

A photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, a dirt road leads through a field with wooden fences. To the right, a large red barn with a gabled roof stands prominently. The background shows a dense forest of trees and rolling hills under a clear sky. A large, semi-transparent circular graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Impact Assessment of the Support the Farmer Project

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Abstract

- The aim of the impact assessment of the Support the Farmer Project is to ascertain the effects and impacts of the project's actions on the wellbeing of agricultural entrepreneurs and their ability to cope at work. The assessment looked at the customer work of the project workers, the support received through payment commitments for outsourced services, the early intervention model and the stakeholder network, as well as the broader social impact of the project.
- **The role of project workers** has been central. They have offered discussion help, situation analysis and service guidance to agricultural entrepreneurs. Project workers have comprehensively mapped the situation of agricultural entrepreneur and, where necessary, referred them to other expert services. Altogether 72 percent of customers received support from other specialists, and 91 percent of these customers found the multiprofessional approach very or somewhat useful. Customers have found the holistic approach to work of project workers, as well as their ability to discuss and listen, to be important. These aspects have helped customers identify problem areas and improve their wellbeing and work ability. The average wellbeing experienced by customers who responded to the survey, on a scale from zero to ten, increased from 3.7 to 6.3 and their work ability from 4.5 to 6.3. In addition, 91 percent of respondents found the work performed by project workers to be very or quite useful.
- **Payment commitments** for outsourced services have offered agricultural entrepreneurs the opportunity to receive professional help, such as psychotherapy. This has helped customers increase their psychosocial wellbeing from 6.3 to 7.2 and their work ability from 6.3 to 7.3 even after the work of project workers was completed. The vast majority of respondents (88%) felt that payment commitments for outsourced services were very or quite useful. The impacts of the project can also be seen in the long term in the continuation of the farm's operations or the improvement of results, as well as in the resolution of relationship problems and, to that extent, in the improvement of the work community at the farm.

Abstract

- The impacts of the project's actions can also be seen in the long term in how the farm's continuity and profitability have been secured. Work community issues, such as relationship conflicts, have also been resolved through the project's actions, and through this the continuity of operations has been secured.
- **The stakeholder network and early intervention model** have played an important role in directing agricultural entrepreneurs to the project's services. Stakeholders have found the early intervention model useful and feel that the support it offers is important to farmers.
- **The broader social impact of the project** can be seen as successful from a social and economic perspective. The project can help break the cycle of silence. When people can talk about their ability to cope without the risk of being stigmatised, communities and support networks are created that can help each other in difficult times. This sense of community can support the wellbeing and work ability of individuals. Improving the wellbeing of agricultural entrepreneurs helps them to continue their farming operations. This in turn promotes employment and economic activities in the region and generates tax revenues. It also strengthens Finland's security of supply.
- Based on this impact assessment, it can be stated **that the Support the Farmer Project has significantly supported agricultural entrepreneurs in their difficulties and improved their psychosocial wellbeing and work ability.** The holistic approach offered by the project workers and the therapy obtained through payment commitments for outsourced services have been important factors in improving the wellbeing and work ability of customers. The stakeholder network that the project coordinates and trains has also supported the success of the project by encouraging farmers to seek assistance at an early stage. On the whole, the project appears to have produced positive impacts on the lives, wellbeing and continuity of the working careers of agricultural entrepreneurs.

Background

- The aim of the Support the Farmer Project is to reduce psychosocial stress factors among agricultural entrepreneurs, to improve their ability to cope at work, and to support their work and entrepreneurial careers. In this way, the project also aims to secure Finland's security of supply. The project offers free help to agricultural entrepreneurs in challenging life situations. These challenges can be related to, for example, burnout, relationships, finances or work ability challenges. (Mela, 2019)
- The roots of the Support the Farmer Project lie in the financial plight of agricultural entrepreneurs and in the Tractor March demonstration that gained public attention in 2016. Following the march, the Finnish government proposed a EUR 50 million crisis package for agriculture for 2017. From this amount, EUR 1 million was allocated to the Farmers' Social Insurance Institution Mela. This marked the beginning of the Support the Farmer Project. (Mela, 2019b)
- Mela has previously conducted assessments of the usefulness of the Support the Farmer Project. In addition, a licentiate thesis has been made on the impacts of the project (Saari 2019). In spring 2023, Mela selected E2 Research through a tender to investigate the impact of the project's actions.



Actions of the Support the Farmer Project

This impact assessment studies at the impacts of the Support the Farmer Project and how effective its actions have been in reducing psychosocial stress factors among agricultural entrepreneurs, improving their ability to cope at work, and supporting work and entrepreneurial careers. The following actions of the Support the Farmer Project are assessed:

- 1. The impact of customer work performed by project workers**
- 2. The impact of payment commitments for outsourced services**
- 3. The impact of the early intervention model and stakeholder network**
- 4. The long-term broader social impact of the project**

Framework of the impact assessment

Impact thinking is based on a logic chain that is known by the abbreviation IOOI: Input, Output, Outcome, Impact. (Aistrich, 2014).

In the Support the Farmer Project, the **input** can be understood as the financial investment in the project or, for example, as the work input of the project workers.

The **output** can be understood as the measurable results of the project, for example the number of farm visits, customers or payment commitments for outsourced services.

The **outcome** is related to the concrete change in the person achieved during the project. This can be examined by evaluating, for example, how meeting the project workers has affected the farmer and what changes have resulted from it.

Finally, the **impact** can be understood as an effect that is apparent even after the end of the support received from the project. In the Support the Farmer Project, this can mean a permanent improvement in the wellbeing and work ability of farmers, or it can be seen, for example, as the continuation of farming operations. Impact can also be viewed on a broader societal level, such as an improvement in or maintenance of food security. Impact can also be evaluated in terms of economic significance or as a change in transgenerational and cultural behaviour patterns.

Framework of the impact assessment

According to the definition of the World Health Organization (WHO), health consists of physical, mental and social wellbeing. This impact assessment primarily examines the mental (psychological) and social dimensions of wellbeing, with the understanding that they may also depend on physical factors. The psychosocial stress experienced by farmers and changes in work ability and/or motivation are the sum of many factors, which makes it difficult to measure the load (Leka et al. 2015).

Since experiences of stress are always individual and subjective, the metrics in this impact assessment have been qualitative (Heinänen, 2019), although quantitative materials have also been utilised.

Often, just understanding the sources of the load can reduce the psychosocial stress or create an opportunity to untie a difficult knot. Qualitative measurement and the intervention it enables may already have an effect on experiences of stress (Kivistö et al. 2008). This is good to take into account in early interventions. The earlier (or preventively) the stress is addressed, the better the possible costs resulting from the stress can be minimised, such as the costs incurred by sick leave or early retirement (Heinänen, 2019).



Methods

When evaluating occupational wellbeing and psychosocial stress, as well as assessing impacts, multi-methodology is important. Therefore, both **qualitative and quantitative methods** have been used in this impact assessment: interaction-based discussions (Manka et al. 2012, Kolehmainen, 2022) and a survey.

Qualitative interview data was collected using semi-structured thematic interviews. Data was gathered from the following:

1. Project workers involved in customer work
2. Agricultural entrepreneurs who have received support from project workers
3. Agricultural entrepreneurs who have received support through payment commitments for outsourced services
4. Stakeholders within the Support the Farmer Project

Quantitative data based on a questionnaire was collected from customers of the Support the Farmer Project who received support through payment commitments for outsourced services.



