyday life Farm management Age and gender Engagement Training Personal stories and experiences of what can help

S8	Mutsvairo et al. (2024) Australia	Total: 4 Gender: male (3), female (1) Age: 25 – 65 years Ethnicity: Not reported Occupation: Farmer (4)	Phenomenological approach Semi structured questions (TG not specified) Face to face interviews Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021)	Triggers and help-seeking Accessing formal and informal Support Barriers to ongoing support Relationships
S9	Roy et al. (2014) Canada	Total: 32 Gender: Male (32) Age: 27 – 63 Ethnicity: Not reported Occupation: Farmer (32)	Qualitative design Semi-structured interviews (TG) Face to face interviews General inductive approach (Thomas, 2003)	Informal support Formal help-seeking
S10	Schlesser et al. (2024) USA	Total: 10 Gender: male (4), female (6) Age: Not reported Ethnicity: Not reported Occupation: Farmer (10)	Qualitative Design Standardised questions (TG) Focus groups Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)	Stressors Barriers to seeking help Strategies for addressing barriers to seeking help Coping strategies Farmers as a unique subculture

S11	Vayro et al (2020) Australia.	Total: 28 Gender: male (12), female (16) Age: 29-70 Ethnicity: Not reported Occupation: Farmer (10), partners (10), GP's (10)	Qualitative design Semi-structured interviews (TG) Face to face and telephone Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)	Lifestyle and culture Farming priorities The challenges of farming life
S12	Vayro et al (2021) Australia.	Total: 28 Gender: male (12), female (16) Age: 29-70 Ethnicity: Not reported Occupation: Farmer (10), partners (10), GP's (10)	Qualitative design Semi-structured interviews (TG) Face to face and telephone Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)	Health service interactions Services are provided within a complex system Emerging technologies: the users, practitioners and systems
S13	Vayro et al. (2023) Australia	Total: 28 Gender: male (12), female (16) Age: 29-70 Ethnicity: Not reported Occupation: Farmer (10), partners (10), GP's (10)	Qualitative design Semi-structured interviews (TG) Face to face and telephone Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)	Mental health literacy Stigma of mental-illness and help-seeking Support, the partner's role in help-seeking The intersectionality between being a farmer, age and gender

S14	Woolford et al. (2022) Australia	Total: 15 Gender: male (15) Age: 23 – 74 years old Ethnicity: Not reported Occupation: Farmer (15)	Qualitative design Semi-structured interviews (TG) Telephone interviews Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)	Interacting with a supportive network Involvement in groups and teams Physical activity Proactively educating themselves Self-prioritising and deliberately maintaining work-life balance Being grateful Focussing on the controllable aspects of farming Actively welcoming mental health professionals into the community Normalising help-seeking Making seeking health assistance a priority Offering services that are culturally appropriate and accessible for male farmers Tailoring mental health information delivery to farming populations

Quality Appraisal

All studies were rated as being either medium or high quality on the CASP (Table 3). Studies presented a clear statement of aims, employed appropriate methodologies and reported their findings clearly. The majority demonstrated sound research design, suitable recruitment strategies, robust data collection methods, rigorous data analysis and adequate consideration of ethical issues. Overall, the review findings are based on generally acceptable quality evidence, but confidence in some findings is limited by poor reporting of reflexivity, ethics and analytical procedures. However, several studies were rated as 'can't tell' in specific domains due to insufficient reporting as outlined below.

Mutsvairo et al. (2024) failed to report if methods were required to be modified during the study or how they reached saturation of data. Hagen et al. (2022) failed to provide adequate information around how they explained the research to participants and it is unclear how they and Vayro et al. (2020) gained informed consent. In Garrett-Wright et al. (2023) and Roy et al. (2014) studies, it is unclear to what extent the research was explained and how ethical approval and governance procedures were addressed. Similarly, Schlesser et al. (2024) did not clearly report study ethical considerations. Mutsvairo et al. (2024) study provided a description of their analysis, however it was unclear who was involved and to what extent contradictory data was considered. These limitations do not invalidate the findings, but they require cautious interpretation, particularly for more subjective or context dependent results.

Only one study explicitly provided a reflexivity statement (Hull et al., 2022). Across the remainder of the studies there were issues with reflexivity, including clear reporting of the relationship between the researcher and participants, acknowledgement or examination of their role in contributing to potential bias and influence throughout different stages of their research. Some authors commented on their backgrounds but did

not detail how this may have influenced their study design or analysis. Example questions, interview guides and prompts were provided for half of the studies included (Garrett-Wright et al., 2023, Gunn et al., 2021, Hagen et al., 2022, Hopkins et al., 2023, Schlesser et al., 2025, Schlesser et al., 2024, Vayro et al., 2021). The limited reflexive reporting across most studies is important when interpreting themes relating to identity, stigma and help-seeking, as these findings rely heavily on researcher interpretation of participant accounts.

Finally, Schlesser et al. (2024) failed to report how the results from their findings will help locally and did not discuss whether or how findings could be transferred to other populations, or implications for practice. Studies also commented on how recruitment and findings were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (King et al., 2023, Schlesser et al., 2024). Overall, the studies provide credible insights, but more confidence should be placed in consistently reported findings, with caution applied to those supported by fewer or less transparently reported studies.

Table 3: Critical Appraisal Skills Programme Checklist Results

Study	Authors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
S1	Firnhaber et al. (2024)										
S2	Garrett-Wright et al. (2023)										
S3	Gunn et al. (2023)*										
S4	Hagen et al. (2022)										
S5	Hopkins et al. (2023)*										
S6	Hull et al. (2022)										
S7	King et al. (2023)										
S8	Mutsvairo et al. (2024)										
S9	Roy et al. (2014)										
S10	Schlesser et al. (2024)										
S11	Vayro et al. (2020)										
S12	Vayro et al. (2021)										
S13	Vayro et al. (2023)										
S14	Woolford et al. (2022)										

Green= 'Yes', Red= 'No', Yellow= 'Can't tell'
White cells indicate 'high quality' group, grey cells indicate 'medium quality' group.

Domains: 1 = Clear statement of aims; 2 = Suitable qualitative methodology; 3 = Appropriateness of research design; 4 = Appropriateness of recruitment strategy; 5 = Adequacy of data collection; 6 = Relationship between researcher and participant; 7 = Ethical consideration; 8 = Rigor of data analysis; 9 = Clear statement of findings; 10 = Value of research.

*Study has been co-rated

Data Synthesis

Narrative synthesis framework (Popay et al., 2006) was undertaken to review and integrate qualitative findings relating to farmers' mental health and well-being support needs, experiences and preferences. A preliminary synthesis was achieved by grouping codes into descriptive categories. Relationships were explored by examining how

identity, structural barriers and preferences interact and a conceptual explanation emerged. Six analytic themes were identified which are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4: Analytical Themes, Descriptive Themes and Supporting Codes

Analytical Themes	Descriptive themes	Codes
Theme 1: Farming identity and cultural norms as central determinants of help-seeking	Mental health is negotiated through farming identity and cultural norms	Masculinity, pride, self-reliance, resilience, fear of weakness, denial, stubbornness
Theme 2: Mental distress as an expected and cumulative feature of farming life	Farmers experience mental distress as cumulative, contextual, and normalised	Pressure, competition, coping, struggling, financial stress, pace of life, and change
Theme 3: Structural and contextual barriers limiting access to mental health support	Structural realities constrain engagement with mental health support	Accessibility, geography, time, financial pressure, competing priorities Privacy/anonymity
Theme 4: Experiences of support shaped by trust, understanding, and validation	Trust, understanding, and being heard shape experiences of support	Not feeling heard, trust, Expectations of services
Theme 5: Preference for informal, flexible, and discreet support modalities	Farmers prefer informal, flexible, and discreet forms of support from known sources	Informal interventions Accessibility and pace considerations
Theme 6: Gendered and relational influences on mental health help-seeking	Gender and family relationships act as key facilitators of help-seeking	The influence of women/spouse Generational expectations

1. Farming identity and cultural norms as central determinants of help-seeking

Farming identity strongly shaped how mental health difficulties were understood, with values such as self-reliance, resilience, pride and stoicism frequently described as essential to being a "good farmer" (Firnhaber et al., 2024, Hopkins et al., 2023, Hagen et al., 2022, Schlesser et al., 2024, Roy et al., 2014, Hull et al., 2022, Vayro et al., 2020, Vayro et al., 2021, Vayro et al., 2023). Resilience was framed as both a coping strategy and a core identity trait. As one farmer reflected, *"We more or less pride ourselves in being resilient and independent… you have to get up, put on your big boy trousers"* (Firnhaber et al., 2024, p359). Stigma, understood as negative attitudes towards mental health difficulties, reinforced these norms, with one farmer stating, *"One of the big things is stigma. Farmers feel like they need to be strong and just muscle through"* (Schlesser et al., 2024, p629), often favouring practical solutions (Vayro et al., 2021). However, some farmers reported to feel less affected by stigma (Vayro et al., 2023).

The emphasis on reliance was linked to a competitive rural culture, where pressure is often self-imposed through concerns about social status and others' perceptions. As one farmer explained *"…everyone is trying to keep their position and not be seen to fail in any respect. I suppose people are putting pressure on themselves the whole time to keep up with the Joneses as the saying goes"* (Firnhaber et al., 2024, p361). Farmers described expectations to endure hardship without showing emotion, reflected in statements such as, *"Just suck it up and get over yourself… I don't think it makes you any less of a man by talking about it."* (Hopkins et al., 2023, p107). Mental distress was often framed as personal weakness, leading to denial or minimisation, and although some farmers were open about using mental health supports, many sought to keep this private through fear of shame (Hull et al., 2022).

Masculinity was identified as a barrier to emotional disclosure and formal help-seeking. Both male and female participants described expectations for male farmers to conform to norms of toughness, emotional control, and endurance, sometimes bluntly expressed as being *"tough, stubborn, bull-headed old bastards"* (Hagen et al., 2022, p117). These norms left little space for vulnerability. Help-seeking barriers were experienced in gendered ways; one female farmer explained *"For women, I find it different. It's the way that we worry because we're different"* (Hagen et al., 2022, p116). By contrast, one male farmer rejected these expectations stating, "*I don't care about looking tough or whatever, I need to understand*" (Roy et al., 2014, p468), however this view was uncommon.

Age also shaped attitudes, with evidence of a gradual shift away from silence and stigma, particularly among younger farmers (Firnhaber et al., 2024, Hopkins et al., 2023). One farmer highlighted, *"When you speak to the older generation you can tell it's like you shouldn't be talking about that! But… when you talk to the younger generation, they're very open*" (Firnhaber et al., 2024, p366). Across studies, younger generations were more willing to seek and sustain support. This theme was consistently supported across medium and high-quality studies, increasing confidence in its importance, though limited reflexive reporting warrants some caution in interpretation.

2. Mental distress as an expected and cumulative feature of farming life

Mental health difficulties were often normalised within the farming community as an inherent and unavoidable aspect of farming. Farming was described not simply as an occupation, but a deeply embedded way of life that shape's identity and commitment to

the farm. One farmer reflected, "*It's in your blood, and you either got it or you don't. All you wanna do - or you don't want nothing to do with it"* (Garret-Wright et al., 2023, p42), framing farming as a vocation rather than choice despite its ongoing, unpredictable stressors.

Self-sacrifice was embedded in everyday thinking, normalising the neglect of personal needs and repositioning distress as routine, with fellow farmers often the first to notice when someone is struggling (Hull et al., 2022, King et al., 2023). Anticipated stress was also viewed as normal, with one farmer noting, *"I'm waiting for the next problem. I'm used to it"* (Garrett-Wright et al., 2023, p42).

