

Holiday contest aimed at stressed farmers

Rachel Thomas

Anyone who has worked on a farm understands the pressures behind endless hours spent working the land and the stress surrounding multiple factors left up to chance.

Just in time for Fieldays, a national homestay network has discovered a way to give farmers a much-needed retreat.

Julia Charity, founder of accommodation provider Look After Me, has called for nominations for a competition to give respite to rural workers who might feel isolated, overwhelmed or alone.

Charity said the competition is open to any farmer across the country who needs to get away from the farm for a couple of days, be that a ski weekend in Wanaka, a trip to a seaside bach or an escape to the warmer northern regions.

The competition was spurred by sobering statistics around rural depression which indicated suicide rates among New Zealand's rural communities were on the rise compared to those living in towns and cities.

In April, Associate Health Minister Jo Goodhew welcomed growth of the National Depression Initiative (NDI) to include voices from rural communities.

"Rural depression is a significant issue. We want rural people who might be isolated to know that they're not alone," says Goodhew.

"In recent years male suicide rates have been up to 67 per cent higher in

rural areas compared to men living in towns and cities," Goodhew said.

Waikato Rural Support Trust is helping to raise awareness on issues farmers face and provide support for those who are struggling.

Chairman Neil Bateup said financial stresses, busy calving seasons and weather conditions can all weigh on farmers.

"One-man farmers are expected to be experts on soil, management, people, finances, and some of those pressures build."

Charity recalled helping on her uncle's Canterbury farm when she was a child, so is well versed on the endless hours farmers work.

"It was always all hands on deck. There was a lot of expectation for the children to help with moving the cows and baling."

Charity said the competition provides a link between the tourism and farming sectors.

"One of the things they are saying is they are feeling isolated, so if they can connect it gives everybody a lift."

Brian and Sarah Mahoney, who farmed in Waikato for more than 25 years, said their local school has closed, the sales yards moved to town and even the local watering hole's gone.

Brian Mahoney said he and his wife haven't had a break in 15 years.

"We're well past the 'she'll be right off,' Brian Mahoney said.



"We want people who might be isolated to know that they're not alone."

Jo Goodhew
Associate Health Minister

Nominations will be accepted until June 30. Entry and competition details can be found on Look After Me's Blog and competition page.

Take a break: A national homestay network is calling for nominations, via its blog, of farmers who deserve a break. Founder Julia Charity, front, with host Deby Sowter and guest.

Photo: Supplied

■ For more information go to lookafterme.co.nz/blog

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