Data: Qualitative data

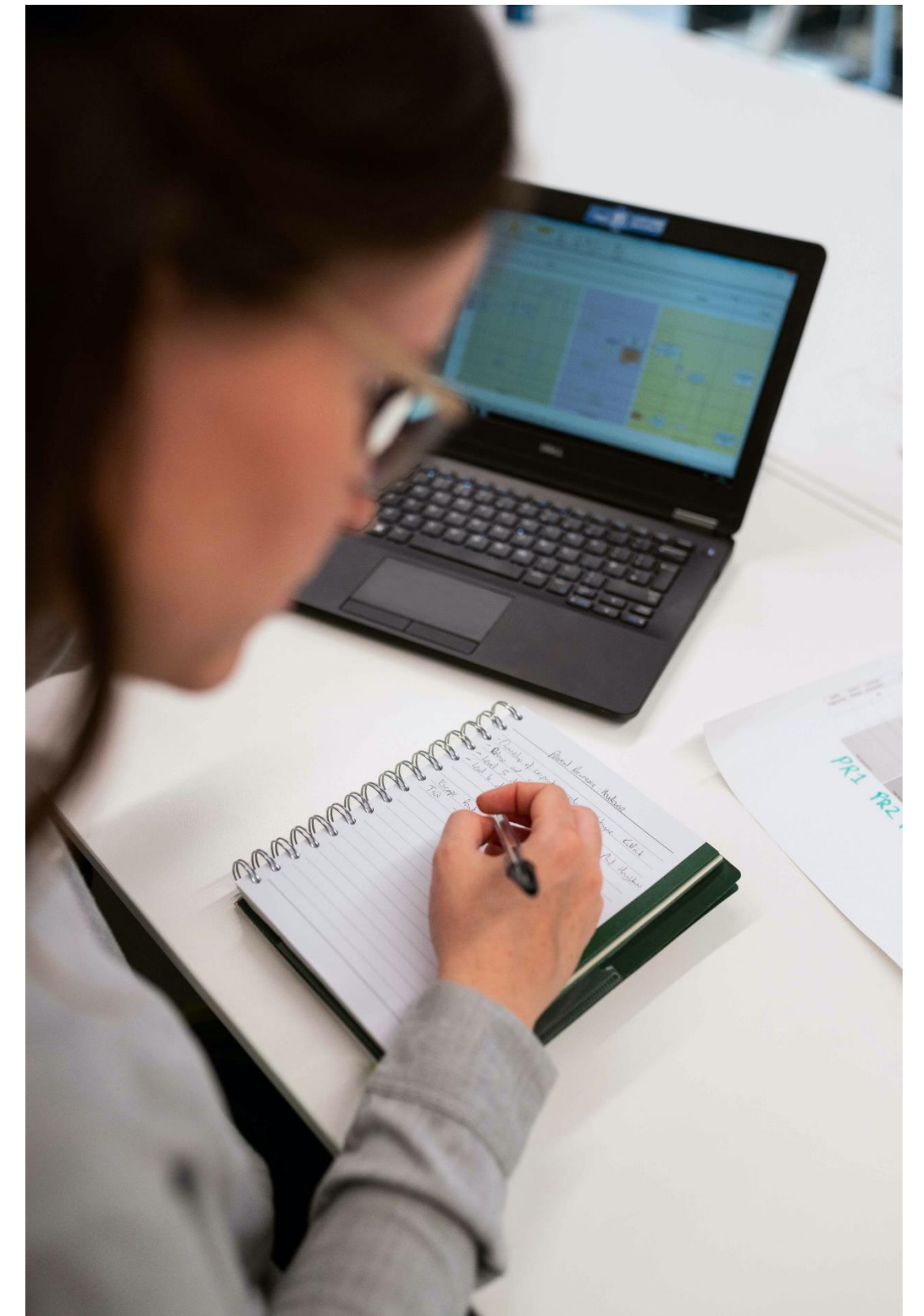
E2 Research collected qualitative interview data (N=31) between April and June 2023. The interviews were attended by eight Support the Farmer project workers, seven stakeholders working with agricultural entrepreneurs (locum worker, occupational healthcare worker, municipal veterinarian, business financing representative of a bank, financial advisor, supervisor from ELY Centre, crop production advisor) and 16 customers. Two interviews were conducted in Swedish and the others in Finnish.

The interviewees lived in different parts of Finland. The researchers obtained contact information for the interviewees from Mela. Mela selected the interviewees based on criteria provided by E2 Research in order to represent different regions of Finland, different farm activities, customers at different stages of the process, and customers in more critical and easier situations. Mela gathered the interviewees using its own resources for purposes of data protection and confidentiality. All interviews were conducted either online via Teams or by phone. The interviews were recorded, but no personal data or other information from which a person, company or farm could be identified was recorded or included in the analysis.

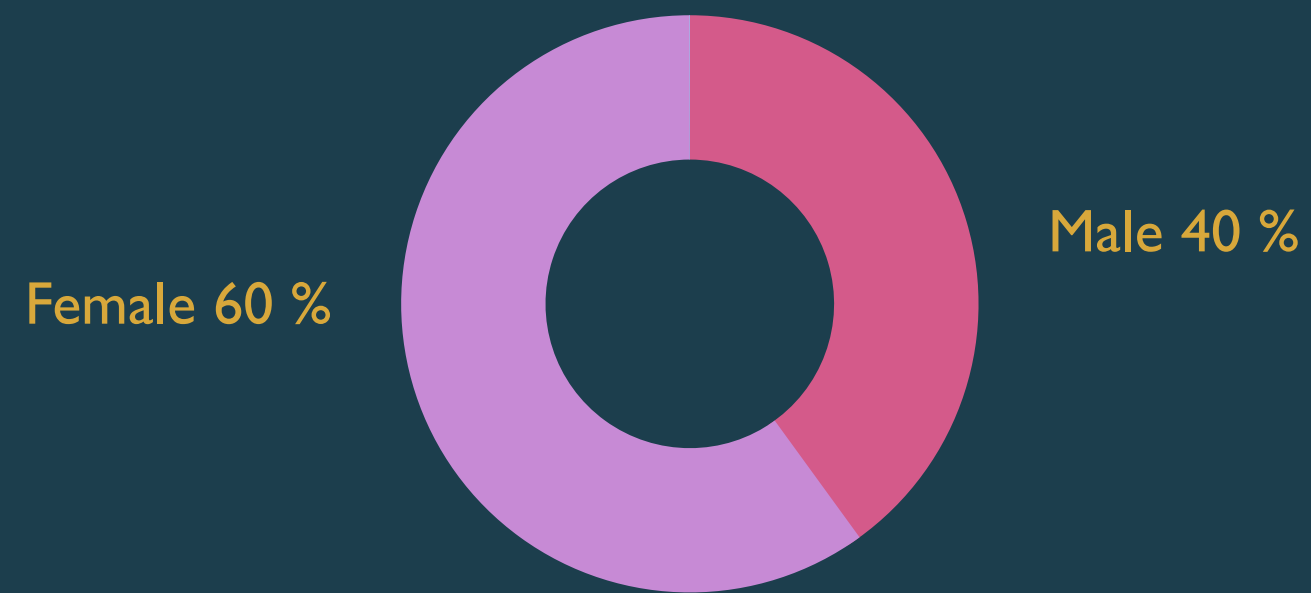
Data: Quantitative data

The questionnaire was drafted together by E2 Research and Mela. The quantitative data was collected between May and June 2023. An online Webropol questionnaire was sent by Mela to those who had agreed to participate in the survey, as well as to those who received payment commitments for outsourced services and customers of the Support the Farmer Project who used these outsourced services.

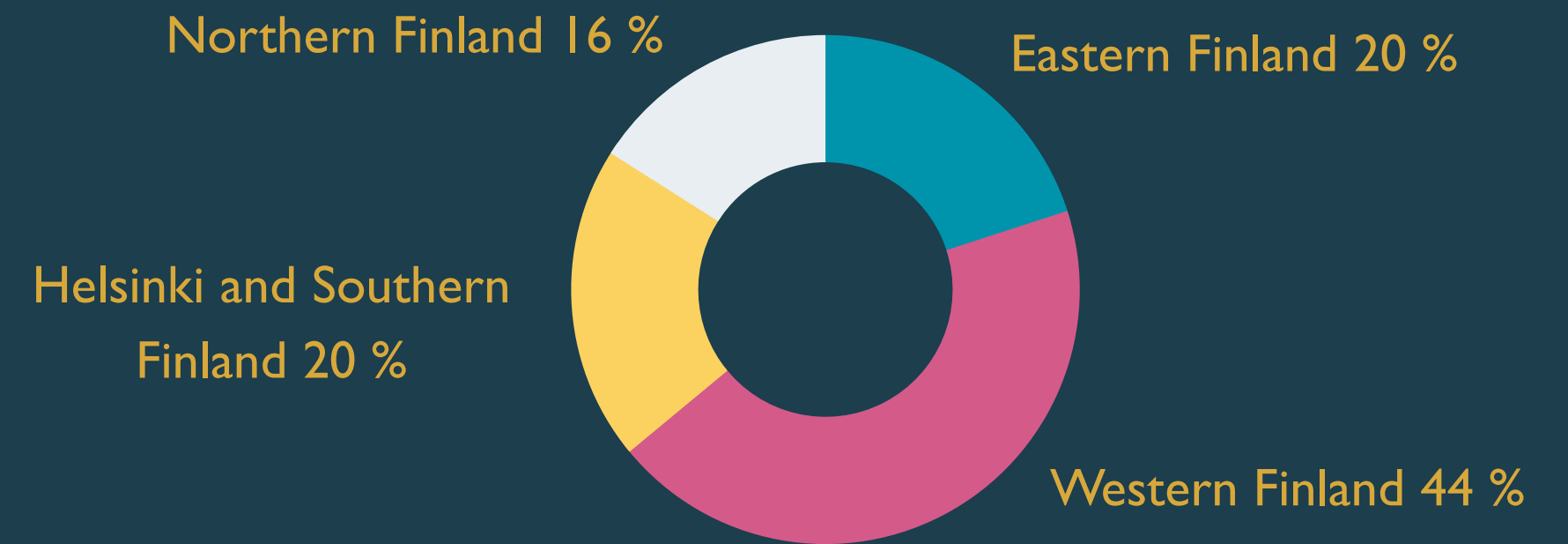
The questionnaire was conducted in both Finnish and Swedish. In total, an invitation to respond to the questionnaire was sent to 1743 customers, and 334 responses were received. The response rate was 19.2%, which can be considered sufficiently high.