Farmers described an inability to switch off, with the responsibility persisting even when away from the farm: *"It's a 24/7 job. And it's not even a job; it's a life. . . Even if you're not on the farm, you're always thinking about it"* (Schlesser et al., 2024, p628). There was also an expectation to endure hardship without pause, including the social unacceptability of taking time off. One farmer stated, *"It seems to be that farmers don't think it socially acceptable to turn around and say, 'you know what, I'm actually off today'"* (Firnhaber et al., p362). However, recent evidence suggests change with farmers increasingly attempting to prioritise themselves and maintain a work-life balance (Vayro et al., 2020, Woolford et al., 2022). Confidence in this theme is strengthened by its occurrence across several studies, although conclusions about changing attitudes should be treated cautiously, as some studies provided limited contextual detail and variation by generation, gender and setting was not always fully explored.

3. Structural and contextual barriers limiting access to mental health support

Six studies identified geographical location and limited time as key structural barriers to farmers accessing mental health support (Hagen et al., 2022, Mutsvairo et al., 2024, Schlesser et al., 2024, Roy et al., 2014, Hull et al., 2022, Vayro et al., 2020). Travel to appointments often exceeded an hour and sometimes required overnight stays, creating practical and financial burdens. One farmer noted, *"time is the essence"* (Hagen et al., 2022, p116). Being time-poor was consistently emphasised, with daily pressures of sustaining the farm leaving little capacity to prioritise well-being (Hull et al., 2022), captured by the statement, "*Time is the most precious thing you have because there's never enough time to get all your stuff done"* (Schlesser et al., 2024, p629, Hopkins et al., 2023).

Six studies highlighted concerns around privacy and anonymity when accessing mental health supports in close-knit rural communities (Hagen et al., 2022, Hopkins et al., 2023, Mutsvairo et al., 2024, Woolford et al., 2022, Roy et al., 2014, Hull et al., 2022). Heightened community visibility created hesitancy around both formal and informal support. One farmer explained, "*Everybody in the community knows that you're having the meeting and they drive by and 'oh, there's their truck"* (Hopkins et al., p108). Even when support was accessed, confidentiality concerns persisted: "*I don't think (farmers) would distrust the actual (mental health professional) themselves . . . but more of the waiting room and everyone knows everyone"* (Woolford et al., 2022, p13). However, farmers who had previously sought help, were more likely to do so again (Vayro et al., 2023).

Technology-based supports were viewed to address time and privacy barriers and became more acceptable following the COVID-19 pandemic (Schlesser et al., 2024). Farmers

reported that flexible, remote engagement aligned better with farming life and increased participation: *"something they can do in their own home is probably way more likely that they'll actually participate in it"* (Gunn et al., 2021, p306). Brief, regular contact was preferred, such as "*a weekly check-in… remotely"* (Woolford et al., 2022, p8). However, engagement depended on trust in services and culturally relevant delivery. Poor internet connectivity, limited digital literacy and clinicians lack of cultural understanding remained barriers, with impractical advice such as, expectations to take time off work, described as frustrating and financially burdensome (Gunn et al., 2021, Hagen et al., 2022, Hopkins et al., 2023, Hull et al., 2022). This was a robust theme, consistently identified across multiple medium quality studies, indicating that access difficulties are embedded in farming life rather than incidental.

4. Experiences of support shaped by trust, understanding and validation

Across nine studies, farmers' experiences of mental health support were shaped more by trust and perceived cultural understanding than by technical quality of care (Firnhaber et al., 2024, Hagen et al., 2022, Mutsvairo et al., 2024, Schlesser et al., 2024, Woolford et al., 2022, Gunn et al., 2021, Hull et al., 2022, Vayro et al., 2021, King et al., 2023). Negative experiences were commonly linked to clinicians' limited understanding of farming life, which undermined trust and discouraged engagement. One farmer stated, *"unless they grew up on a farm, I personally almost look at that as a waste of time"* (Woolford et al., 2022, p8). Lack of continuity of care in rural areas reliant on locum professionals were also identified as a barrier (Vayro et al., 2021).

In contrast, farmers placed greater trust in informal supports embedded in everyday life. Friends, neighbours and farm workers were often relied upon for practical and emotional

support and were sometimes valued more highly than formal services. One farmer described a helper who listened while working was "*the best psychologist that I've got*" (Mutsvairo et al., 2024, p4). Family and close networks played a central role, enabling distress to be managed privately and reducing social visibility or stigma. Farmers preferred to address difficulties "*inside your own farm gate*" before seeking external help (Firnhaber et al., 2024, p363), viewing home as a safe place (Roy et al., 2014).

Community-based activities offered low-pressure spaces for connection and discussion of mental well-being and were viewed as culturally acceptable (Roy et al., 2014). However, self-initiating help remained difficult, with farmers emphasising the need for proactive, outreach-based based mental health supports to overcome hesitancy (Gunn et al., 2021, Hull et al., 2022). Farmers also recognised the importance of gradual cultural change and locally tailored engagement with mental health professionals, acknowledging variation in readiness across rural communities (Woolford et al., 2022). Confidence in this theme is moderate; although commonly reported, limited detail on analysis and reflexivity means interpretations may reflect unexamined researcher assumptions.

5. Preference for informal, flexible and discreet support

Farmers consistently preferred support that was informal, flexible and discreet. Community-based initiatives, peer-led programmes, and helplines were viewed as more acceptable than traditional clinical services, with privacy and anonymity central concerns due to the stigma and visibility in small rural communities. Farmers described deliberate efforts to avoid highly visible healthcare settings; one noted discomfort *"seeing a doctor in this community"* and avoided pharmacies for fear of recognition (Mutsvairo et al., 2024, p5). Community supports were considered as most acceptable when locally

embedded yet sufficiently removed to minimise unwanted social encounters. One farmer stated, *"I would not go to someone or an organisation who I haven't had contact with before"* (King et al., 2023, p10).

Access to culturally informed support was a key preference across studies, with farmers emphasising that farming is a 'way of life' rather than simply an occupation (Vayro et al., 2021). Support was valued when delivered by individuals who understood agricultural realities; services lacking this understanding were seen as less relevant. One farmer remarked, "*it'd be nice if there was just someone to call… somebody that understands farming"* (Hagen et al., 2022, p119). Training rural healthcare professionals in farming culture was widely recommended to improve trust and engagement (Garrett-Wright et al., 2023, Hopkins et al., 2023, Schlesser et al., 2024).

Farmers valued opportunities to share experiences with peers facing similar challenges. Bottom-up, community-led approaches were preferred, with lived experience narratives seen as effective in improving mental health literacy and help-seeking. One farmer noted, "*the more we start sharing, the more people are going to start going right, well, this is something that is normal*" (Woolford et al., 2022, p7). Group supports facilitated by trusted rural professionals were suggested as practical ways to foster peer connection, while countering stigma and reluctance to seek help (Garrett-Wright et al., 2023, Woolford et al., 2022, Hull et al., 2022).

Mental health support was perceived as more accessible when integrated into existing services that farmers already attended, such as meetings or conferences, as they were "*heading in that direction anyway*" (Hagen et al., 2022, p116). These reduced barriers related to time, travel and competing farm demands, enabling access to multiple supports in one setting (Roy et al., 2014).

Web-based, telephone and online supports were viewed as useful for early intervention and prevention, particularly when designed to appear authentic and relevant to farming communities. Farmers preferred simple, visually familiar designs using farming imagery, natural colours and accessible positive language described as '*casual, empowering and carefully humorous*' (Gunn et al., 2021). However, care was needed to avoid widening the digital divide for those with poor internet speed/connectivity or lower digital literacy (Gunn et al., 2021, Vayro et al., 2021). This theme is well supported, but should be interpreted cautiously due to limited participant detail, which may mask subgroup differences.

6. Generational and relational influences on mental health help-seeking

Across five studies, help-seeking among farmers was shown to be a strongly relational process shaped by family dynamics, gendered roles and intergenerational norms (Gunn et al., 2021, Hagen et al., 2022, Hopkins et al., 2023, Mutsvairo et al., 2024, Vayro et al., 2023). Partners, particularly women, were central to recognising distress, locating services, and encouraging engagement, often acting as advocates for male farmers (Gunn et al., 2021). This gendered burden was acknowledged, with one farmer suggesting that mental health information would be more effective if directed towards women: "*Us women is really what it comes down to. It would take mum, or me, or another sister-in law to push them to go get help"* (Hagen et al., 2022, p117).

Farmers frequently reported uncertainty about accessing support independently, reinforcing reliance on partners: one male farmer noting, *"I wouldn't know where to start. I'd probably ask my wife"* (Hopkins et al., 2023, p108). While male farmers valued this support, female farmer partners expressed frustration with the associated burden (Hull et al., 2022) Partners also acted as catalysts for awareness and validation, helping

farmers recognise the need for support: *"I think my wife pointing out to me was a catalyst… to think about it myself"* (Mutsvairo et al., 2024, p4).

Generational norms further shaped help-seeking, with older farming cultures emphasising the expectation of self-reliance and minimising mental health needs (Hopkins et al., 2023, Vayro et al., 2023). However, several studies noted gradual generational change, with younger farmers reporting greater openness to support: *"As for the younger generation I think they've come around to tend to want help and talk to people*" (Schlesser et al., 2024, p109), alongside improved help-seeking behaviours (Vayro et al., 2023). This theme should be interpreted with some care due to inconsistent demographic reporting, though its recurrence suggests it is a meaningful influence on help-seeking.

Discussion

Overview of findings

This review provided an up-to-date critical synthesis of qualitative research exploring farmer's needs, preferences and barriers to seeking mental health support. Six descriptive themes illustrated how these needs are shaped by the interaction between cultural identity, occupational stressors, structural constraints and relational dynamics. Importantly, barriers to access are not solely logistical but are embedded within the social and cultural context of farming life. These conclusions are supported by recurring patterns across multiple medium-high quality studies, although confidence is stronger for some themes than others due to variation in reporting quality.

Farmers commonly viewed stress as normal and inevitable aspect of farming, with accumulated stress often recognised but rarely framed as a mental health concern requiring support. This normalisation is embedded in farming culture, where continuing

"as normal" is expected despite psychological strain, and distress is frequently seen as something to endure rather than address (Hammersley et al., 2023). This interpretation is strengthened by the consistency of this finding across the included qualitative studies.

Resilience was strongly valued and linked to a "good farmer" identity characterised by self-reliance and stoicism (Burns, 2021). While resilience supported coping, it also acted as a barrier to help-seeking, as accessing support was often perceived as incompatible with being resilient (Cleary, 2012, Stewart et al., 2015). Although some farmers acknowledged the importance of early interventions and improved mental health literacy, these needs were constrained by stigma and reputation concerns. Younger farmers were perceived to be less affected by these expectations, suggesting a gradual intergenerational shift (Perceval et al., 2018). However, this apparent shift should be interpreted somewhat cautiously, as subgroup differences were not always explored in depth and demographic reporting across primary studies was inconsistent.

Farmers' experiences of mental health support were shaped by reliance on informal networks and persistent stigma. Farmers were generally more comfortable seeking help from family and peers who understood farming life, often favouring self-help and independent coping (Collins et al., 2009). Engagement with professional services was frequently delayed or avoided due to stigma and doubts about clinicians' understanding of farming contexts (Staniford et al., 2009, Wilson et al., 2015). Consequently, formal support was often viewed as a last resort rather than a preventative resource, reinforcing patterns of endurance and self-reliance. This was a consistent finding across the review, though limited reflexive reporting in many studies reduces certainty about how fully these experiences were explored.

