

Prince Charles's letter to Herefordshire farmer

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A farmer who suffered with his own mental health issues decided it was time to set up his own charity to help others in the industry who struggle with isolation.

Sam Stables farms on Duchy of Cornwall land near Hereford at Kingsthorne, and has received a personal letter from Prince Charles backing the new venture. Giving a platform for farmers to get together and combat isolation, Mr Stables said the driving-force behind the We Are Farming Minds charity has been his wife, Emily, who helped him with his mental health struggles.

“We had a really nice letter from Prince Charles, who wants to make a donation to it. That was incredible,” he said. “The farm is owned by the Duchy, and he’s great really. He keeps up with all that his tenants are doing. He’s really passionate about his farming. He’s a great chap and keeps up-to-date with what’s going on on the estates all over the country.”

Recently, Mr Stables helped a farmer from Yorkshire by lambing his flock of sheep after he tested positive for Covid-19. Then after a feature in industry publication the Farmers Guardian, the Prince of Wales praised the move in his letter to Mr Stables.

“The letter that he sent was saying how proud he was and how he came through coronavirus. The article said about We Are Farming Minds and he wanted to make a donation, which is incredible.”

The charity, which is in the process of being registered, will help farmers who are struggling with the isolation, as some can go several days without seeing anyone. Mr Stables highlighted the stark figures about the suicide rate amongst farmers. NFU Mutual’s Farm Safety Foundation said that in 2018, there were 83 suicides among people working in agricultural and related trades in England and Wales – more than one every week. Research from the foundation also showed four out of five farmers under the age of 40 believe mental health is the biggest hidden problem facing farmers.

“We’ve got together a steering group incorporating one of the directors from Belmont Vets, Matt Pugh: they’re fantastic. We’re looking at putting money into doing courses for people who have that immediate connection with farmers like your vets and feed reps, how to identify a farmer who is potentially struggling, so we’ll be putting some money into that. Obviously, isolation is the main thing, certainly for me, not being able to see people day-to-day. With the coronavirus situation, the general public are starting to see what isolation can do to your mental health. What we’re trying to do in different parts of Herefordshire is to organise social evenings where farmers can get together and get off the farm. At that point we’ll have people in the room who aren’t going to chuck mental health down your throat, but it’s more of a social thing. We’ll have a speaker or other things going on, and have people who can signpost farmers to areas which might be helpful in a subtle sort of way.”

Duchy of Cornwall deputy land steward Charlotte Ibbs will support the farming couple on the venture, and said it is an important issue to highlight.

“Despite a growing awareness of issues surrounding mental health, it is still a subject which many people find hard to open up about,” she said. “The farming community work long hours and are often isolated, both of which can have a negative impact on mental health, and it is vital that farmers have access to help when they need it. “I am pleased to be able to support Emily and Sam as a trustee of the charity and look forward to making a positive difference in the future.”