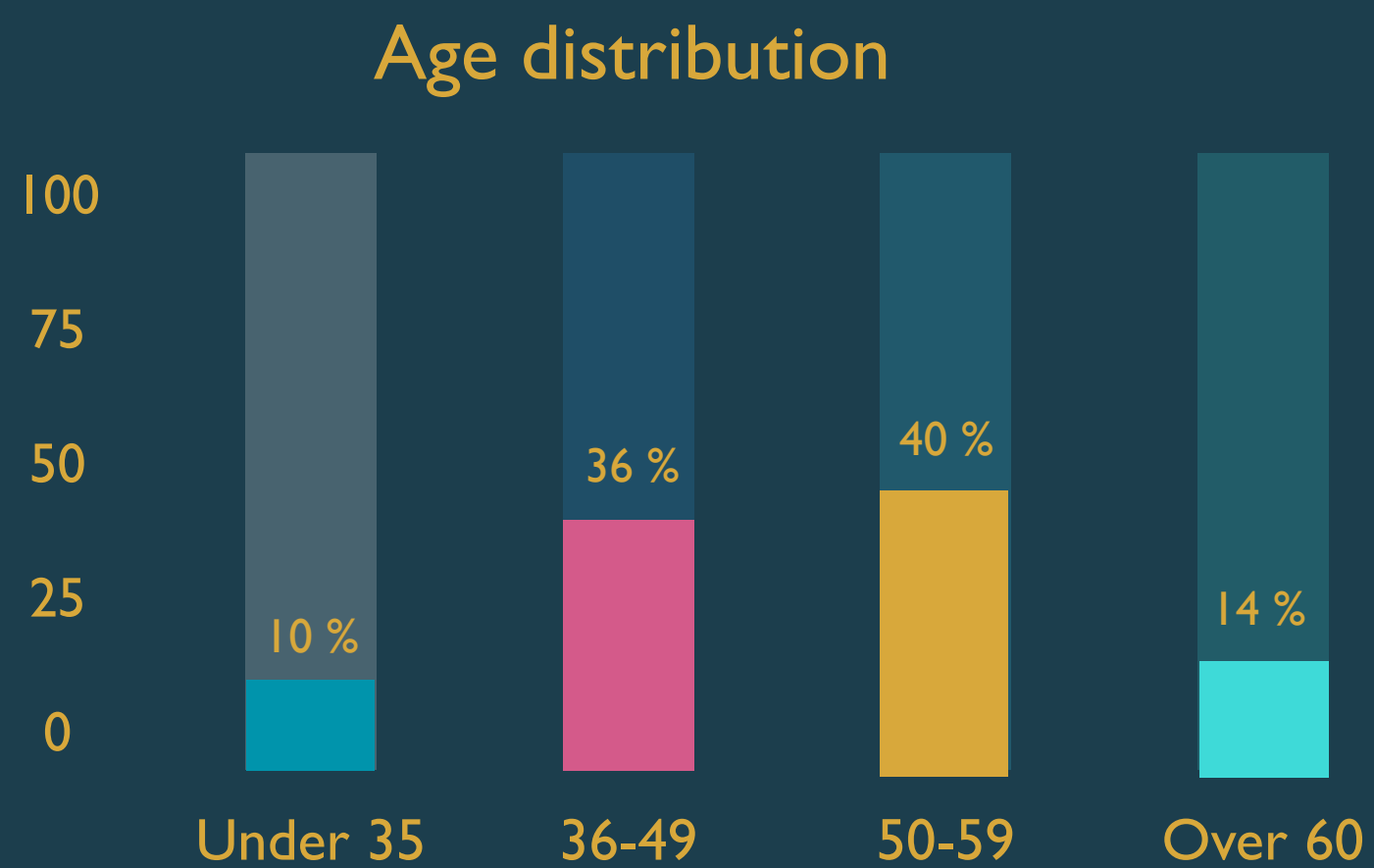
Background information of questionnaire respondents