Preferences for support were closely linked to access barriers. Farmers favoured support that was informal, discreet, flexible, community-led, and culturally informed, with locally embedded approaches valued for their relevance and credibility (Batterham et al., 2020). Trust, cultural understanding, and continuity of care were important. However, community-embedded support created tensions around privacy, confidentiality and over-familiarity (Staniford et al., 2009). Face-to-face support was generally preferred, yet accessibility was limited by geography, time pressures, and competing farm demands. There was cautious openness to technology-based support despite evidence of its clinical effectiveness (Titov et al., 2017), but poor connectivity and digital exclusion in rural areas limited feasibility (Handley et al., 2014). These preferences co-existed with psychosocial barriers, including pride, stigma and limited mental health literacy, which reinforced self-reliance and normalisation of distress. As structural barriers were among the most consistently reported finding across the higher quality studies, this is one of the stronger conclusions of the review.

Overall, findings suggest farmers may be more effectively engaged through approaches that increase awareness, improve mental health literacy, and reframe resilience in ways that align with farming culture. Community-embedded, farmer-led interventions were particularly valued, as they foster trust and shared understanding, while challenging stigma through peer endorsement and "community champions" (Kennedy et al., 2016, Kennedy et al., 2018). Informal support delivered through familiar settings, such as agricultural events, may normalise mental health discussions without positioning individuals as 'service users'. Engagement could be further enhanced by improving professionals' cultural awareness (Hagen et al., 2020), alongside targeted efforts towards younger farmers and recognition of the influential role of spouses, particularly women, in encouraging help-seeking. These implications are supported by the overall direction

of the evidence but should still be viewed as provisional given the recurring limitations in reflexivity, sampling transparency and ethical reporting across the included studies.

Strengths and Limitations

A key strength of this review is its synthesis of farmer's lived experiences across qualitative studies, offering a nuanced understanding of how mental health needs, preferences and barriers are shaped by cultural identity, occupational stressors, and structural constraints. Narrative synthesis enabled integration of diverse evidence linking farming identity, normalisation of distress, and help-seeking behaviour, with recurring themes across countries suggesting some transferability and demonstrating this approach's suitability for capturing the complexity of farmers' perspectives. The inclusion of predominantly medium and high-quality studies also strengthens the credibility of the synthesis.

The review is limited by the scope and quality of included studies, which commonly relied on self-selected samples, inconsistent demographic reporting (particularly regarding ethnicity, socioeconomic status and farm type), unclear ethical reporting, and limited reflexivity. These limitations are important because they reduce confidence in how representative the findings are and in how transparently interpretations were developed. Although the predominance of male farmers reflects the workforce, underrepresentation of women restricts interpretation of gender-specific needs and barriers despite their influence on help-seeking. Restriction to English-language studies may have excluded relevant international evidence and, as with all qualitative synthesis, findings remain to interpretive judgement. Accordingly, the review findings are best understood as identifying credible and recurring patterns in the literature rather than definitive conclusions applicable to all farming populations.

Implications for practice and future research

This review highlights the importance of involving farmers with lived experience in community initiatives and service delivery, alongside targeted professional training and engagement at agricultural events, to improve practitioners understanding of farming and enhance the credibility of mental health supports. Greater cultural awareness may also help reduce stigma by encouraging open discussions of mental well-being and challenging intergenerational norms that discourage help-seeking. These practice implications are most strongly supported in relation to culturally informed, flexible and community-based support, which were recurring findings across several of the stronger studies.

Future research should explore the attitudes and preferences of young farmers to determine whether patterns of help-seeking are shifting across generations. A complementary review of mental health professionals' experiences could offer valuable insight into farmer engagement with services. Future research would also benefit from clearer reflexive accounts, more transparent ethical reporting, and fuller demographic description to strengthen confidence in the evidence.

Conclusion

Farmers' needs and preferences arise from the interaction of cultural identity, occupational stressors, structural constraints and relational dynamics. Barriers to access are therefore not only logistical but embedded within the social and cultural context of farming life, emerging before formal or informal supports are considered. This review highlights the need for accessible services, improved professional training in farming cultural awareness, and community-led approaches incorporating lived experience. Given global and regional diversity of farming, a single standardised model of support is

unlikely to be effective. Instead, locally responsive and adaptable approaches are required. While these conclusions are supported by generally moderate-to-high quality qualitative evidence, confidence is reduced by recurring weakness in reflexivity, reporting transparency and sampling detail across the included studies. Further high-quality research addressing these study limitations is required.

Declarations

Competing interests: The authors declare no competing interests. CW directs an educational life skills company offering a free mental health life course for farmers. KL leads research trials within farming communities. One of the cited papers was authored by KL and CW.

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Authors' contributions: LS designed the search strategy, carried out the literature searches, screened articles synthesised the findings and wrote the systematic review. CW/KL provide supervision, reviewed and offered feedback on revisions. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Chapter 2 - Major Research Project

Beyond the Farm Gates. Growing up in Farming Families; Expectations, Pressures and Well-being

Prepared in accordance with the author requirements for the

Qualitative Health Research: Sage Journals

Author Guidelines

An explanation of terminology

In this study, "*farmers*" includes all farm workers and members of the broader agricultural community, including unpaid workers, family members, and part-time farmers. "*Family farms*" are defined as farms primarily managed and operated by a family and largely dependent on family labour (Garner and De la O Campos, 2014).

Plain language summary

Title: Beyond the Farm Gates - Growing up in Farming Families

Background: Farming is often more than a job. It is a way of life closely linked to land, family and identity. Farming supports rural communities and traditions. However, it can also be hard work. Farmers often work long hours. They face uncertainty about weather and money. They can also feel isolated. This can affect their mental health. In farming families, people are often taught to be strong and independent. They are encouraged to work hard. They are also taught not to show their feelings too much. This can make it difficult to talk about stress or worries. People who grew up on farms may feel expected to undertake unpaid work and ultimately to take over the family farm. These expectations can shape who they become. They can also affect their life choices, even if they choose a different career.

Aim: This study wanted to understand how people who grew up on family farms feel about family expectations. It also wanted to know how these expectations affected their adult lives, careers and well-being.

Research question: How do people who grew up on family farms experience what their family think they should do? How do they feel this has affected their adult lives?

Methods: The researchers spoke to people through online interviews. Nine people took part. Three were farmers. Six had grown up on farms but now worked in other jobs. The interviews were recorded and written down. The researchers looked for common themes in what people said.

Main findings and conclusions: Most people said they were not directly forced to take over the farm. However, they still felt strong family and cultural influences. These were

linked to the land and farming life. These influences shaped their identity, values, and sense of responsibility. Many people said they had to find their own ideas of success. They wanted to respect their farming background and all reported positive memories of growing up on their family farm. At the same time, they wanted to make their own choices and look after their well-being. They also hoped their future generations would feel less pressure and be healthier and happier.

Abstract

Farming is widely understood as a way of life shaped by strong emotional ties to land, family and identity, yet it is also associated with demanding working conditions, social isolation and elevated risks to mental health. Cultural norms within farming communities, include ideals of self-reliance, stoicism and the identity of the "good farmer". Within family farming systems, these norms are reinforced through the close integration of work and home life, with intergenerational expectations shaping identity from an early age, and processes of succession and attachment to place continuing to influence well-being and life choices. This study explored how individuals raised on family farms experience intergenerational expectations and how they perceive these as influencing their adult lives. A qualitative approach was adopted using semi-structured online video interviews, which were audio-recorded with consent. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Nine participants took part: three were farmers and six were employed in non-farming occupations. Three overarching themes were identified: *Love, Land and Legacy, Roots and Routes, and Inheritance of the Heart.* These themes portray farming as a distinct cultural way of life and illustrate how inherited experiences shape identity and career pathways. Rather than experiencing explicit pressure to farm, participants described a more subtle yet enduring emotional and relational influences, while actively renegotiating inherited expectations to prioritise autonomy, balance and sustainable well-being.

Keywords: family farm, expectations, pressures, well-being, intergenerational

Introduction

Farming provides essential goods and services while sustaining social, cultural and environmental heritage, yet it remains a demanding occupation characterised by long working hours, uncertainty and low profit margins (Lobley et al., 2019, Brennan et al., 2022). This way of life is often associated with social and physical isolation, limited opportunities to disengage from work, and difficulties maintaining work-life balance, all of which contribute to elevated levels of poor mental health (Rose et al., 2022). Despite these pressures, farmers frequently remain in the profession due to strong emotional ties to the land, generational responsibility and commitment to family continuity, rather than economic reward alone (Garrett-Wright et al., 2023).

The 'good farmer' theory describes how farmers construct their identities within rural communities, where social status is tied to dominant ideals of hard work, self-reliance, and emotional constraint (Burton et al., 2020, McGuire et al., 2012). Respect is afforded to those who embody these norms, often encouraging the suppression of vulnerability at the expense of health and well-being. As a result, stoic masculine health behaviours are valued, and mental health difficulties are frequently concealed to avoid perceptions of weakness (Firnhaber et al., 2024, Roy et al., 2014). These norms are reinforced within family farming, which extends beyond economic activity to represent a way of life where family, work and identity are deeply intertwined (Price and Evans, 2009). The overlap of home and workplace blurs professional and personal boundaries, with the land symbolising heritage, continuity, and intergenerational responsibility, resulting in farming being experienced as a moral and relational process (Riley and Robertson, 2022). This strong emotional attachment fosters a lasting sense of belonging and identity, often formed in early life and remaining influential even when individuals pursue non-farming careers (Burton et al., 2020, Cassidy and McGrath, 2015, Conway et al., 2017).

Intergenerational expectations in family farming are closely linked to succession, traditionally understood as the transfer of land, assets, and control, but increasingly recognised as a prolonged and relational process shaped over time (Lobley et al., 2019, Bertolozzi-Caredio et al., 2020). Decisions about joining or leaving the family farm often develop gradually through childhood exposure to family roles, values and expectations, aligning with broader family business research (Stavrou, 1998). These decisions are influenced by factors such as gender, personality, identification with the farm, and parental dynamics, with expectations frequently remaining implicit rather than explicitly stated (Schröder et al., 2011, McMullen and Warnick, 2015, Liu et al., 2024). As a result, many individuals internalise a sense of responsibility and loyalty from an early age, which can complicate later career choices (Carolan, 2018, Fischer and Burton, 2014, Holloway et al., 2021).

These intergenerational dynamics intersect with concerns about succession among farmers and non-farming spouses, reflecting broader anxieties about preserving the family legacy. Traditional divisions of labour have often disadvantaged women, positioning them as invisible and unpaid workers. Associated challenges may relate more to status within the family farm and family structure than gender alone (Contzen and Forney, 2017, Price, 2012). Ongoing uncertainty in the agricultural sector has been known to push women to seek off-farm employment, alongside multiple roles, highlighting their crucial contribution to farm stability. Such decisions are also shaped by motivations including improved work-life balance, greater independence, and enhanced social and financial security (Bharadwaj et al., 2013).

Children's involvement in farm work is commonly framed as helping rather than as formal labour. Children often contribute from an early age to daily routines that foster skills, work ethic, and a sense of usefulness (Becot, 2022, Becot et al., 2021). The meaning attached to this work varies, with some recalling it as burdensome and others as emotionally significant, particularly in facilitating relationships with parents with lasting implications for how individuals relate to work and family roles in adulthood (Holloway et al., 2021, Callejo-González and Ruiz-Herrero, 2024). While family farms share similarities with other businesses, they are distinct in combining home, work, and family life within a single space, intensifying attachment, responsibility and reinforcing ideas of legacy (Potter and Lobley, 2008).

