

AgriKids Farm Safety Ambassador



Theme 5: Healthy Eating & Wellbeing

Level: 5th – 6th Class

Objective

In this theme we will be highlighting the importance of farmer health and wellness. How farmers must protect themselves against the elements, a healthy diet and the importance of staying fit and healthy as well as making sure to take a break! The topics are also relevant to non farmers!

Learning outcome topics

1. Staying fit.
2. Healthy eating and a healthy diet.
3. How farm work can affect farmer's health.
4. Protecting yourself against the weather
5. Feeling well and happy.

Tip: Review the Farm Safety Partnership's, 'Farmer's Health and Wellbeing – a guide to staying healthy while farming'.

Topics

1. Staying fit.

You would think that working on a farm and being out and about every day is enough exercise for a farmer. But as machinery has become more sophisticated and modern, much physical work is now taken care of by machines.

Exercise

Ask the class what advice they would give farmers to keep active?

- Can they walk more and drive less?
Eg. Instead of driving around fields or driving up laneways to the main yard or animal pens, can they walk there?
- Join a club, eg. Football, badminton, tennis, swimming or local gym. Is there another benefit to taking up an interest away from the farm? (eg. Mental health, cut down stress as well as getting fit).
- Keep a log to see just how much exercise they are getting.
Eg. 30 mins daily moderate exercise, 5 days per week is the minimum.



Exercise is a great way to feel good and stay well.

Now ask the class what other kind of exercise they could do that would help their mental wellbeing as well as helping to stay fit. Eg.

- Joining local gym
- Playing football or other sports in local club or with friends
- Taking up swimming

Creating habits that are both healthy and social can really benefit our physical and mental wellbeing.

2. Healthy eating and diet

Diet

Farmers spend their days producing the best quality food so it is important that their diet is equally good. We know too many sweets, chips and fizzy drinks can be bad for us and lead to problems such as obesity and diabetes.

Farmers can help prevent these things by:

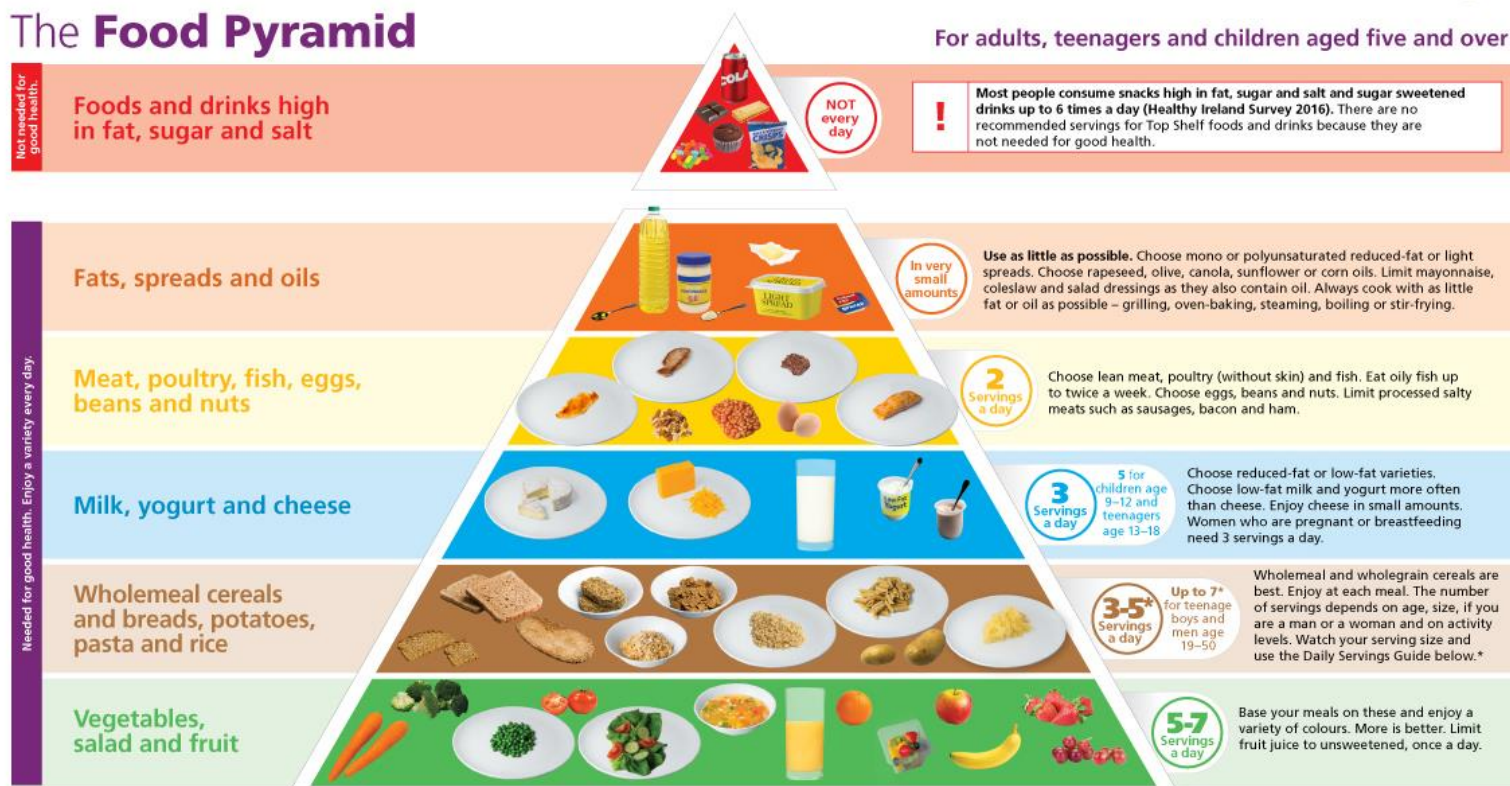
- Eating a balanced diet (the food pyramid is a great guide)
- Eating nourishing food at key mealtimes (think of a rainbow on your plate, the more colour the better)
- Choose healthy snacks, such as fruit and nuts.
- Drinking plenty of water (always have bottles of water in their tractors during busy times)
- Eat more fibre 9 out of 10 people do not eat enough fibre. Fibre is crucial to filling us up, keeping bowels moving and reducing cholesterol. People should aim for 5-7 portions of fruit and vegetables every day. Other sources of fibre are: wholegrain (cereals, bread and pasta), the skins on potatoes, beans and lentils.



Create a rainbow on your plate



The Food Pyramid



Source: SafeFood.ie

3. Farmers: Protecting yourself at work!

Much of the day to day activities of farmers can take their toll over time. Below are some of the key ailments affecting farmers as they undertake their work. Can the class think of anymore?

a. Back pain.

One in two farmers have suffered back pain at some stage in their life. This pain can be as a result from exposure to bad practice in manual handling, eg. lifting heavy loads, awkward postures, lifting loads to a height or to ground level, repetitive movements and poor workplace set up.



b. Hearing loss.

On farms, tractors, machinery, power tools, and livestock all create a 'noisy' working environment. Exposure to sounds louder than 85 decibels (dB)A over long periods of time can cause permanent hearing loss.

According to the 'Farmers Health and Wellbeing Guide', 25% of farmers (1 in 4) at age 30 and 50% (half) of farmers at age 50 have hearing loss. In addition, around 70% (7 in 10) teenagers living on farms show early signs of 'noise-induced' hearing loss.

Ask the class what can be done to protect hearing when working in a noisy environment such as a farm. The below list will aid the conversation:

- Consider the noise levels of machinery before buying.
- Keep doors and windows of tractors and machinery closed while operating them.
- Check and maintain the seals on doors and windows of tractors and machinery in good condition.
- Maintain tractors and other machinery, including exhaust systems, properly.
- If noise levels would make it difficult to communicate with someone less than two metres away, wear hearing protection such as ear plugs or ear muffs.
- Where noise levels are very high, for example if using a chainsaw or angle grinder, consider a combination of ear plugs with ear muffs.