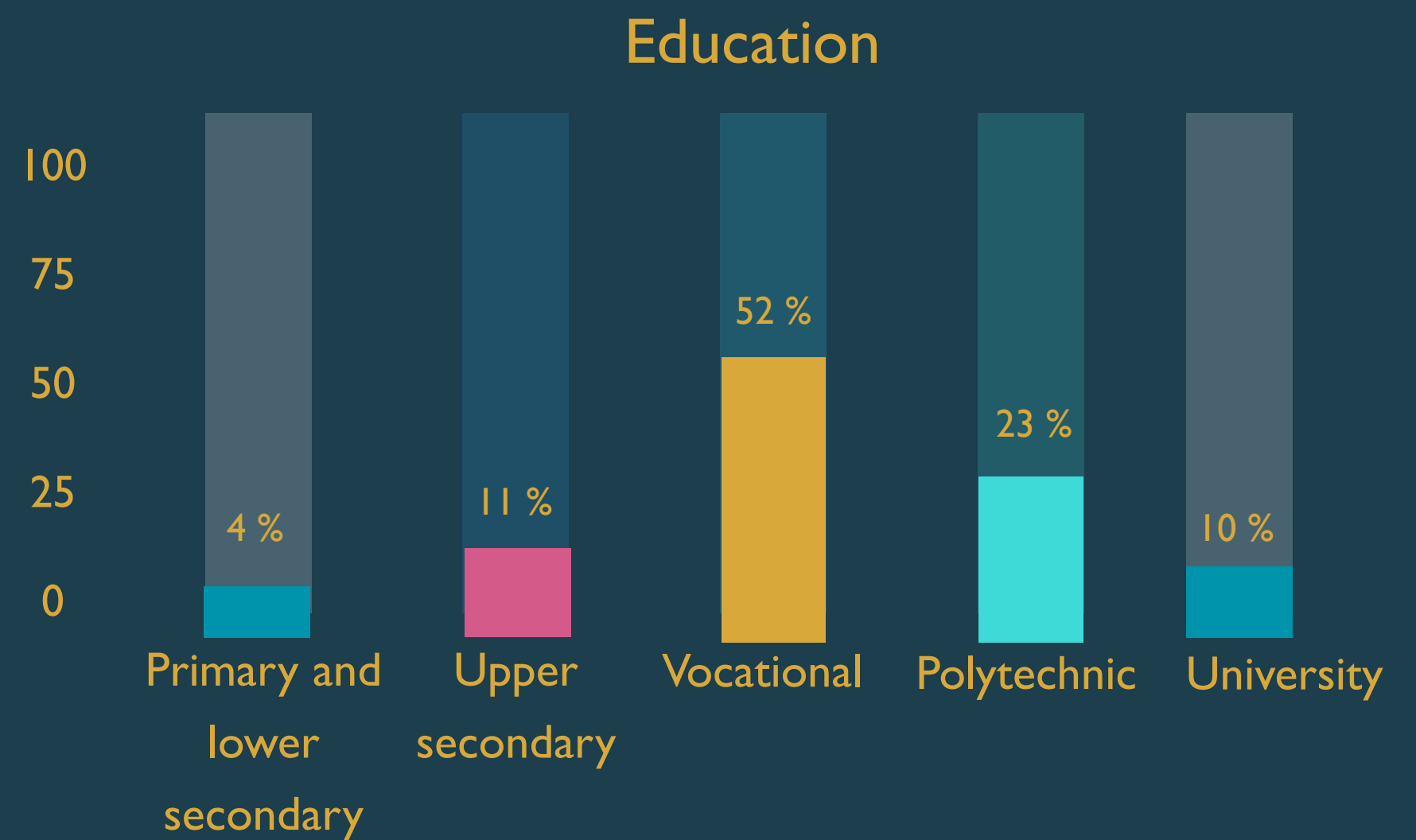
Gender distribution



Region



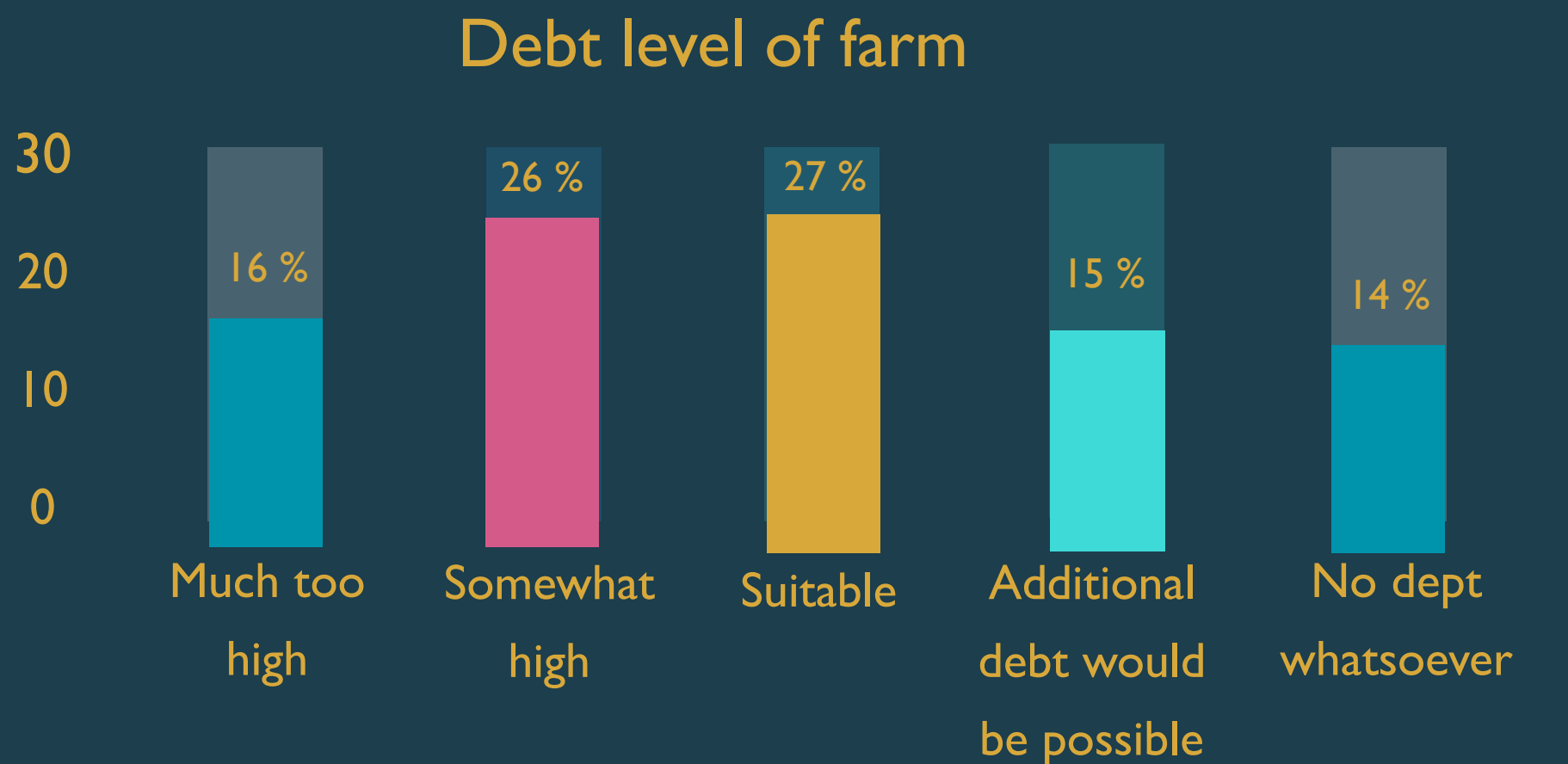
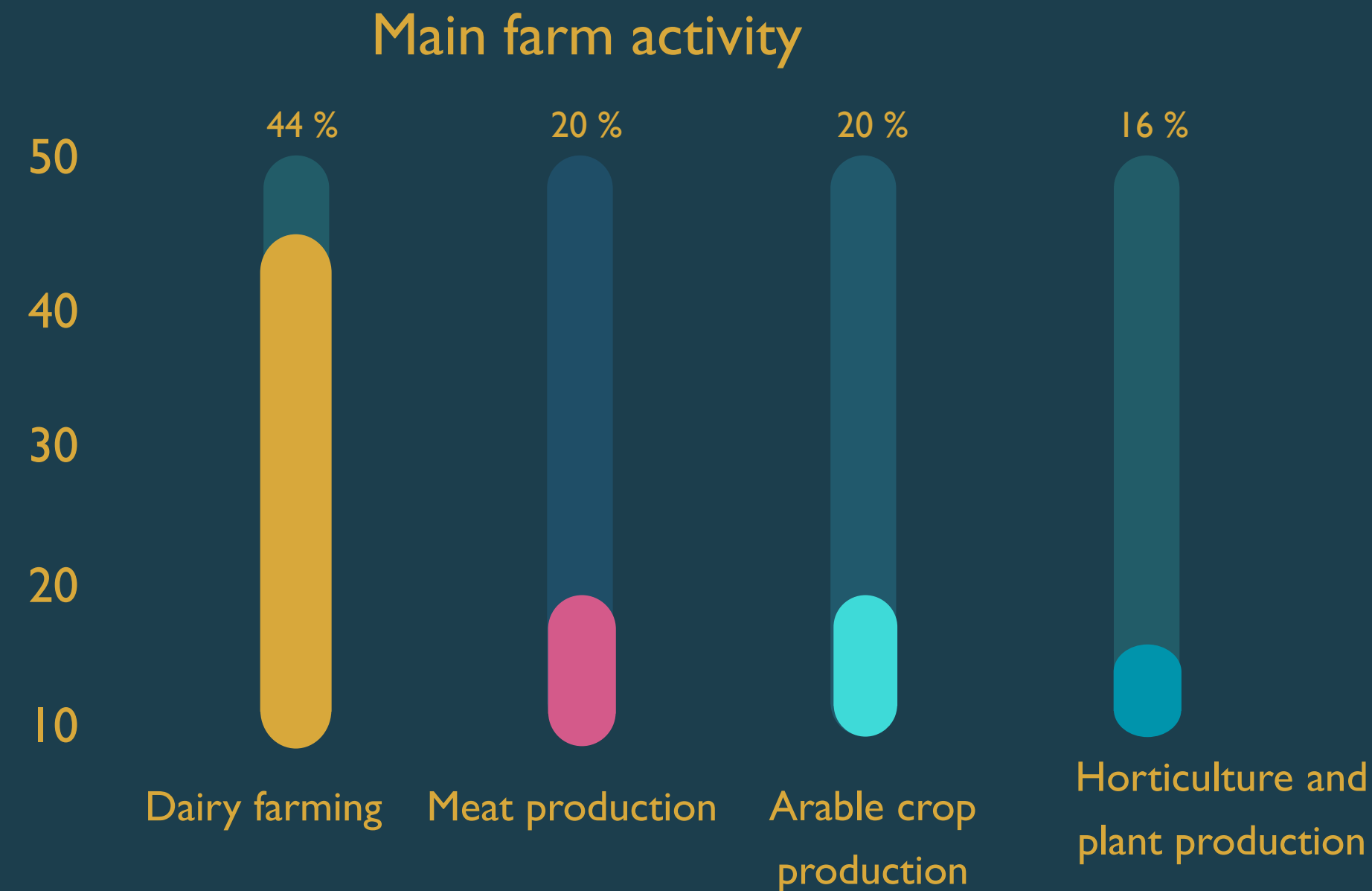
Age distribution



Education



Background information of questionnaire respondents



- A comparison with Mela's statistics shows that the survey data fairly well represents the main farm activities of farms that have received a payment commitment for outsourced services through the Support the Farmer Project.
- The proportion of women in the questionnaire data is slightly higher than among those who received a payment commitment for outsourced services. The regional distribution of those who received a payment commitment for outsourced services through the project corresponds quite well to the regional distribution of those who responded to the questionnaire (Mela 2023).