Attachment to place further shapes these experiences. Emotional bonds with specific landscapes contribute to a stable sense of self over time, with the farmhouse and land often serving as central reference points for identity and sense of belonging among those raised on farms (Scannell and Gifford, 2010, Holloway et al., 2021, Jayakody et al., 2024). Rural childhood experiences are frequently recalled nostalgically in adulthood, particularly following moves away from farming environments, however, nostalgia reflects ongoing emotional connection rather than simple idealisation and continues to shape self-understanding and life choices (Cuervo and Cook, 2019). Studies of rural upbringing indicate that early exposure to open spaces, independence and close-knit family life, can have long-term effects on well-being and identity (Tešin et al., 2024). Career pathways are therefore often non-linear and conditioned by rural context, with individuals leaving farming to pursue education or alternative employment, some subsequently return later in life. Moreover, significant events such as the sale of the family farm carries substantial symbolic meaning, with implications for both identity and

well-being (Carolan, 2018, Villán et al., 2025, Bryant and Garnham, 2015, Conway et al., 2016, Nye, 2021).

Loneliness is closely associated with poor mental health among farmers and contribute to elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and suicide (Beautrais, 2018, Furey et al., 2016). Shaped by occupational isolation and farming norms, loneliness is experienced across social, emotional and cultural dimensions (Wheeler et al., 2023). The demanding and unpredictable nature of farming contributes, alongside stressors such as the threat of farm loss together with access to lethal means (firearms/poisons), is linked to higher rates of depression and suicide than the general population. Although farmers report similar levels of general distress to other manual workers, they experience higher rates of depression, including compared with non-farming siblings, indicating a distinct occupational impact on mental health (Deere, 2018, Jones et al., 2018, Kennedy et al., 2020, Torske et al., 2016).

Research Rationale and Aim

Previous research has examined the farming way of life and its associated challenges (Rose et al., 2022), deeply embedded in community expectations that younger generations will continue farming (Potter and Lobley, 2008). Although family roles and identities within farming communities are changing, (Contzen and Forney, 2017), there remains limited research on intergenerational expectations and their impact on both those who become farmers and those who pursue non-farming careers. Accordingly, this study aimed to address the following question: *What is the experience of intergenerational expectations of individuals who have grown up on family farms and, how do individuals perceive these have impacted on their adult lives?*

Methods

Ethics

This study was granted ethics approval by University of Glasgow Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences Ethical Committee (Reference 200240395, Appendix 2.2).

Design

An exploratory design was used to address the research questions using the Reflective Thematic Analysis (RTA) approach to interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2006). RTA enabled the identification of patterns of meaning across participants' accounts, supported an inductive analytic approach, and aligned with the authors critical realist stance.

Recruitment

A mixed opportunity sampling strategy was used for recruitment. The study was advertised via social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn) of the Principal Investigator (PI), and through targeted agricultural networks including Scottish Rural College, livestock markets, Young Farmers groups and Farmstrong Scotland through an advertising poster (Appendix 2.4). Interested individuals provided their contact details to the PI, and eligibility was determined using the inclusion and exclusion criteria outlined in Table 5.

Table 5: Study Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion	Exclusion
Have parents of a family farm who are/were the main farmer, landowner or tenant farmer.	Do not have parents of a family farm who are/were the main farmer, landowner or tenant farmer. New generation farm (1st generation).
Farm work makes up at least part of their paid employment	
Have parents of a family farm and have chosen a non-farming career, and/or returned to farming career	
Participants who have capacity to consent	Participants who do not have capacity to consent.
Living and working in the UK	Living and working outside the UK
Able to read and speak English as first language	English is not the first language.
Aged 16 and over	Under 16 years old.

Those who agreed to be contacted were emailed further information about the study by the PI, including the Participant Information Sheet (PIS), privacy notice and consent form (Appendix 2.4), and were given at least 24 hours to decide whether to participate to avoid any sense of pressure to consent immediately. A follow-up email was sent to confirm interest and answer any questions. Informed consent was then obtained electronically via the secure Qualtrics survey software (Qualtrics, Provo, UT).

Fourteen individuals initially expressed interest and consented to be contacted for interview; one withdrew interest and four did not respond to follow-up. Nine individuals participated in the study.

Procedure

Consenting participants answered brief demographic questions before taking part in a semi-structured interview facilitated by the PI. Participants attended alone and were reminded of confidentiality limits and their rights to refuse questions, take breaks and withdraw. Interviews, conducted via Microsoft Teams, lasted 45-65 minutes and were audio-recorded using Microsoft Teams auto-transcriber, checked for accuracy by the PI and anonymised using Participant IDs.

Following the interview, participants received a debrief and were directed to the PIS, with the option to contact the research team if desired. No repeat interviews were conducted. Recordings were stored securely in accordance with University of Glasgow Safe Handling of Information Policy and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and were destroyed following transcription and analysis. The Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) standards for reporting qualitative research were followed (Appendix 2.1).

Participants were offered entry into a prize draw for one of four £25 Amazon vouchers; all opted in, and winners were contacted after data collection had concluded. The PI made reflective notes after each interview and during transcription, however transcripts and findings were not returned to participants for verification due to time constraints.

Topic Guide

A topic guide (Appendix 2.4), developed collaboratively and used flexibly to inform the semi-structured interviews. Although not pilot tested, it was grounded in existing literature and the research team's prior research experience with farmers (KL/CW), focussing on intergenerational expectations within the farming way of life and their impact on mental health and well-being.

Participants

All nine participants described themselves as White British, and were UK citizens (8 Scottish,1 English), aged 23-65 years (M = 39). The sample included five females and four males, all with at least one sibling and all holding post-school qualifications. Three participants were self-employed on their family farms, three worked in other agriculture roles, and three were employed outside agriculture; one additionally described themselves as a hobby farmer. Farm types included mixed livestock, dairy, and arable farms, with family ownership ranging from 40 to 110 years. Demographic details are summarised in Table 6. Recruiting farmers who had never left the farm was challenging; however, three female farmers who had left the farm and subsequently returned were included.

Table 6: Participant Demographics

PARTICIPANT#	SEX	AGE	FAMILY OWNERSHIP	HIGHEST QUALIFICATION	CURRENT OCCUPATION
1	M	30	50 years	Masters	Non-farming career
2	M	28	50 years	HND	Non-farming career
3	M	39	40 years	Honours	Non-farming career
4	F	38	110 years	Masters	Non-farming career
5	F	41	60 years	Honours	Farmer*
6	F	50	75 Years	Postgraduate Diploma	Farmer*
7	M	65	60 years	Postgraduate Diploma	Non-farming career
8	F	44	75	Honours	Farmer*
9	M	23	80 years	Honours	Non-farming career

**Participants were in non-farming employment before returning to being a self-employed farmer*

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase reflexive thematic analysis. Anonymised transcripts were read and re-read by the PI, with initial ideas noted PI. The PI conducted systemic coding across the full data set in Microsoft Excel, collating data relevant to each code. An inductive approach was adopted, with no attempt to fit data to a pre-existing framework. Codes were organised into provisional themes, which were reviewed against the data set, and an initial thematic map was developed to visualise relationships between themes. Themes were refined and clearly redefined throughout the analytic write-up process. Just under half of the interviews were independently reviewed by two supervisors to compare themes and sub-themes, with feedback discussed via email and meetings. Supervision also included review of transcripts, coding and theme development. The PI confirmed consistency of themes.

Justification of sample size

Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend that between 6-10 participants are interviewed in thematic analysis until saturation is achieved. Following the completion of nine interviews, a consistent pattern of experiences emerged among participants. These experiences were described in considerable depth and detail, indicating that the data possessed sufficient richness and informational power to address the research questions effectively. Recruitment concluded after nine participants had been interviewed.

Epistemological Perspective

A critical realist stance was adopted recognising that whilst a real social world exists independently of individual perception, access to this reality is always mediated through subjective experience and interpretation (Olsen, 2007). Participants' accounts of intergenerational pressures within farming families are therefore understood as reflections of both lived experience and the influence of broader social and cultural structures. Within this framework, RTA was employed as an interpretive method to explore how participants make sense of their experiences, whilst acknowledging the active role of the researcher. Themes are not treated as objective truths, but as interpretive accounts of patterns in meaning that may point towards underlying social mechanisms shaping career choices and well-being within the agricultural community.

Researcher Reflexivity

The PI is a white, female Trainee Clinical Psychologist working within NHS services and researching intergenerational pressures, expectations, and well-being within farming families. While not from a farming background, the PI has personal connections to individuals within the farming community, positioning them as both an insider and outsider. The PI acknowledges that their clinical training and personal connections may have influenced their interpretations and how participants perceived them. Reflexivity was supported through reflective journalling and regular supervision to ensure interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts rather than clinical or personal assumptions.

Results

Through a process of reflective thematic analysis, the PI identified three main themes with 11 sub-themes: 'Love, Land and Legacy', 'Roots and Routes', 'Inheritance of the Heart'. These illustrate cultural dynamics and a distinct "*way of life",* an inherited lifestyle through which experiences have shaped and influenced career choices. A thematic diagram including codes is presented in Figure 2. The participant identifiers for the interview quotes are as follows: age, followed by, M (male), W (women), F (farmer), NF (non-farming occupation).

1. Love, Land and Legacy

This theme captures the emotional and social bonds associated with the farmhouse, family and farming identity. The farmhouse is portrayed not simply as a physical structure but as a source of warmth, belonging, and family life, where relationships, traditions and values were shaped, and creating a powerful sense of unity and continuity across generations. The home and surrounding land are closely linked to participants' sense of self, providing stability and grounding across their life's.

Fields of Freedom: nostalgia, foundations, contentment

All participants reflected a deep emotional connection to the countryside and farming life, characterised by nostalgia, strong foundations and a sense of contentment. Participants recall their upbringing with vivid affection. They shared memories of open spaces, the smell of hay, and the freedom to roam and explore, symbolising a carefree and fulfilling childhood.

"It was fabulous. I don't know, just the countryside, the freedom." (M, 65, NF)

"I've got that whole nostalgia thing of growing up on the farm and endless summers, and the smell of hay." (M, 30, NF)

Participants described their family farms as representing both a physical and emotional home, described as a place of safety, belonging and simple joy. Their memories focus not only on the farmhouse but also on the constant flow of people across generations. They described how warmth and sociability of these interactions stand out as some of the participant's most positive memories, highlighting how the farm environment nurtured emotional security and social engagement during their upbringing.

"I do go back as much as I can. It's like a big hug." (M, 39, NF)

Even those who felt somewhat isolated as children or less involved in the farm later recognised the strength of their attachment, seeing it as an enduring foundation of their identity. Participants who described returning to the farm evokes warmth and comfort and how these early experiences continue to bring peace and a sense of wholeness in adulthood.

Rural Identity

Participants expressed a strong and lasting connection to their rural upbringing, viewing their farming background as a central part of their identity. Even though they may no longer work in farming, they remain proud of their roots and continue to share that

heritage with others.