**c. Lung and breathing problems**

Farmers are high risk in developing respiratory (lung) disease. About 60% (6 in 10) of non-smoking Irish farmers report having some lung or breathing issues.

Dust and spores (from mould) can cause severe illness. Sources of dust and spores include mouldy hay, straw or grain, compost used in mushroom growing, poultry feathers and poultry droppings, and dust in intensive livestock houses.

Exposure to dust and spores can lead to short and long-term complaints such as:

- short-term: irritation, bronchitis and breathlessness;
- long-term: asthma, chronic bronchitis, shortness of breath, weight loss, 'farmers' lung' and sensitisation.



Ask the class what can be done to protect hearing when working in a noisy environment such as a farm. The below list will aid the conversation:

- Prevent hay, straw or other materials from becoming mouldy by storing in dry and well ventilated areas.
- Wear a mask when working with mouldy silage, hay, straw or grains.
- If sweeping in dry conditions, wet down surfaces to avoid raising dust.
- Keep dust to a minimum, ventilate livestock housing, stables and barns, and work outside where possible.
- Use mechanical aids such as fans and filters to remove air pollutants.

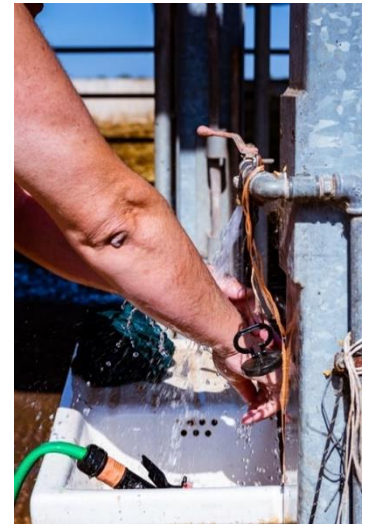
d. Zoonotic diseases

We already covered Zoonosis in Theme 3, however it must still be mentioned here

Farmers take good care of their animals, but many are not aware that healthy animals could be a source of infections.

Tips to keep healthy when working with animals:

- Take care of your skin and prevent cuts and grazes. If you have a cut or graze, clean it properly and cover it with a waterproof plaster.
- Wear protective gloves when handling cattle. If you suspect your animals have a disease, wear a mask.
- Always wash your hands with water and soap after handling animals and dry your hands thoroughly.
- Keep your sheds as clean as possible.



4. Protecting against the weather

Another area where farmers must be care is against the weather. Where the weather is both a farmer's biggest enemy and best friend. Sun, rain, wind and frost are important but needed at different times.

Too much sun dries up the earth and nothing grows and too much rain causes the crops to rot in the ground. A little bit of everything is just right.

1. On the board write up the following types of weather.

A. Sunny day

B. A rainy day

C. A very cold day

D. Windy Day

2. Now ask the class what the farmer should do to stay well on these types of days. The prompts below will help you. Discuss what might happen if they do not protect themselves.

A. Sunny day - Be Sun Smart

Your skin is the largest organ of your body and, when intact and healthy, will:

- protect your body from harmful chemicals and pesticides;
- keep moisture in and infections out;
- maintain your body temperature

To protect our skin, we all must remember to cover up from the sun's damaging rays. Farmers and those working outside are at the greatest risk of long term skin damage, such as skin cancer and must therefore be very vigilant when it comes to skin protection and carry out the following preventative methods:

- Wear sun cream with a high SPF (Skin protection factor).
- Wear a hat to protect skin on their head
- Wear Long Sleeves
- Protect their eyes with sunglasses



Other common skin diseases among farmers are eczema, contact dermatitis, skin allergies and infections, often caused by contact with chemicals and pesticides on the farm.