Analyses

The interview data was analysed in accordance with the principles of qualitative research. During the interviews, the researchers took notes, based on which mind maps were made using the GitMind app. Based on these mind maps, the researchers identified preliminary themes and created a preliminary codebook based on them (Bernard and Ryan, 2010).

The interviews were transcribed and anonymised. The transcriptions were uploaded to MAXQDA 2022 software for qualitative research. The codebook was updated and refined after reading the material in accordance with the principles of thematic analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The researchers then coded all the interviews according to the themes that emerged and grouped them appropriately for this impact assessment.

The quantitative data was statistically analysed using cross-tabulations. In the analysis, the effect of different background variables on the results was taken into account.

PART I

Description of support needs



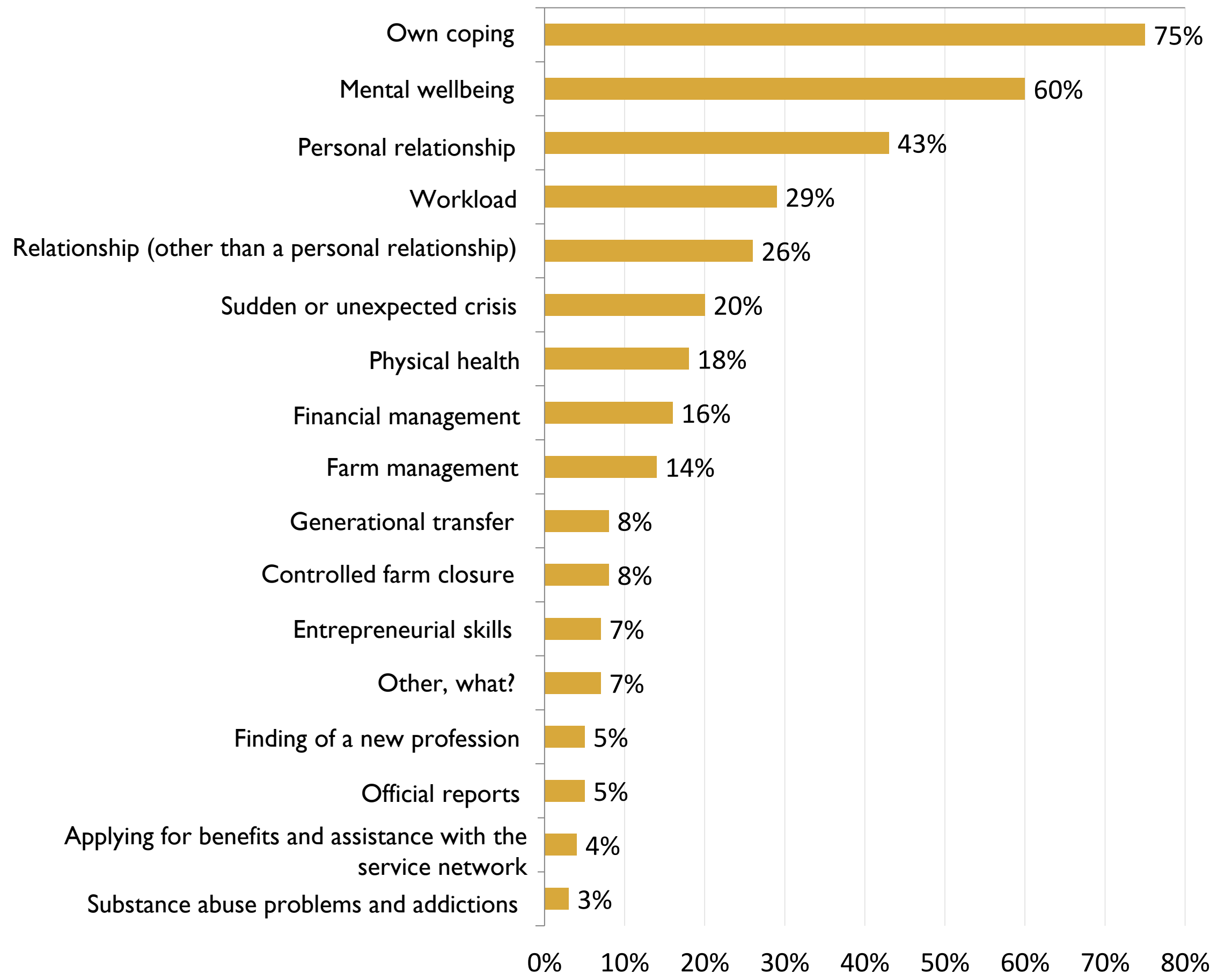
Support needs of customers

- This part describes the particular support needs of customers.
- Based on the interviews and questionnaire, agricultural entrepreneurs have a diverse range of needs. Often there are other factors behind each need that was identified.
- Typically, multiple factors have led to the farmer's coping problems or burnout, which has been reflected in the agricultural company's operations or personal relationships.
- However, sometimes the need for support is easier to manage and are so-called single-issue situations. It is also not the case that all customers are in crisis, as some customers seek support preventively.

Own coping and mental wellbeing are the most common reasons for contacting the Support the Farmer Project

- Based on the questionnaire data, the most common reasons for seeking support are own coping, mental wellbeing and relationship-related problems.
- Rather than individual problems, a complex mix of issues lies behind the need for support. Only 17 percent of respondents chose one option. Two out of three chose between 2 and 5 options.

What made you (or someone on your behalf) contact the Support the Farmer Project? You may select more than one.



Age is a factor in support needs

An examination of the background variables shows that men and women have contacted the project mainly for the same reasons. Only **one's own coping** stands out in the responses of women (79%) slightly more often than in the responses of men (68%).

Age is a factor to a certain extent. Those under the age of 35 clearly indicated multiple reasons for contacting the project more often than other age groups.

Own coping (88%) and **mental wellbeing** (79%) were more common reasons for contacting the project among those under the age of 35.

Also among those under the age of 35, **farm management** (24%) and **generational transfer** (21%) were given as reasons for contacting the project slightly more than on average.

For those over the age of 50, a personal **relationship** was the reason for contacting the project slight less than on average (36%). Approximately half of the respondents under the age of 50 (49%) had contacted the project because of a personal relationship.

Workload (43%) and **physical health** (38%) were highlighted particularly among those over the age of 60.

Support needs are often varied and cumulative

The interview material clearly shows how customers of the Support the Farmer Project often seek support for a specific problem, but after the initial investigation it becomes clear that **there may be several other problems in the background.**

Farming is often done as a couple, in which case the family is at the same time the work community.

Situations in which support has been sought for issues related to personal relationships are common, even though support was actually needed in financial management: finances can cause stress for those concerned, strain personal relationships and lead to burnout.

Most of the time, the reasons behind seeking support are problems with coping, a decrease in one's work capacity, a loss of overall control, or too much work – the feeling that one cannot cope anymore.

I like the work and am able to do it, but the stress level began to get so intense that I found it harder to recover. Everything was leading to a vicious cycle.

(Customer)

And when I tried to say that I can't cope anymore, that it was beginning to pile up, that I myself no longer knew what to do, that something is completely wrong and somehow over and done with in every single part of my life.

(Customer)

There is often the feeling that they have lost overall control of the situation and there are so many issues related to recovery that it is clear that they need [support]... they have so much going on all the time and so much on their mind that they don't have the time to find out what kinds of services they could access and where can they get them.

(Project worker)

Personal relationship problems increase burnout

The interview data shows how farms are often managed together with a spouse. **A crisis or breakdown in the relationship** often has a direct impact on the farm business, **as one's life partner is also often one's work partner in farming.** A lack of communication often increases problems among couples and other relationships.

In some cases, the end of a relationship has led to seeking support. Discussion help and help with partitioning the farm or solving other problems have been sought. Similarly, support has been sought to help save or improve the relationship in order to avoid a divorce.

It was a crisis and the worst situation I've ever found myself in so far and it was really tough, so much so that I was losing sleep and could think of nothing else except that everything familiar and safe in life was ending.
(Customer)

...behind it was also this divorce process, which has really drained my energy, and this financial pressure began to materialize to the extent that we had to sell our belongings in order to cope with our loan.
(Customer)

They have come to me saying that there is something in their relationship or ability to cope that prevents them from getting their work done, that they simply don't have the energy to take care of things and are completely spent.
(Project worker)

Support is needed to manage bureaucracy and the administrative burden

Being an agricultural entrepreneur involves much more than just taking care of the farming.