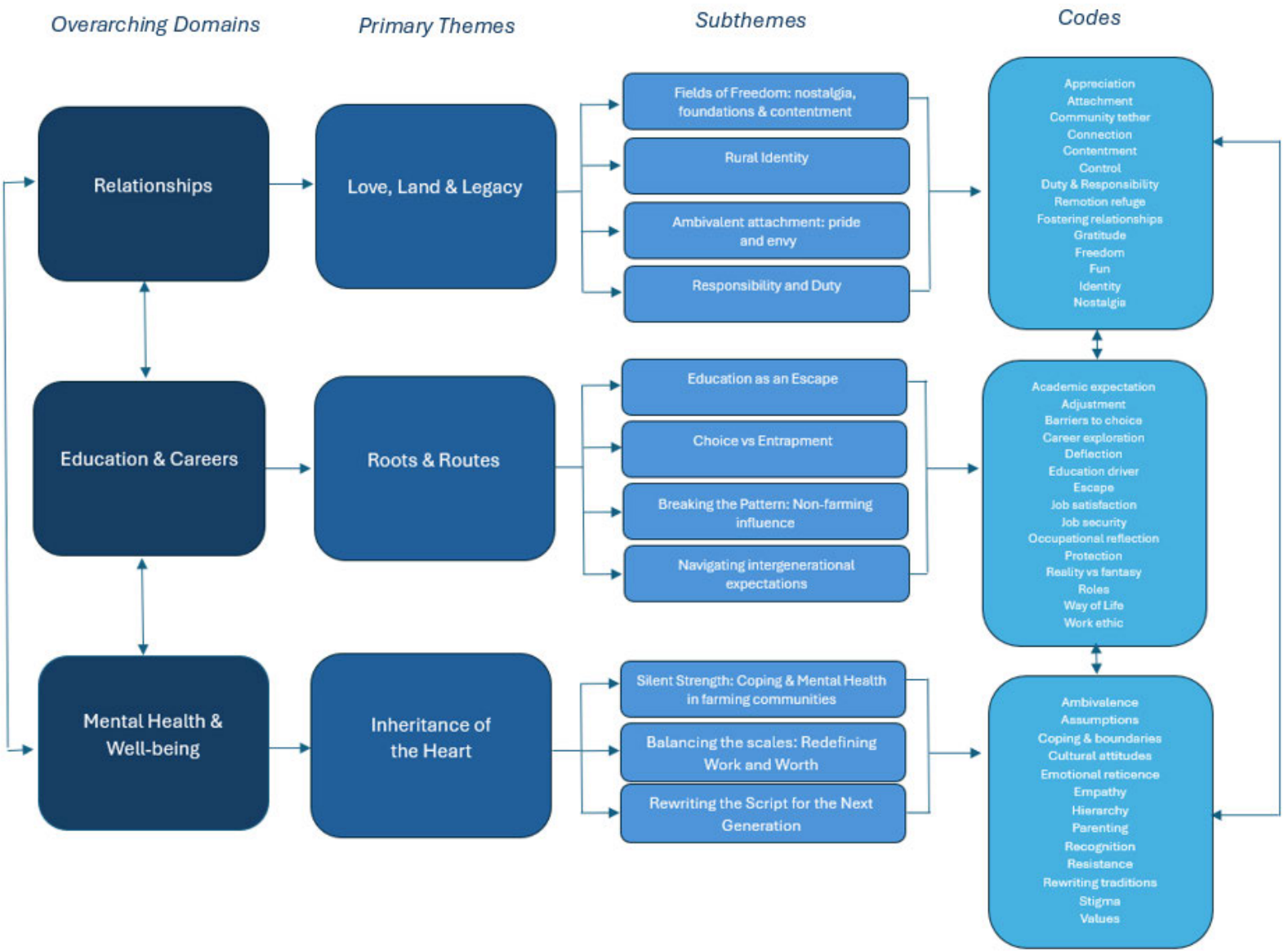
"I'm very lucky. It's an important part of my personality. My history as well. I'm proud of it and I talk to other people about it at work. And when I meet people through work or friends, it's a part of my identity that doesn't really go away, even though I don't work in farming now." (M, 39, NF)

This was also shared by those who continued to work in farming, although had a non-farming career break, reinforcing the deep emotional attachment to the land, shaped by childhood experiences on the farm and how this continues to influence their sense of self and belonging.

"There's an affinity to the land, and I think you have that when you grew up on a farm. Why do we care so much about where we farm and why are we so unwilling to move as people?" (F, 38, NF)

All participants, regardless of their current occupation expressed a strong and enduring sense of identity shaped by their farming background. Even those who have moved away from rural areas or farming careers still regard this heritage as a defining part of who they are, reflecting a continued emotional and cultural attachment to the land and the community that shaped them.

Figure 2: Thematic Diagram



Ambivalent attachment: pride and envy

Participants with non-farming careers expressed a conflicting sense of belonging to the farm, torn between admiration and distance. They acknowledge the challenges of farm life yet describe it as a rewarding and authentic way of living that demands genuine passion and commitment.

"I don't think you can do it if you don't really love it. You really must live and breathe it. I don't think there's another way." (M, 39, NF)

Feelings of envy and appreciation reveal a continued emotional connection to the land and the lifestyle they left behind, even after choosing a non-farming career. During challenging moments in their current work, participants often find themselves reflecting nostalgically on the life they might have led.

"There's a bit of jealousy in some ways, maybe that could have been me." (M, 39, NF)

Although participants shared an idealised view of farming, they also acknowledged the contrast between its fantasy and reality. Many expressed a "grass is always greener" sentiment during challenging times, finding a sense of comfort and reassurance in reflecting on their farming roots while navigating their current occupations.

"I am partly envious, because I think it is a really nice way of life, despite all the challenges." (M, 30, NF)

"It's rose-tinted glasses at times, but no regrets, more fantasy." (M, 39, NF)

All participants expressed deep respect for those who continue to work in farming, recognising both the rewards and the difficulties of that life. Their reflections reveal a blend of pride and uncertainty, a tension between their enduring rural roots and the pull

of modern, non-farming careers. One participant shared how the sale of the family farm, marked the end of a formative chapter and the separation from a space deeply tied to their rural identity, evoking grief and other difficult emotions.

"And after the farm was sold, I've never been back. I can't quite face it, I might one day, but I'm not sure when that will be." (W, 41, F)

Together participants' reflections captured both the warmth of community and belonging and the pain of disconnection and nostalgia, illustrating how growing up on the family farm shaped an enduring, if ambivalent, emotional attachment.

Responsibility and Duty

Participants described a complex mix of responsibility and duty while growing up on the family farm. Farming in their early lives was often characterised by obligation and hard work and falling into a routine of helping whenever needed, often without question or reward.

"A lot of it was just unpaid labour that you just did because you felt it was your duty to do it." (M, 30, NF)

Many participants describe labour as a natural part of life, something you simply "did" because family and farm came first. They reported a strong sense of responsibility, sometimes framed as an inherited expectation passed down through generations, where children were implicitly expected to take over the farm, reflecting traditional gender and family roles.

"That's how it was like years ago." (M, 28, NF)

Some participants recalled frustration at being pulled away from childhood pastimes or social activities, describing the work as a "chore" or "unpaid labour."

"We always worked and it was a real pain… like you're trying to play video games or something with your friends and then dad shouts through that he needs help to move sheep or something. It was a bit of a chore really. But you just did it, and you never really asked questions." (M, 30, NF)

Others found satisfaction and pride in contributing feeling accomplished, useful, and emotionally connected to their parents through shared effort.

"It meant dads got less stress on him, and it you get that feeling that you're actually being helpful." (M, 28, NF)

However, one participant reflected that helping on the farm was the only way they could spend meaningful time with their father. They described what might have begun as an obligation or routine chore took on deeper emotional significance within the rhythms of farm life.

"I quickly worked out if I wanted to see my dad the only way to do that was to go out and help him." (W, 50, F)

2. Roots and Routes

This theme relates to the tension between inherited pathways and education as a deviation from tradition, encompassing different career options, the management of intergenerational expectations, and the influence of cultural attitudes on career choice. It

connects with the other two themes in illustrating how these experiences have shaped the evolution of future expectations within family farming and perceptions of career success.

Education as an escape

Education emerges as both a symbolic and functional route out of farming for all participants. For some, moving into further education or agricultural college served explicitly to avoid being tied to the farm.

"For me… going into agriculture was a way out of school." (W 41, F)

"Leaving school and going straight home (to the farm) is not the best idea." (W, 44, F)

Participants who had returned to farm life also valued education before returning and acknowledging that gaining other work experience has made them a better farmer and reinforced the drive to return to their roots. A few participants described being encouraged to leave the farm because they were doing well academically.

"…because we were clever, we had options and it was like, well, why would you? (stay on the farm)." (M, 39, NF)

Many participants also reflected on how they believed their parents encouraged education as an alternative option due to the harsh realities of the job, protecting them from those realities that they themselves had been pressured into a generation before, and recognising similar experiences in those family farms around them.

"They just wanted us to be healthy, and they were surrounded by people that were killing themselves to farm." (W, 38, NF)

"I have quite vivid memories of helping my dad after the milking and talking to him about becoming a farmer. And he put me off it and didn't think it was a good idea" (M, 39, NF)

Choice vs Entrapment

Participants describe a continual negotiation between the freedom to pursue alternative futures and the persistent pull and push of the family farm. Many highlight that they had options, often linked to education, ability, or proximity to wider job markets, which made remaining on the farm seem unnecessary or even illogical. Most participants described families that explicitly encouraged choice over obligation. Some parents were described as open-minded and supportive of whatever route their children pursued.

"It was always my choice, and Dad was always there to support." (M, 65, NF)

"Mum was supportive of everything that we were choosing to do." (M, 23, NF)

This freedom existed alongside implicit forms of pressure. Farming was sometimes framed as the fallback option and what one did if nothing else worked out.

"If you can't do anything else, you farm." (W, 38, NF)

Others recalled childhood warnings positioning the farm as a consequence rather than choice.

"If you don't work hard at school, then you'll have to come home and work on the farm." (W, 41, F)

Participants also recognised that external constraints of climate, soil, limited local opportunities restricting what farmers can realistically change or pursue, reinforcing a sense of entrapment by circumstance. Despite this, many retained ambivalence. Some

tried to leave agriculture but found themselves drawn back by identity, community or continuity.

"I have tried to leave agriculture numerous times, but I've always came back to it." (W, 41, F)

For others, the absence of pressure paradoxically opened a different form of tension of wanting to farm but being unable to do so because opportunities were limited, or because of difficult family dynamics or decisions made by previous generations.

"There was no expectation to take over. I didn't get the chance to." (W, 41, F)

"I could never understand why he had a daughter so desperately keen and didn't sidestep or move over" (W, 50, F)

Breaking the Pattern: Non-farming influence

Exposure to non-farming influences, particularly through education, parents' non-agricultural careers and broader social experiences, open alternative pathways that disrupted the assumption of remaining on the farm. Participants often identified having at least one parent in a non-farming career as pivotal, as these parents modelled different ways of living and working, thereby loosening the expectation that they would follow a farming trajectory.

"My mum did latterly work on the farm, but she was a teacher, so she had a life away from the farm." (M, 39, NF)

"It brought a different dimension." (W, 50, F)

Participants emphasise the strong encouragement they received to try different jobs, gain external experience, and not feel confined to the farm.

"There was definitely encouragement to go and explore other things." (M, 39, NF)

"You need to go and work somewhere else… that made him a really good farmer." (W, 38, NF)

Many participants described education as a significant mechanism through which individuals break the traditional farming pattern. Mothers, in particular, were portrayed as strong advocates for education.

"Mum wanted everyone to have a really good education." (W, 50, F)

Even as education and non-farming experiences open new pathways, a few participants note that these same influences can create social friction within farming communities. Education is sometimes perceived as a marker of distance or superiority.

"There's a stigma about going to university… you think he's better than us." (M, 23, NF)

Similarly, those without farming backgrounds struggle to integrate fully and feel they are a priority over the demands of the job.

"It's really hard if you're not from a farming background… to live on a farm and accept that you'll never be before the cows." (W, 38, NF)

Navigating Intergenerational Expectations

Participants reflected on how they negotiated implicit and explicit expectations surrounding succession, responsibility, and identity within farming families. Participants reported variable experiences of pressure and expectation. One participant stated that

they did not feel pressured to take on the farm, often because another sibling filled the succession role.

"I never really felt pressure because my brother took it on… I never felt any guilt about it." (M, 39, NF)

All participants expressed that there was no pressure or expectation to take on the family farm and were supportive of their careers. Participants described parents as open and accepting.

