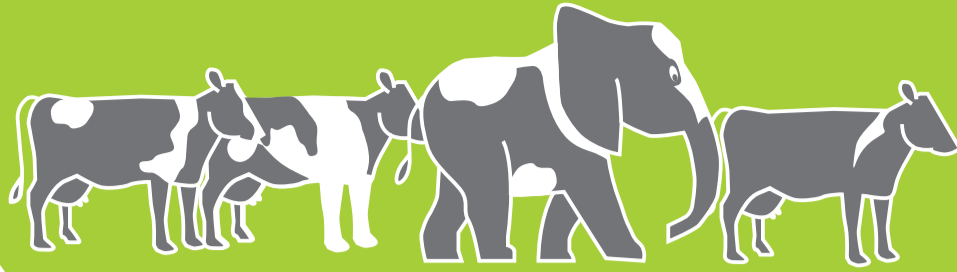


Let's talk about...
**The Elephant
in the Paddock**



Proud to be a farmer

Although Paeroa dairy farmer Tina Keys worked on the farm alongside her husband Peter for years, he made most of the big decisions. Until his death from cancer in May changed everything.

"Suddenly, on top of my grief, I was dealing with balancing feed, the drought, the bank overdraft and being responsible for making all the right decisions," she said.

"I wasn't sleeping, and the more you don't sleep, the more everything gets on top of you."

Taking time out was a distant dream, but when a friend convinced her to go away to Mount Maunganui for a weekend, it was a real turning point.

"If I'd known what a world of difference a few days away from the farm would make, I'd have gone so much earlier," she said.

"I came back so much stronger. My advice to anyone out there who feels the farm is getting on top of them is, just go - even if you don't think you can. The farm will wait."

Accepting offers of help was another key coping strategy for Tina. When Peter got sick, his mates came round, chopped firewood, planted crops and fixed the fences he could no longer take care of. A friend's wife offered to do Tina's books. The family's long-time fertiliser sales rep looked over the farm and gave help and advice. Tina has also been able to source direct farm advice from a farm consultant and a neighbouring farmer.

"It's been really valuable to get different points of view and insights into the farm. I've found the advice from different people is often complementary, though everyone has different preferences. This gives me plenty of new ideas and the confidence to back-up the decisions I make," she said.

"Since I admitted I need support, I've realised people want to feel like they can do something to help, and that's been such a weight off."

Tina also learnt to get back to sleep by getting up in the early hours of the morning and writing down the thoughts racing through her head. Fixing annoying little things on the farm is another small thing that helps.

"When you fix the little things that annoy you or make life hard on the farm, even if it's just to repair a gate latch, it



Fix the little things that annoy you or make life hard on the farm, even if it's just to repair a gate latch. You'll feel good at the end of the day because you've ticked that off and achieved something, and you'll feel good every time you open that gate.

Tina Keys

Most days I wake up at 2am and start thinking about all the things I have to do and all the decisions I have to make. If I get up and write my thoughts down I can go back to sleep, otherwise they just keep going round and round in my head.

Tina Keys

makes you feel good at the end of the day because you've ticked that off and achieved something. And you feel good every time you open that gate," she said.

Off-the-farm time with family and friends helps too. Tina and her friends have ladies' nights most fortnights, where they chip in for takeaways and do their best to talk about things other than pasture cover and mastitis. Her three adult children also offer time out from the farm and ongoing support. Son Jack in particular juggles working in the agri-food division at KPMG in Auckland during the week with weekends helping mum out back in Paeroa. Diagnosed with melanoma in 2019, Jack had two surgeries before receiving the all clear. Now he's in training for the Auckland marathon on 1 November, which he plans to run in red gumboots to raise money and awareness for Melanoma NZ and the Rural Support Trust.

"I set up a Givealittle page with a target of \$2000 and the CEOs of both organisations called me straight away. They sounded really stoked," he said.

Tina said the Rural Support Trust is a lifeline for many farmers who are under pressure on multiple fronts.

"Before he died, Peter said he used to be proud to say he was a farmer, but that had changed recently with the public perception of farming starting to become more negative," she said.

"We had Peter's service out at our Kahikatea stand and 150 people came and planted native trees of all different species. Our local rural community has wrapped itself around us over the past eight months, which is a real testament to the giving and humble man Peter was. I couldn't be more humbled and proud to be a farmer than I am right now."

Checking in on the wellbeing of the Hauraki Rural community

The Elephant in the Paddock began in 2017 when the Council teamed up with a number of rural support agencies to check in on the wellbeing of our rural communities. That project was so successful we're doing it all again. The revamp includes three new local champions who are sharing their stories, as well as a refreshed brochure with up-to-date information on how to recognise unhealthy stress or depression and where to find support services within the local community.

Support services available to the rural community

- Make an appointment with your GP
- **Rural North Hauraki Mental Health & Addiction Services** (DHB), phone 0800 08 03 39
- **Crisis Assessment and Treatment Service** for emergency calls after hours, weekends and public holidays phone 0800 50 50 50
- **Waikato-Hauraki-Coromandel Rural Support Trust** (farmer to farmer support), phone 0800 787 254, www.rural-support.org.nz
- **Need to talk?** phone or text 1737 anytime day or night to talk with a trained health professional
- **Depression Line** phone 0800 11 17 57, www.depression.org.nz
- **Alcohol Drug Helpline** phone 0800 787 797
- **Te Korowai Hauora O Hauraki - Hinengaro** (mental health), phone 07 868 0033

Find out more
www.hauraki-dc.govt.nz/wellbeing-farming