It emerges from the interview data that agricultural entrepreneurs also **need help coping with bureaucracy**, filling in forms and writing applications. Previous studies have also shown how bureaucratic challenges are a burden to farmers in particular. For example, in a 2014 survey conducted by Gallup Elintarviketieto, farmers mentioned that bureaucracy has the biggest negative impact on their ability to cope (MT 2014).

Support has also been sought for **managing various administrative responsibilities.**

The situation was mostly about running the farm, paying invoices and so on – administrative matters. My father was no longer able to take care of these things and couldn't keep up with the times.

(Customer)

They need help with applications, such as applying for sickness allowance from Kela...Many don't necessarily have a computer or they lack digital skills, so we have helped with these kinds of online services and also helped them contact stakeholders, as they often have a high threshold for calling the bank or an advisor, for example, so they need a messenger for these interactions.

(Project worker)

Financial problems at the heart of burnout

The agricultural entrepreneurs interviewed told that **financial difficulties** were one of the biggest reasons for seeking help from the Support the Farmer Project.

Financial problems are manifested in many ways and have different background causes.

Sometimes, investments that have been made did not turn out to be profitable. In other cases, the company's costs have risen, but income has not.

...and then our financial matters were in a complete knot, and for a long time I tried to manage them by making phone calls and getting payment extensions and making all kinds of payment commitments until it all became impossible and I couldn't even take care of the smaller things.

(Customer)

Another typical situation that I have encountered is finding all these envelopes that haven't been opened because the recipient hasn't dared open them or even collect them from the mailbox. These envelopes are left unopen because the recipients are scared of what they may contain. This is quite typical when the financial situation was the main reason for getting in touch.

(Project worker)

Crises and health concerns also reasons for seeking support

Sudden crises can catch agricultural entrepreneurs by surprise, no matter what they are related to. Losing loved ones is an example that everyone can understand. Another example is when the sudden collapse of the market for agricultural products creates situations for which it was not possible to prepare.

The cost crisis in agriculture is a reason why many farmers seek support, but the Covid pandemic and Russia's attack on Ukraine have also increased the need for help, albeit to a lesser extent.

Neglecting physical wellbeing can also eventually lead to problems.

...everything, absolutely everything. It has to do with coping, not having the strength. Motivation has been a keyword lately, or rather the lack of motivation. And then there have been long periods of sickness.

(Project worker)

Some customers have done heavy physical work for a really long time and forgotten about taking care of themselves, so their bodies are simply worn out. Some have started working around the age of fourteen, when their mother died and they had to go out and milk the cows. In other words, they don't have experience with anything else, not even proper education in some cases, so it's not always easy to find and build a future path.

(Project worker)

Support for planning and preparing for the future

Even though a large share of the customers of the Support the Farmer Project have encountered some degree of crisis or are heading in that direction, it is important to note that **planning and preparing for the future** are also among the needs of the project's customers.

Generational transfers of farms is one good example of the type of concrete assistance that customers seek. Many customers are not sure how to handle the matter and what needs to be done

In general, these involve periods of change and beginning to think about their health. And then there are these... well, not all of them are crises, but often they begin to think whether there is any sense in continuing, plus then sicknesses and everything that goes with them, so they are concerned about how to carry on. Situations involving generational transfers often lead customers to begin thinking a little in advance about how long they can keep going and how they will take care of everything, so then they can begin making a 5-year plan or changing their farm activities, for example.

(Project worker)

PART 2

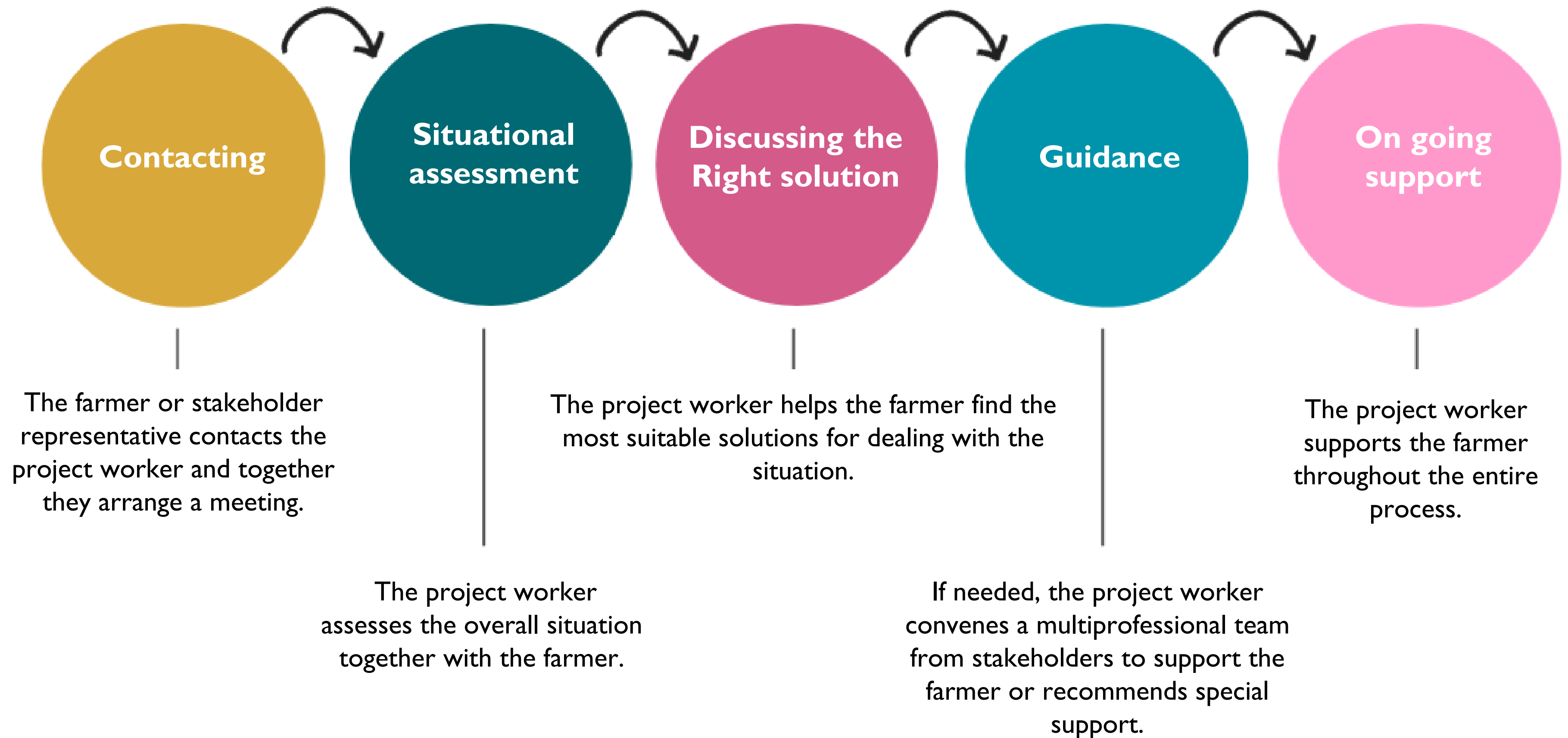
Customer work performed by project workers



Customer work performed by project workers

- This part describes the roles, tools and tasks of project workers. It also describes the factors that lower the threshold for customers to seek support.
- The key role in the Support the Farmer Project is played by 15 regional project workers. The project worker is the first person the farmer meets after requesting help. Project workers therefore have an important and responsible position in providing support to farmers.
- The project workers understand the agricultural operating environment and are thus able to assess the farmer's situation comprehensively and offer discussion assistance. Based on the assessment, further actions are decided together with the farmer (Mela, 2019b).
- The initial contact with the project worker is made either by the farmer or by a stakeholder who has received permission from the farmer to contact the project worker and provide contact information.

Job description of project workers



Farmers satisfied with recommendation to seek help

Farmers heard about the Support the Farmer Project from many different sources.

According to the questionnaire, a large share of the respondents had obtained the information themselves from the internet or the media (42%) or heard about it from a cooperation partner (25%). The interviews mentioned, for example, Mela's newsletter or wellbeing events, as well as events organised by the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK).

Among the respondents, **93% had a very positive or somewhat positive attitude towards the suggestion of a member of the stakeholder group who visited the farm to seek help from the project.**

Based on the interview data, the initial impressions of the project among farmers can be divided into two main categories: **very positive (the majority) and somewhat sceptical.** A sense of grasping at the last straw due to some kind of desperation also emerged as one of the themes.

I was a little sceptical. I can't say what personal reasons caused me to be sceptical about who this person was and how they could help me.