"There was never any pressure, no negative connotations whatsoever." (M, 65, NF)

However, others described an implicit cultural expectation, not directly from their parents, but from the wider farming community.

"But it was expected. That was it. You're the son. That's very much your life." (W, 38, NF)

"He got a really hard time from his friends… they felt he'd thrown the opportunity away." (W, 38, NF)

A few participants emphasised that they believed traditional, hierarchical farm structures would limit the next generations agency and choice by delaying or blocking their ability to influence decision-making and make change.

"It would still have been quite an old-fashioned structure… it would have taken me a long time to have any power at all." (W, 41, F)

However, participants recalled parents often expressing encouragement for children to pursue their own paths, yet some sensed an unspoken hope that they might return to farming.

"My dad maybe deep-down always liked the idea that I might go into the farm… but he never expressed that." (M, 30, NF)

Participants largely attributed this to the more limited choices available to their parents' generation, who often farmed out of expectation, whereas the current generation of parents was described as more flexible and supportive of diverse career paths.

"Most people just adapt, don't they? As long as their child is happy" (W, 50, F)

All participants described their parents as often emphasising the seriousness and difficulty of farming, framing it as a vocation requiring commitment. Farming participants described how being encouraged to pursue non-farming careers and not directly taking over the family farm, only sparked more motivation and determination to return to their own farm and become successful.

"If that's how you treat somebody, it tends to make them want it more." (W, 50, F)

3. Inheritance of the Heart

This theme captures the influence of generational coping mechanisms in rural life, mental health awareness, work-life balance and redefining strength and well-being for future farming families.

Silent Strength: Coping and Mental Health in Farming Communities

Participants draw a strong distinction between being surrounded and supported. They spoke of farm communities offering practical help with no hesitation, but this did not translate into emotional availability. Many participants shared a similar experience where

there was a culture of joking and surface level check-ins but avoiding deeper emotional conversations from fear of the realistic answers.

"But people don't want to genuinely ask how you are, but they will sort of jokingly say, 'How's your mental health?' like kind of tongue in cheek, but with a sort of serious tone." (M, 30, NF)

Many participants described a 'silent generation' of fathers and grandfathers as central figures in shaping emotional norms, characterising them as men of few words who did not show vulnerability and struggled to communicate their feelings.

"Dad's generation is called the 'silent generation'. It really resonates because it's like you don't talk about things like that." (W, 41, F)

One participant noted that they had internalised these coping strategies until adulthood, seeing them as essential to farm like and their sense of resilience. Others described this way of coping as not only admired but required, with the pressures of self-employment leaving little space for rest or emotional processing and making help-seeking feel incompatible with their role.

"We were brought up that hard work would solve all the answers, however you realise hard work might not solve everything." (W, 50, F)

"Farmers are their own worst enemies... And they're absolutely the last to go and look for help because they can't afford to." (M, 65, NF)

"I can understand why some people may be hesitant to being honest, especially if it's a single-family farm because of the implications it might have." (M, 30, NF)

A recurring undertone is the loneliness created by this emotional restraint. Participants explain that without siblings, it would be *'really lonely'* or that they grew up never being allowed to show weakness. The competitive nature of proving strength is reinforced by solitude in which silence becomes a strength which is admired.

"Growing up with my brothers, and particularly around my dad, it felt like you were never supposed to show any vulnerability". (M, 23, NF)

Balancing the Scales: Redefining Work and Worth

Both farming and non-farming participants described the tension between traditional farming expectations and their emerging desire for a more balanced life. Farming is framed as a deeply meaningful "way of life", but also as physically and emotionally demanding, with pressures stretching across generations, multiple responsibilities, and the weight of local community scrutiny.

Many participants expressed wanting holidays, time to travel, a chance to enjoy life, and freedom and choice of when to stop working which had some influence on their career choice. They recognised the toll farming can take on the body and mind, as well as the need for connection, teamwork, and life outside the farm.

"I think it's a great way of life. I think it's just trying to figure out how you can have a life and that includes money, time, quality of life, doing jobs that you want to do, and not destroying your body." (W, 38, NF)

While farming is often romanticised as solitary, several participants challenged that narrative and reflected on why this influenced their choice to pursue a non-farming career. They described looking for connection and teamwork to share the burden of the workload and shape the work-life balance they desired.

"I don't like being by myself to be honest." (W, 38, NF)

"You've got to have a bit of a team around you." (W, 41, F)

Farming participants spoke of about their love of the farming "way of life" but intentionally agreed conditions with their family farm to ensure they have a break from previous inherited assumptions of constant work. These participants spoke of the shift from work as 'worth' and reframing these desires as 'selfish' to 'necessary' to create a more fulfilling life.

"Part of my stipulation is that we have holidays twice a year and we leave the farm." (W, 41, F)

"...get off the farm once a day, out the county once a month, and out the country once a year." (W, 50, F)

Rewriting the Script for the Next Generation

Farming participants spoke of making a conscious shift from inherited patterns of over-work, emotional silence and restricted horizons. Participants spoke of how they have challenged intergenerational expectations and pressures by taking time off the farm, but acknowledged that while it was not easy, it is advantageous for their mental health and well-being. As illustrated by one farmer:

"There's a lot of farmers out there that just won't ever leave. I can't do that… I know I need to leave." (W, 41, F)

"You've got to force yourself to do it… It's easier to stay at home and do the work than take that time out." (W, 41, F)

"How you feel when you come back makes a big difference." (W, 41, F)

Participants reflected on their experience of this in their childhoods and why it has influenced them to model new behaviours for their own children, such as open conversations and opportunities beyond and alongside farming.

"I felt I was kept in the dark as a child." (W, 50, F)

"I try and have open conversations with the kids, so they know what's happening." (W, 41, F)

Participants recognised the presence of emotional reticence within the farming community but acknowledge the effort they were purposefully making with their own children to attempt to break the silence and notice that meaningful conversations would emerge in shared company.

"Working side by side with sheep, you get some of the best chats." (W, 50, F)

Participants frame the next generation's life choices differently, however, simultaneously this was not framed as rejection but as freedom, choice and security.

"I want them to realise that there's a big world out there, go experience it." (W, 44, F)

"If it doesn't suit, then yeah, it'll be here for them to come back to." (W, 41, F)

Discussion

Overview of findings

The findings reinforce the existing literature that conceptualises family farming as an emotionally embedded context in which identity, belonging, and values are closely tied to the land and 'way of life' (Rose et al., 2024). Crucially, this study makes a novel contribution by evidencing how these processes are actively interpreted, negotiated, and sustained across the life course, rather than passively inherited. The strong attachment to the farmhouse and countryside reflects research on place-based identity within farming families, where expectations are absorbed through everyday experience, rather than communicated explicitly (Price & Evans 2009).

Early rural childhood experiences were remembered as providing emotional stability, freedom and strong foundation that continued to influence their self of self and long-term well-being (Holloway et al., 2021, Jayakody et al., 2024). A key strength of this study lies in the depth and richness of participants' narratives, which illuminate how early environmental and relational contexts become internalised as enduring psychological resources. Farming identity persisted beyond active involvement in agricultural work, with those who had left farming continuing to strongly identify with their upbringing and support more flexible understandings of continuity within family farming. Mixed emotions towards farming life highlighted the emotional complexity of leaving or remaining in farming (Fischer and Burton, 2014), although no participants reported feelings of regret or familial hostility regarding career choice. This finding is particularly noteworthy, as it challenges dominant deficit-based narratives of conflict within succession and instead highlights relational adaptability and emotional continuity within farming families. Experiences of responsibility and obligation to help on the farm from a young age were simply expected, shaping their understanding of responsibility and

contribution. While some found this restrictive, others experienced it as meaningful, particularly in strengthening family relationships and work ethic (Becot et al., 2021, Becot, 2022).

Intergenerational expectations were negotiated through education, perceived choice and exposure to alternatives to farming. Rather than a fixed expectation to remain on the farm, education emerged as a key route away from traditional succession, reflecting broader shifts towards autonomy and flexibility in family farming. Parental encouragement to pursue education was often framed as protection from the demands of farming, aligning with research linking such encouragement to awareness of agricultural hardship and work-life balance (Bharadwaj et al., 2013). However, education did not necessarily signal rejection of farming. For some, time away strengthened skills and commitment, supporting the view that off-farm experience can benefit long-term sustainability (Carolan, 2018, Bryant and Garnham, 2015, Conway et al., 2017). By purposively including participants with varies trajeesctories, this study offers a more comprehensive and dynamic account of succession than is typically represented in the literature. While choice was frequently emphasised, it was shaped by narratives positioning farming as a fallback option and by structural constraints such as geography and limited opportunities, highlighting the conditional nature of rural life (Nye, 2021). Non-farming role models, particularly mothers with external careers who strongly advocated education (Bharadwaj et al., 2013), disrupted automatic succession while simultaneously promoting greater choice and well-being. Importantly, the inclusion of female perspectives represents a significant strength, addressing a well-documented gap in farming research and enabling a more inclusive and contemporary understanding of intergenerational influence.

Intergenerational expectations within family farming were transmitted as much through emotional norms and coping practices as through work and succession. A culture of practical support coexisted alongside emotional silence, where resilience, self-reliance, and humour often replaced open discussion of distress, reflecting rural stoicism and the normalisation of emotional restraint within farming communities, particularly among older generations (Roy et al, 2014). These norms appeared to be learned early and internalised as markers of competence and responsibility. Avoidance of vulnerability was commonly linked to fears of judgement, financial consequences or letting others down, consistent with research associating stigma around help-seeking with older generations in farming contexts (Burton et al., 2020, Firnhaber et al., 2024).

The findings indicate a generational shift, with growing resistance to inherited assumptions that equate constant work with worth. Greater emphasis on rest, connection, and teamwork aligns with the literature positioning well-being as central to farm sustainability (Carolan, 2018, Villán et al., 2025, Conway et al., 2017). For those who returned to farming, explicitly negotiated boundaries around time off signalled a move from implicit expectation to conscious choice, enabling some rebalancing of life. A further strength of this study is its ability to capture these evolving cultural shifts, demonstrating that farming identities and practices are not static but are actively reshaped across generations. These changes reflect efforts to break cycles of overwork and emotional silence by modelling openness and broader opportunity for the next generation. Rather than rejecting farming, continuity was reframed as providing security and choice, supporting contemporary understandings of succession as relational and non-linear, shaped by well-being as well as economics.

Strengths and limitations

A strength of this study is capturing diverse experiences within the context of family farming, including female participants. Given the historically male-dominated representation both in research and practice, incorporating the perspectives of women strengthens the study by challenging traditional narratives and highlighting gendered dimensions of intergenerational expectations. This contributes to a more inclusive and contemporary understanding of family farming cultures and their long-term impact on identity, career development, and adult life.

Another strength is the variation within participants life trajectories. While participants had grown up on family farms, all had left the farm during early adulthood, with only three participants returning to work in farming. This allowed the study to explore how intergenerational expectations are not only experienced at a single point in time, but are re-visited, re-evaluated and renegotiated across the life course.

In-depth interviews generated rich narrative accounts that highlighted participants' experiences of growing up on a family farm and the influence of these on subsequent career choices. The findings offer a novel insight into this population, highlighting the complex interplay of intergenerational pressures and expectations within farming families. Thematic analysis was employed for its flexibility and suitability in identifying patterns of meaning across the qualitative data in line with the research aim, enabling a rich yet accessible analytic approach, which successfully facilitated the development of a diverse and richly textured narrative. Reflexivity was embedded throughout the study, with the researcher critically considering their dual role as researcher and trainee clinical psychologist. Reflective journaling, regular supervision and a transparent analytic process enhanced credibility and helped mitigate potential bias.

