Time pressures and stress on Irish suckler farms

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Introduction
Monk (1999) reported that stress levels, isolation and suicide are rising in rural Ireland. Farm work and time pressures combine to form significant predictors of stress. Suckler (cow-calf) farmers work long hours and certain times of the year are particularly demanding (Leahy et al., 2003). Farming is a physically demanding occupation and decline in the labour force has increased the workload. Family members are engaging increasingly in off-farm employment to supplement income. The workload on remaining farm operatives consequently has increased. As the labour force in Irish agriculture continues to decline there is an increasing level of isolation in farming. Fatigue, strain and social isolation are all risk factors to individuals who are farming.

Purpose
The objective of the study was to identify if time pressures were present on Irish suckler farms.

Major points of information to be shared
The majority of farmers said that 1) the nature of farming was stressful; 2) the workload in farming caused stress; 3) they had problems balancing work and family responsibilities; 4) unplanned interruptions caused hassle and stress; 5) there was too much work and too little time to complete it on farms, consequently farm work was rushed; 6) there was no farm help or loss of farm help when most needed and 7) personal illness at busy times was a major stressor.

Conclusions
The majority of farmers surveyed showed signs of suffering from stress and time pressure.

Educational importance
Farming stress cannot be remedied but it can be managed. How farmers react to and manage stress varies for each individual. Agricultural advisors and extension workers should be aware of and understand, the causes and impact of farm-related stress, how best to cope with it, what changes can be made to manage it, and what support networks are in place for farmers.

References
http://www.harper-adams.ac.uk/v2/resch_cons/research_staff/cdu/amonk1.html (as at 1st May, 2003).