(Customer)

So good, and even the name, "Support the Farmer" gave me such a warm feeling. Someone is thinking about us too and our wellbeing.

(Customer)

When I saw it, I thought to myself that this is our last chance, we have to seize the opportunity and see if it could provide help with our financial situation.

(Customer)

Seeking support is often hard

Asking for help is not easy.

Several respondents said **they felt ashamed of asking for help.**

Since previous generations have not asked for or received help, why should they. The fear of failure was struck many people's minds.

According to the data, a small share of respondents thought in advance that therapy is useless or not suitable for them. The cycle of silence prevented men in particular from asking for help. It was thought that if they asked for help, they would have to discuss their own issues and feelings.

Some simply could not bring themselves to contact anyone.

Finnish farmers, these old-time farmers, are like immortal people in their own minds and can farm up to the age of 100 at least, but sometimes it doesn't go like that and they refuse to admit it.

(Customer)

...in our situation too, I was thinking how my husband would approve of someone coming to help, because the idea is so ingrained in his head that you take care of your own things on the farm.

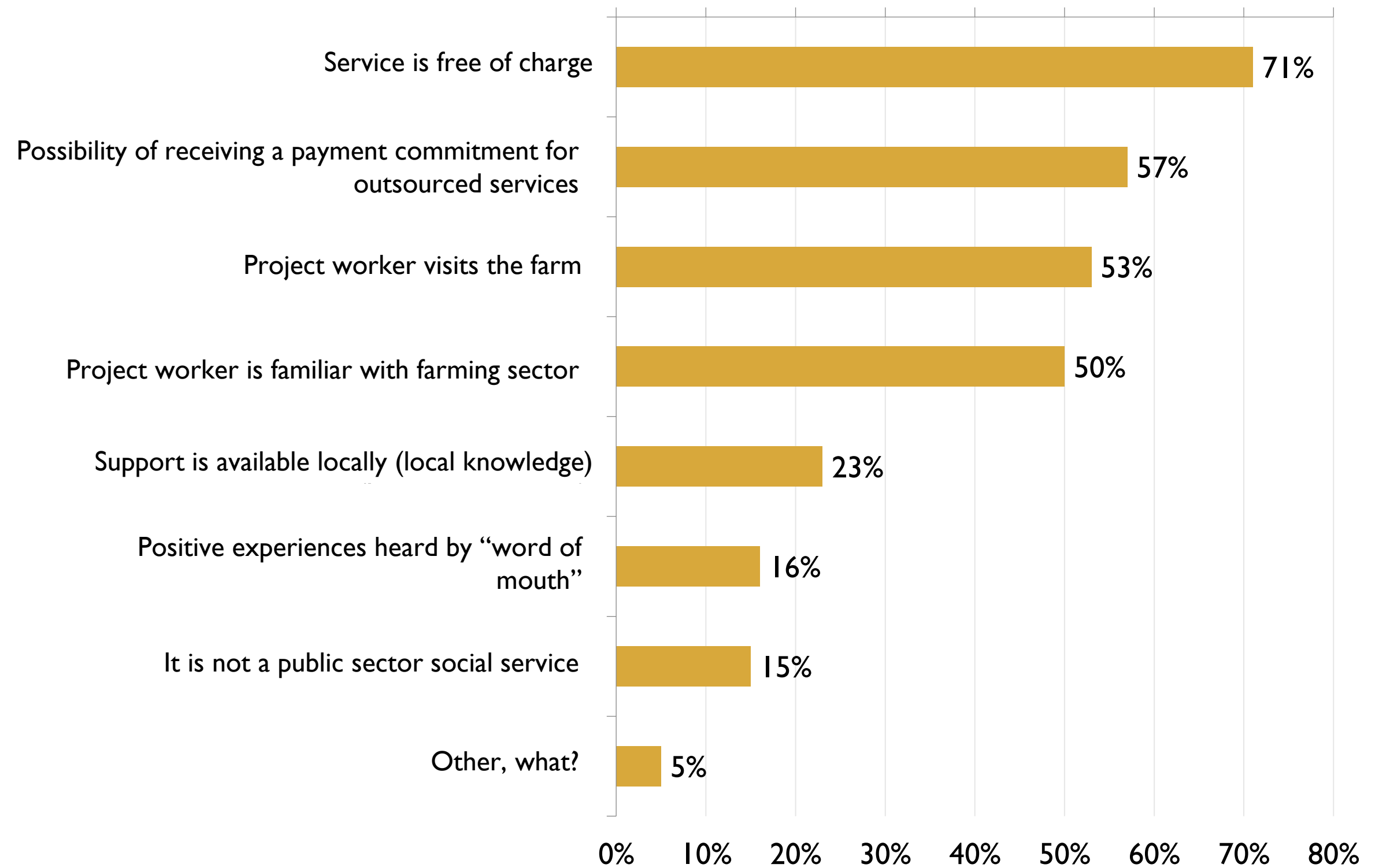
(Customer)

Lack of initiative. In a way, I know what to do and even who to call, but I just can't bring myself to grab the phone and dial the number.

(Customer)

Free service and chance to receive a payment commitment for outsourced services lowered the threshold for getting in touch

Did any of the following lower the threshold for contacting the Support the Farmer Project? You may select more than one:



Free service important especially among young farmers

*I think it is quite a decisive factor that the service is free of charge.
(Customer)*

Even though asking for help is not easy, the data shows that certain factors lowered the threshold for getting in touch with the Support the Farmer Project.

In particular, the fact that **the service is free of charge** made it easier for customers to get in touch. The background variables show that this was slightly more important to women (74%) than to men (67%).

Respondents under the age of 35 highlighted the importance of the fact that the service is free of charge more often than average (88%), whereas respondents over the age of 60 mentioned its importance less often than average (62%).

According to the interviews, the threshold for using services that are not free is high especially among those with financial difficulties.

Also, the **possibility of receiving a payment commitment for outsourced services** is slightly more important to women (64%) than to men (58%) and slightly more important to those under the age of 35 (64%) than to those over the age of 50 (56%).

Approximately half of respondents also highlighted the fact that a **project worker would visit the farm** as a factor that lowered the threshold. This was of above-average importance to those over the age of 60 (66%) and those under the age of 35 (61%).

According to the interviews, this is related to the fact that **farmers suffering from burnout or are too busy may be unwilling or unable to leave their farms.**

Also, those under the age of 35 (36%) more often than average highlighted the fact that support is available locally as a factor that lowered the threshold.

Factors that lower the threshold for seeking support

According to the interviews, the fact that the project worker has **farming expertise, is familiar with the farming sector and has an obligation of confidentiality** were important factors that lowered the threshold for getting in touch.

The project workers themselves believed that their understanding of the farming sector has supported the positive impact of the project.

In some cases, the burnout of customers has become so serious that they find it too hard to get in touch. In these cases, it was considered important that the **project worker takes the initiative and makes the first contact.**

I remember, thinking about those feelings, when you are too tired to take care of things, the threshold for calling is such that it can be too much to start looking for the right number and calling, asking if this is the right place.
(Customer)

It was exactly the fact that [the project worker] has an obligation of confidentiality and is otherwise a professional who can help in many ways. We too had all the typical farm problems. Plus everything with our personal life... but yes, the obligation of confidentiality was important.
(Customer)

Roles of project workers

Project workers have diverse and multidisciplinary means of supporting customers.

The two most important are **talking** and **listening**. Both customers and project workers emphasise how often simply **opening a channel of communication can resolve the issue**. Customers feel that they are taken seriously, listened to and seen.

In addition, project workers act as **coordinators and analysts who can see the big picture**. They **assemble and coordinate a multidisciplinary team of experts to resolve the customer's problems** and are often themselves part of these teams.

In that sense it is good that there is someone who you can contact who has channels for taking care of these things.

(Customer)

I am a person [who is here] for the other person. The most important thing is that, when I go out there to the farm, I can see eye to eye with the farmer.

(Project worker)

It gives the customer a calm situation in which to talk about everything, tell us about all their issues and worries, so that we can then begin to resolve them together. We don't have that kind of principle of offering only one service, that we can only be asked about one thing.

(Project worker)

Tools of project workers

The discussion and analysis support described on the previous page describe the work of project workers holistically. The actions of individual project workers depend very much on the type of support that is needed.

Often, project workers may open the invoices of an exhausted customer and **discuss the situation of farmers who are struggling with financial problems**. In connection with this, the **services of a financial advisor may be requested** for the customer. **General scheduling** has also been important.