The sample size was sufficient to reach conceptual saturation, although uneven demographic distribution may limit comparative analysis. Recruitment took place in summer, typically the busiest period for farmers, which may have influenced participation. With eight participants from Scotland and one from England, transferability across the wider UK is limited and findings should therefore be considered in terms of transferability rather than generalisability. As all participants had spent time away from the family farm, the absence of those who had never left restricts insight into whether intergenerational expectations are experienced differently from those who remained. The predominance of highly educated participants may bias findings towards more reflexive interpretations, potentially underrepresenting experiences shaped primarily by economic or structural constraints.

Implications for practice and future research

The study highlights the importance of normalising periods away from the family farm. Agricultural education providers and industries could frame external education and employment as a legitimate and even beneficial stage in succession planning. Grounded in one of the study's key strengths, these findings provide strong support for reframing "leaving" as a constructive and developmentally beneficial phase rather than a disruption to succession. Rather a lack of commitment, supporting young people to gain broader experience before making long-term decisions has the potential to strengthen both individual well-being and the long-term sustainability of farming systems.

From a clinical perspective, this study offers a distinctive contribution by highlighting how deeply embedded cultural values, such as self-reliance, endurance, and emotional restraint, shape psychological functioning within farming populations. Practitioners

should be aware that distress may be minimised, normalised or expressed indirectly, and that help-seeking may be inhibited by fears of judgement or perceived failure. These findings support the need for culturally attuned interventions that respect these values while expanding acceptable forms of emotional expression and support-seeking.

The inclusion of female participants highlights the need to challenge gendered assumptions around farm succession and roles, through more inclusive succession planning that better recognises women in farming. This is both a methodological and applied strength, as it enables practice and policy to be informed by perspectives that have historically been marginalised within agricultural research.

Future research should include individuals who have remained continuously on the family farm to examine whether intergenerational expectations and pressures are experienced differently from those who stay, and how they negotiate alignment between personal aspirations and family expectations. Comparative studies between those who leave, return, and never leave the farm could deepen understanding of career trajectories and their impact on mental health and well-being. Longitudinal research would further illuminate how expectations evolve over time, particularly during key transitions such as leaving school, returning after further education, or assuming ownership. Research across multiple generations within the same family could also clarify how expectations are constructed and communicated relationally. While studies across different cultures, countries, and farming contexts would strengthen understanding of how structural and cultural factors shape intergenerational expectations and enhance transferability of findings.

Conclusion

This study explored how individuals raised on family farms experience intergenerational expectations and how these shape their adult lives. Findings indicate that such expectations were rarely felt as an explicit pressure to farm, but operated as deeply embedded emotional, cultural and relational influences. Growing up on the farm fostered a lasting sense of identity, belonging and attachment to the land and family that persisted regardless of career path. Some participants experienced expectations as negotiable rather than fixed, framing choice in terms of care rather than obligation. Some participants would have preferred to have stayed but were not given the opportunity. Adult lives were shaped by whether individuals remained in farming, than by how they balanced autonomy with attachment, responsibility and well-being. Intergenerational expectations were also conveyed through emotional norms around work, coping and strength, shaping how participants managed stress and vulnerability. Importantly, many actively reinterpreted these expectations for the next generation, seeking continuity while prioritising openness, balance and well-being, thereby reshaping the notion of the "good farmer" to include being good to oneself as well as the farm.

Declarations

Competing interests: The PI declares no competing interests. CW directs an educational life skills company offering a free mental health life course for farmers. KL leads research trials within farming communities.

Funding: No funding was received for this study.

Authors contributions: Original idea LS and shaped by KL/CW. Data collected by LS. KL/CW provided supervision, reviewed and offered feedback on revisions. All authors read and approved final manuscript.

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Chapter 3 – Appendices

Appendix 1.1 – PRISMA Checklist

Section and Topic	Item #	Checklist item	Location where item is reported
TITLE			
Title	1	Identify the report as a systematic review.	P8
ABSTRACT			
Abstract	2	See the PRISMA 2020 for Abstracts checklist.	P9
INTRODUCTION			
Rationale	3	Describe the rationale for the review in the context of existing knowledge.	P12
Objectives	4	Provide an explicit statement of the objective(s) or question(s) the review addresses.	P13
METHODS			
Eligibility criteria	5	Specify the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the review and how studies were grouped for the syntheses.	P15-16
Information sources	6	Specify all databases, registers, websites, organisations, reference lists and other sources searched or consulted to identify studies. Specify the date when each source was last searched or consulted.	P14
Search strategy	7	Present the full search strategies for all databases, registers and websites, including any filters and limits used.	P14-15 Appendix 1.3
Selection process	8	Specify the methods used to decide whether a study met the inclusion criteria of the review, including how many reviewers screened each record and each report retrieved, whether they worked independently, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	P16-17
Data collection process	9	Specify the methods used to collect data from reports, including how many reviewers collected data from each report, whether they worked independently, any processes for obtaining or confirming data from study investigators, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	P16-17
Data items	10a	List and define all outcomes for which data were sought. Specify whether all results that were compatible with each outcome domain in each study were sought (e.g. for all measures, time points, analyses), and if not, the methods used to decide which results to collect.	P16
	10b	List and define all other variables for which data were sought (e.g. participant and intervention characteristics, funding sources). Describe any assumptions made about any missing or unclear information.	P16-17
Study risk of bias assessment	11	Specify the methods used to assess risk of bias in the included studies, including details of the tool(s) used, how many reviewers assessed each study and whether they worked independently, and if applicable, details of automation tools used in the process.	P18
Effect measures	12	Specify for each outcome the effect measure(s) (e.g. risk ratio, mean difference) used in the synthesis or presentation of results.	N/A

Section and Topic	Item #	Checklist item	Location where item is reported
Synthesis methods	13a	Describe the processes used to decide which studies were eligible for each synthesis (e.g. tabulating the study intervention characteristics and comparing against the planned groups for each synthesis (item #5)).	P16-17
	13b	Describe any methods required to prepare the data for presentation or synthesis, such as handling of missing summary statistics, or data conversions.	N/A
	13c	Describe any methods used to tabulate or visually display results of individual studies and syntheses.	P16-17 Appendix 1.4
	13d	Describe any methods used to synthesize results and provide a rationale for the choice(s). If meta-analysis was performed, describe the model(s), method(s) to identify the presence and extent of statistical heterogeneity, and software package(s) used.	P17
	13e	Describe any methods used to explore possible causes of heterogeneity among study results (e.g. subgroup analysis, meta-regression).	N/A
	13f	Describe any sensitivity analyses conducted to assess robustness of the synthesized results.	N/A
Reporting bias assessment	14	Describe any methods used to assess risk of bias due to missing results in a synthesis (arising from reporting biases).	N/A
Certainty assessment	15	Describe any methods used to assess certainty (or confidence) in the body of evidence for an outcome.	N/A
RESULTS			
Study selection	16a	Describe the results of the search and selection process, from the number of records identified in the search to the number of studies included in the review, ideally using a flow diagram.	P19 Figure 1
	16b	Cite studies that might appear to meet the inclusion criteria, but which were excluded, and explain why they were excluded.	P19 Figure 1
Study characteristics	17	Cite each included study and present its characteristics.	P22-28 Table 2
Risk of bias in studies	18	Present assessments of risk of bias for each included study.	P29-30 Table 3
Results of individual studies	19	For all outcomes, present, for each study: (a) summary statistics for each group (where appropriate) and (b) an effect estimate and its precision (e.g. confidence/credible interval), ideally using structured tables or plots.	N/A
Results of syntheses	20a	For each synthesis, briefly summarise the characteristics and risk of bias among contributing studies.	P31-39
	20b	Present results of all statistical syntheses conducted. If meta-analysis was done, present for each the summary estimate and its precision (e.g. confidence/credible interval) and measures of statistical heterogeneity. If comparing groups, describe the direction of the effect.	N/A
	20c	Present results of all investigations of possible causes of heterogeneity among study results.	N/A

Section and Topic	Item #	Checklist item	Location where item is reported
	20d	Present results of all sensitivity analyses conducted to assess the robustness of the synthesized results.	N/A
Reporting biases	21	Present assessments of risk of bias due to missing results (arising from reporting biases) for each synthesis assessed.	N/A
Certainty of evidence	22	Present assessments of certainty (or confidence) in the body of evidence for each outcome assessed.	N/A
DISCUSSION			
Discussion	23a	Provide a general interpretation of the results in the context of other evidence.	P40-42
	23b	Discuss any limitations of the evidence included in the review.	P41
	23c	Discuss any limitations of the review processes used.	P41
	23d	Discuss implications of the results for practice, policy, and future research.	P42-43
OTHER INFORMATION			
Registration and protocol	24a	Provide registration information for the review, including register name and registration number, or state that the review was not registered.	P14
	24b	Indicate where the review protocol can be accessed, or state that a protocol was not prepared.	P14
	24c	Describe and explain any amendments to information provided at registration or in the protocol.	P14
Support	25	Describe sources of financial or non-financial support for the review, and the role of the funders or sponsors in the review.	N/A
Competing interests	26	Declare any competing interests of review authors.	N/A
Availability of data, code and other materials	27	Report which of the following are publicly available and where they can be found: template data collection forms; data extracted from included studies; data used for all analyses; analytic code; any other materials used in the review.	N/A

Appendix 1.2 – ENTREQ Checklist

Item No.	Guide and Description	Location page#
1. Aim	State the research question the synthesis addresses	P13
2. Synthesis methodology	Identify the synthesis methodology or theoretical framework which underpins the synthesis, and describe the rationale for choice of methodology (e.g. meta-ethnography, thematic synthesis, critical interpretive synthesis, grounded theory synthesis, realist synthesis, meta-aggregation, meta-study, framework synthesis)	P17-18
3. Approach to searching	Indicate whether the search was pre-planned (comprehensive search strategies to seek all available studies) or iterative (to seek all available concepts until they theoretical saturation is achieved)	P14-15
4. Inclusion criteria	Specify the inclusion/exclusion criteria (e.g. in terms of population, language, year limits, type of publication, study type)	P15-16
5. Data sources	Describe the information sources used (e.g. electronic databases (MEDLINE, EMBASE, CINAHL, psycINFO), grey literature databases (digital thesis, policy reports), relevant organisational websites, experts, information specialists, generic web searches (Google Scholar) hand searching, reference lists) and when the searches conducted; provide the rationale for using the data sources	P14
6. Electronic Search strategy	Describe the literature search (e.g. provide electronic search strategies with population terms, clinical or health topic terms, experiential or social phenomena related terms, filters for qualitative research, and search limits)	P14 Appendix 1.3
7. Study screening methods	Describe the process of study screening and sifting (e.g. title, abstract and full text review, number of independent reviewers who screened studies)	P19 Figure 1
8. Study characteristics	Present the characteristics of the included studies (e.g. year of publication, country, population, number of participants, data collection, methodology, analysis, research questions)	P21-28 Table 2