Signs include dryness, cracking, irritation, itchiness, redness, inflammation and abnormal lumps or growths. Taking care of your skin and avoiding cuts and other skin damage are ways to prevent skin diseases.

Other tips to protect include:

- Wash your hands after working with chemicals and pesticides and make sure you dry them thoroughly.
- Wear gloves to protect your hands or use barriers creams.
- Cover skin cracks, cuts and grazes with waterproof dressings.

B. A rainy day

Wearing wind and rain proof work wear protects the farmer from the harshness of wind and rain while also keeping them warm and dry. This will help them avoid getting a cold or flu.

- Waterproof overalls
- Wellington boots
- Jacket with hood
- Rain hat

C. A cold day

We know that wearing wind and rain proof work wear protects the farmer from the wind and rain so what happens when it is very cold? Remind the class what they wear to keep warm.

- A woolly hat
- Gloves
- An extra jacket
- A vest

D. Windy Day

Some wind is great during hay and silage season as a light warm wind helps to dry the grass before baling. However too much wind can spell trouble as crops get pushed over and any loose sheets on sheds and outbuildings can come away and cause damage.

For the farmer staying safe and well during high wind conditions should be pre-empted. So keeping any eye on the weather forecast is very important.

- Tying and securing any loose elements of the building
- Keeping animals sheltered or indoors in very bad conditions
- They themselves should also stay indoors
- Not undertake any work especially at heights or cutting trees, etc.

5. Rest & Wellbeing

Early mornings and late nights can take their toll. Especially during those very busy times, farmers must remember to sleep and take breaks. It can help them not only feel better but will help them work better too.

The times of the year when farmers are most likely to be busy and need rest are:

- Harvest time
- Calving time
- Lambing time
- Silage and hay

By getting enough rest we all can be at our very best!



Wellbeing

Even though they are doing something they love, many farmers (like everyone) can still have days where they feel stressed, worried and anxious. We all can work and relax better when we don't feel stressed so it is important that, as well as farmers we get into the habit of using relaxing techniques to keep stress and worries at bay.

What is stress?

Stress is described as 'a feeling of being overwhelmed, worried or anxious'. It is completely normal to feel this now and again, but feeling stressed regularly can affect your health and wellbeing. For example, stress can cause headaches, stomach aches and worry, and it can affect your ability to concentrate.

Feeling stressed can influence your thinking and problem-solving and can reduce your ability to think clearly and calmly. It is not always easy to recognise stress or admit to feeling stressed. But remember: 'It is OK to say you are not OK'!

So what can we all do to help us feel better when stressed:

- Take a break if you feel overwhelmed
- Talk to someone you know and trust
- Take care of yourself with healthy eating, being active, getting a good night's sleep

For farmers it is important they take a break when they feel overwhelmed and make sure to have interests and hobbies away from the farm.

Follow up activities

- Review the project ideas for this theme.
- Check out our white board and PC games: Farm Yard Safety, Off to Work and Follow the Signs on agrikids.ie
- Create a food pyramid of your own – tip: check out Healthyireland.ie
- Download and fill in our 'Spot the Dangers' worksheets.
- Sign up for an AgriKids webinar
- Create an exercise calendar for the class - allocating 30 mins exercise each day.
- Invite a nutritionist or chef into class to explain to the class about healthy eating.
- Create a farming calendar for different times of the year when a farmer might be very busy.
- Study more about how farmers use the weather for their crops and the different ways they might forecast the weather. (Apps, news, etc).
- Why not make a healthy smoothie or soup in class.
- If you have a model farm in class add in an area for a slurry pit and put up the correct signs.
- Check out the PAWS the water safety programme from Irish Water Safety.
- Check out SunSmart on HSE.ie
- Download and view the [Farmers Health and Wellbeing](#) booklet from the Farm Safety Partnership and HSA.
- Have a class discussion on times when you might have felt worried or overwhelmed and discuss ways that would help reduce these feelings. Eg. Doing some meditation, having outdoor time