

# Q&A WITH BEN EAGLE AND FCN ON FARMRUNNER AND MANDOWN

## **Please introduce yourself and Thrive Outdoor**

I'm Ben Eagle and I'm a farmer from north Essex as well as a Director of Thrive Outdoor. I run Thrive with my fellow Directors Andy Bareham and Stephen Mayzes.

Thrive Outdoor is an outdoors fitness and wellbeing company based on the farm. We have an 11 acre site which includes an outdoor gym, bouldering wall, a 750m running track and 16 obstacles accessible to all ages. In 2019 we launched 'FarmRunner' as a way of getting local people out on the farm at the weekend, meeting each other and running, jogging or walking a 2.5km course across the farm. This soon developed into mud run events and now our bespoke facility on the farm.

## **What was your motivation to start FarmRunner?**

FarmRunner was driven by our passion for getting the community together and for fitness to be accessible for all. I am a great believer in the connection between good physical fitness and positive mental wellbeing and FarmRunner was an easy way of combining both.

## **Why is it important for people working on farms to think about physical fitness?**

Better physical fitness results in improved mental wellbeing. I believe it's also healthy to have a break from the farming when you can and doing some form of physical exercise, even if that is simply going for a walk around the farm noticing what's around you, provides a good opportunity for this. Farming requires a good level of physical fitness too for many tasks and better physical fitness will make these tasks easier, enabling you to feel better in the long run.

## **What advice would you give to someone wanting to take the first steps to improve their fitness?**

Do something that you enjoy is the most important thing I'd say. There are lots of ways that you can improve your fitness but doing something that you want to do helps you see improvement. Keeping motivated is also important and so I'd also say make sure to do something regularly if you can and get into a routine. That could be running at a regular time or maybe even finding a local group that plays a sport such as five a side football, or maybe join a local running group if there is one in your area. If you'd rather swim, join a swimming club. It's about doing what you want to do.

## **How do you think the physical and fitness aspect to FarmRunner will support that individuals mental wellbeing?**

FarmRunner is partly about community but critically it is also about encouraging everyone to improve their physical fitness. As a regular group activity participants can track their own progress and see their improvement over time. This sense of positive personal achievement is partly a boost to mental wellbeing. Further, exercise also increases concentrations of norepinephrine, that helps moderate the brain's response to stress so there is a real beneficial impact simply through aerobic activity.

## **What made you want to start ManDown, in addition to FarmRunner?**

We recognised that we had more women than men taking part on a regular basis in our farmrunner groups so ManDown is partly about increasing the number of men who take part in FarmRunner generally. However, we ourselves have had personal experience of poor mental health and have seen how men can lose sense of self esteem. We have known about the rising number of cases of male suicide and wanted to help to raise awareness of this issue. Hence, ManDown was born partly as a way of engaging more men in FarmRunner and partly for raising awareness of male suicide here in Essex.

### **Why do you think it's important to encourage those in the farming community to take part in FarmRunner or ManDown?**

Farming can be quite isolating at times and it can also be easy to be swept up with work and not take the time to focus on yourself for a bit. FarmRunner is an easy way to meet others (either face to face here on the farm or virtually on social media using the hashtag #FarmRunner) and improve your physical fitness and mental wellbeing.

### **Top Tips from you on staying fit on the farm**

- Make time once a week for something you enjoy
- Do some form of physical exercise each week that's not connected to farming
- Eat a balanced diet
- Drink plenty of water
- Get enough sleep
- Relax at the end of the day
- A little bit of activity is better than nothing at all

[www.thriveoutdoor.co.uk](http://www.thriveoutdoor.co.uk)

[www.farmwell.org.uk](http://www.farmwell.org.uk)

[www.yellowwellies.org](http://www.yellowwellies.org)