9. Study selection results	Identify the number of studies screened and provide reasons for study exclusion (e.g. for comprehensive searching, provide numbers of studies screened and reasons for exclusion indicated in a figure/flowchart; for iterative searching describe reasons for study exclusion and inclusion based on modifications to the research question and/or contribution to theory development)	P20 Figure 1
10. Rationale for appraisal	Describe the rationale and approach used to appraise the included studies or selected findings (e.g. assessment of conduct (validity and robustness), assessment of reporting (transparency), assessment of content and utility of the findings)	P29-30
11. Appraisal items	State the tools, frameworks and criteria used to appraise the studies or selected findings (e.g. Existing tools: CASP, QARI, COREQ, Mays and Pope [25]; reviewer developed tools; describe the domains assessed: research team, study design, data analysis and interpretations, reporting)	P29 Table 3
12. Appraisal process	Indicate whether the appraisal was conducted independently by more than one reviewer and if consensus was required	P19
13. Appraisal results	Present results of the quality assessment and indicate which articles, if any, were weighted/excluded based on the assessment and give the rationale	P29-30 Table 3
14. Data extraction	Indicate which sections of the primary studies were analysed and how were the data extracted from the primary studies? (e.g. all text under the headings "results /conclusions" were extracted electronically and entered into a computer software)	P16-17
15. Software	State the computer software used, if any	P16-17
16. Number of reviewers	Identify who was involved in coding and analysis	P16
17. Coding	Describe the process for coding of data (e.g. line by line coding to search for concepts)	P16
18. Study comparison	Describe how were comparisons made within and across studies (e.g. subsequent studies were coded into pre-existing concepts, and new concepts were created when deemed necessary)	P31 Table 4
19. Derivation of themes	Explain whether the process of deriving the themes or constructs was inductive or deductive	P17
20. Quotations	Provide quotations from the primary studies to illustrate themes/constructs, and identify	P32-39

	whether the quotations were participant quotations of the author's interpretation	
21. Synthesis output	Present rich, compelling and useful results that go beyond a summary of the primary studies (e.g. new interpretation, models of evidence, conceptual models, analytical framework, development of a new theory or construct)	P32-42

Appendix 1.3 – Systematic Search strategy and results

Database	Search terms/fields	Results
CINAHL	("mental health" OR "psychological well-being" OR "well-being" OR "mental illness" OR "mental wellbeing" OR "mental health supports" OR "mental health interventions" OR "mental health services" OR stress OR distress OR anxiety OR depression OR suicide OR "self-help" OR "community support" OR "emotional well-being") AND TI (farmers OR farmer OR "farm workers" OR "farm-workers" OR "rural communit*" OR "agricultural workers" OR rural) AND TI ("help seeking" OR "help-seeking" OR "seeking help" OR resources OR "service utilisation" OR "service utilization" OR support OR barrie* OR facilitators OR intervention OR "risk factor*" OR facilitator* OR "mental health needs" OR needs OR "access to care" OR "access to services" OR "pathways to care" OR "health service use" OR "seek* support")	854
APA PsychInfo	("mental health" OR "psychological well-being" OR "well-being" OR "mental illness" OR "mental wellbeing" OR "mental health supports" OR "mental health interventions" OR "mental health services" OR stress OR distress OR anxiety OR depression OR suicide OR "self-help" OR "community support" OR "emotional well-being") AND TI (farmers OR farmer OR "farm workers" OR "farm-workers" OR "rural communit*" OR "agricultural workers" OR rural) AND TI ("help seeking" OR "help-seeking" OR "seeking help" OR resources OR "service utilisation" OR "service utilization" OR support OR barrie* OR facilitators OR intervention OR "risk factor*" OR facilitator* OR "mental health needs" OR needs OR "access to care" OR "access to services" OR "pathways to care" OR "health service use" OR "seek* support")	340
Scopus	(TITLE-ABS-KEY("mental health" OR "psychological well-being" OR "well-being" OR	652

	"mental illness" OR "mental wellbeing" OR "mental health supports" OR "mental health interventions" OR "mental health services" OR stress OR distress OR anxiety OR depression OR suicide OR "self-help" OR "community support" OR "emotional well-being")) AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY(farmers OR farmer OR "farm workers" OR "farm-workers" OR "rural communit*" OR "agricultural workers" OR rural)) AND (TITLE-ABS-KEY("help seeking" OR "help-seeking" OR "seeking help" OR resources OR "service utilisation" OR "service utilization" OR support OR barrie* OR facilitators OR intervention OR "risk factor" OR facilitator* OR "mental health needs" OR needs OR "access to care" OR "access to services" OR "pathways to care" OR "health service use" OR "seek* support"))	
Sociological Abstracts	(TI(mental health OR psychological well-being OR wellbeing OR well-being OR mental illness OR stress OR distress OR anxiety OR depression OR suicide OR "self-help" OR "community support" OR "emotional well-being")OR AB(mental health OR psychological well-being OR wellbeing OR well-being OR mental illness OR stress OR distress OR anxiety OR depression OR suicide OR "self-help" OR "community support" OR "emotional well-being")OR SU("mental health" OR "psychological well-being" OR "mental illness" OR stress OR anxiety OR depression OR suicide)) AND (TI(farmer* OR "farm worker*" OR "agricultural worker*" OR rural OR "rural communit*") OR AB(farmer* OR "farm worker*" OR "agricultural worker*" OR rural OR "rural communit*")OR SU(farmers OR agriculture OR "rural communities" OR "rural population")) AND (TI("help seeking" OR "help-seeking" OR "seeking help" OR resources OR support OR barrie* OR facilitator*	370

	OR intervention OR "risk factor*" OR "mental health needs" OR needs OR "access to care" OR "access to services" OR "pathways to care" OR "health service use" OR "seek* support")OR AB("help seeking" OR "help-seeking" OR "seeking help" OR resources OR support OR barrie* OR facilitator* OR intervention OR "risk factor*" OR "mental health needs" OR needs OR "access to care" OR "access to services" OR "pathways to care" OR "health service use" OR "seek* support") OR SU("help seeking" OR "health service utilisation" OR "health care access" OR barriers OR facilitators OR needs OR intervention*))	
Google Scholar	("mental health" OR "mental well-being" OR wellbeing OR "mental illness" OR stress OR anxiety OR depression OR suicide) AND (farmer OR farmers OR "farm worker" OR "agricultural worker" OR rural) AND ("help seeking" OR "help-seeking" OR barriers OR facilitators OR "access to care" OR "mental health needs" OR support OR "service use")	100

Appendix 1.4 – Data Extraction Tool

General Info	
Author	
Title	
Journal	
Year	
Country	
Funding	

Study Characteristics	
Aims/Objectives	
Design	
Recruitment	
Data collection method	
Data analysis method	

Study sample	
Sample size	
Sampling method	
Age range	
Ethnicity	
Occupation	

Study findings	
Results	
Findings	
Limitations	

Appendix 1.5 – CASP Checklist

CASP Checklist: https://casp-uk.net/casp-checklists/CASP-checklist-qualitative-2024.pdf

Appendix 2.1 – CORE-Q Checklist

Topic	Item No.	Guide Questions/Description	Reported on Page No.
Domain 1: Research team and reflexivity			
Personal characteristics			
Interviewer/facilitator	1	Which author/s conducted the interview or focus group?	63
Credentials	2	What were the researcher's credentials? E.g. PhD, MD	1, 66
Occupation	3	What was their occupation at the time of the study?	66
Gender	4	Was the researcher male or female?	66
Experience and training	5	What experience or training did the researcher have?	66
Relationship with participants			
Relationship established	6	Was a relationship established prior to study commencement?	66
Participant knowledge of the interviewer	7	What did the participants know about the researcher? e.g. personal goals, reasons for doing the research	66
Interviewer characteristics	8	What characteristics were reported about the inter viewer/facilitator? e.g. Bias, assumptions, reasons and interests in the research topic	66
Domain 2: Study design			
Theoretical framework			
Methodological orientation and Theory	9	What methodological orientation was stated to underpin the study? e.g. grounded theory, discourse analysis, ethnography, phenomenology, content analysis	61
Participant selection			
Sampling	10	How were participants selected? e.g. purposive, convenience, consecutive, snowball	61
Method of approach	11	How were participants approached? e.g. face-to-face, telephone, mail, email	61
Sample size	12	How many participants were in the study?	62
Non-participation	13	How many people refused to participate or dropped out? Reasons?	62
Setting			
Setting of data collection	14	Where was the data collected? e.g. home, clinic, workplace	63
Presence of non-participants	15	Was anyone else present besides the participants and researchers?	63
Description of sample	16	What are the important characteristics of the sample? e.g. demographic data, date	64
Data collection			
Interview guide	17	Were questions, prompts, guides provided by the authors? Was it pilot tested?	63
Repeat interviews	18	Were repeat inter views carried out? If yes, how many?	63
Audio/visual recording	19	Did the research use audio or visual recording to collect the data?	63
Field notes	20	Were field notes made during and/or after the inter view or focus group?	63
Duration	21	What was the duration of the inter views or focus group?	63
Data saturation	22	Was data saturation discussed?	65
Transcripts returned	23	Were transcripts returned to participants for comment and/or	63

Topic	Item No.	Guide Questions/Description	Reported on Page No.
		correction?	
Domain 3: analysis and findings			
Data analysis			
Number of data coders	24	How many data coders coded the data?	65
Description of the coding tree	25	Did authors provide a description of the coding tree?	Figure 2
Derivation of themes	26	Were themes identified in advance or derived from the data?	65
Software	27	What software, if applicable, was used to manage the data?	65
Participant checking	28	Did participants provide feedback on the findings?	63
Reporting			
Quotations presented	29	Were participant quotations presented to illustrate the themes/findings? Was each quotation identified? e.g. participant number	67-89
Data and findings consistent	30	Was there consistency between the data presented and the findings?	67-89
Clarity of major themes	31	Were major themes clearly presented in the findings?	67-89
Clarity of minor themes	32	Is there a description of diverse cases or discussion of minor themes?	67-89

Appendix 2.2: Ethical Approval Letter

University of Glasgow

20th June 2025

MVLS College Ethics Committee

Project Title: Beyond the Farm Gates. Growing up in Farming Families: Expectations, Pressures and Well-being
Project No: 200240395

The College Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Project end date: End December 2026
- The data should be held securely for a period of ten years after the completion of the research project, or for longer if specified by the research funder or sponsor, in accordance with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research: https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_490311_en.pdf
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups defined in the application.
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment, except when it is necessary to change the protocol to eliminate hazard to the subjects or where the change involves only the administrative aspects of the project. The Ethics Committee should be informed of any such changes.
- You should submit a short end of study report to the Ethics Committee within 3 months of completion.
- For projects requiring the use of an online questionnaire, the University has an Online Surveys account for research. To request access, see the University's application procedure at https://www.gla.ac.uk/research/strategy/ourpolicies/useofonlinesurveystoolforresearch/.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

Jesse Dawson
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Professor of Stroke Medicine
Chair MVLS Research Ethics Committee

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Appendix 2.3: MRP Proposal

Final MRP Proposal –
https://osf.io/q8rky/files/f4xmv?view_only=09a679f4dfde47778fe2ea9152605122

Appendix 2.4: Study Documentation

Patient Information Sheet:

https://osf.io/q8rky/files/tcynr?view_only=09a679f4dfde47778fe2ea9152605122

Consent Form:

https://osf.io/q8rky/files/m2w68?view_only=09a679f4dfde47778fe2ea9152605122

Privacy notice**:**

https://osf.io/q8rky/files/ek7s3?view_only=09a679f4dfde47778fe2ea9152605122

Advertising Poster**:**

https://osf.io/q8rky/files/qeny4?view_only=09a679f4dfde47778fe2ea9152605122

Topic guide**:**
https://osf.io/q8rky/files/uzety?view_only=09a679f4dfde47778fe2ea9152605122

Appendix 2.5: Detailed analysis plan

Detailed analysis plan:
https://osf.io/q8rky/files/4ze95?view_only=09a679f4dfde47778fe2ea9152605122

Appendix 2.6: Detailed Record of Analysis

Detailed records of analysis:
https://osf.io/q8rky/files/gx6ks?view_only=09a679f4dfde47778fe2ea9152605122

Appendix 2.7: Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethic restrictions, as they contain information that could compromise the confidentiality of the participants. Anonymised excerpts from interview transcripts are included within the thesis where relevant. For any queries about the data, please contact the corresponding author.