Help with filling out forms has also been deemed necessary to **resolve bureaucracy problems**. In addition, assistance negotiating with a bank or locum agency has been useful, according to customers.

This project worker has been in contact with these companies whose invoices haven't been paid, and so on. Payment extensions and arrangements have been agreed to avoid recovery proceedings.

(Customer)

Exactly these schedules too, so that it hasn't been so much confusion about what goes where and who does what, so organising things.

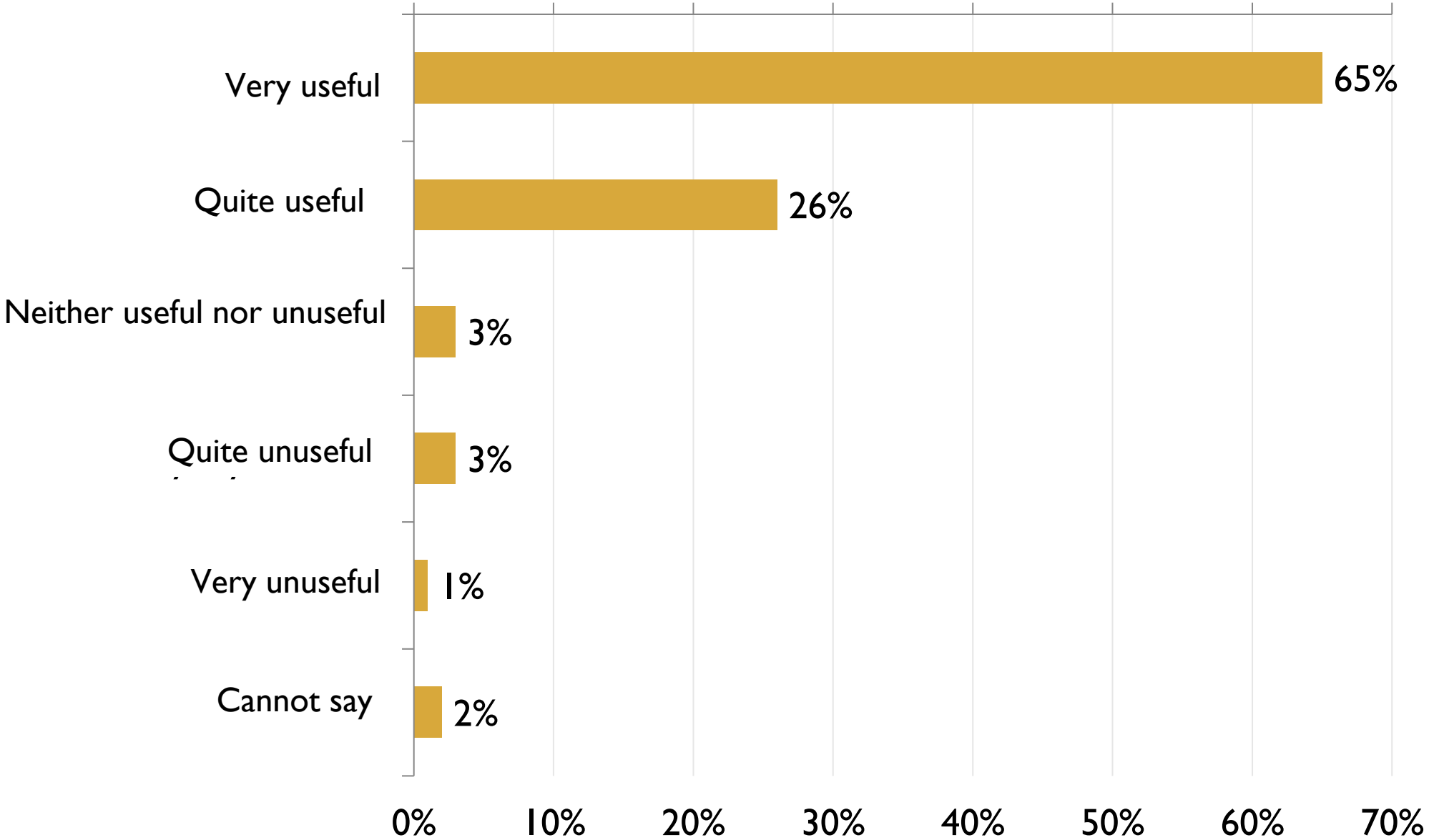
(Customer)

If there is a financial problem, often our concrete task, if there is a huge pile of unpaid bills, for example, is to open the envelopes, put them in the right order and figure out how many invoices are for late payment.

(Project worker)

Altogether 72 percent of customers received support from other experts – 91 percent of whom considered the multidisciplinary approach to be very or quite useful

How useful was it for you that the project worker gathered other experts to support you?



Customers appreciate multidisciplinary expertise of project

Based on the interviews, the assessments performed by project workers often **leads to seeking and receiving help from other sources, such as a financial or farming advisor or a mental health professional.**

The majority of customers found the **multidisciplinary approach necessary and useful.** Also, the fact that project workers have organised support on site or by phone without customers having to make arrangements themselves has been perceived as an effective solution. It is difficult to make contact when one is exhausted.

...for many it is certainly so that they don't have the contacts for getting help, so that really is important work.

(Customer)

I think it's really good that, when I already think that people are the sum of themselves, that a single issue doesn't lead to a situation in which it has to involve many different parties.

(Customer)

We coordinate the whole package, making sure that they get financial support from somewhere, whichever the advisory body is... or if it has to do with livestock, so we bring in these livestock experts, so in a way we gather a ring of experts around the issue to provide help, advice and support.

(Project worker)

Length of process varies

Based on the questionnaire data, **over half (55%) of customers have met the project worker once or twice, 34 percent 3-5 times and 10 percent 5-10 times.**

The respondents told that the length of the Support the Farmer process varied a lot on a case by case basis.

Some have wanted to meet and discuss with the project worker just once and have received the help they needed from this meeting once the issue has been opened. For others, the process has lasted even years and required regular meetings.

According to the interviews, the duration appears to depend on the seriousness of the issue, the individual resources of the customer and whether the situation involves a crisis or preventive action.

We have had countless [visits], I can't even say how many, but in the beginning we had one every week, or at least once every 2 weeks. We had really many in the beginning, and then gradually fewer, but at first we really had lots of visits and it was really good, because it got the process started, this farm closure process, and we really needed the support.

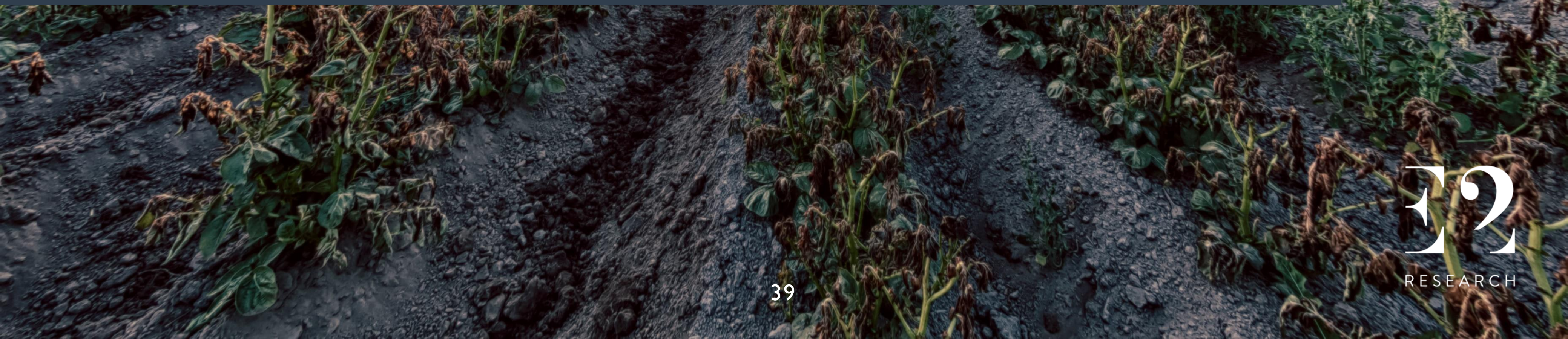
(Customer)

I've never counted, but for sure around half of all customers contacts have been just single visits.

(Project worker)

PART 3

Impact of customer work performed by project workers





Impact of work performed by project workers

- This part assesses customer experiences of participating in the project, as well as the impact and effectiveness of the customer work performed by the project workers. The data comprises interviews and questionnaire data.
- The impact is assessed according to the reference framework described at the beginning of this report.

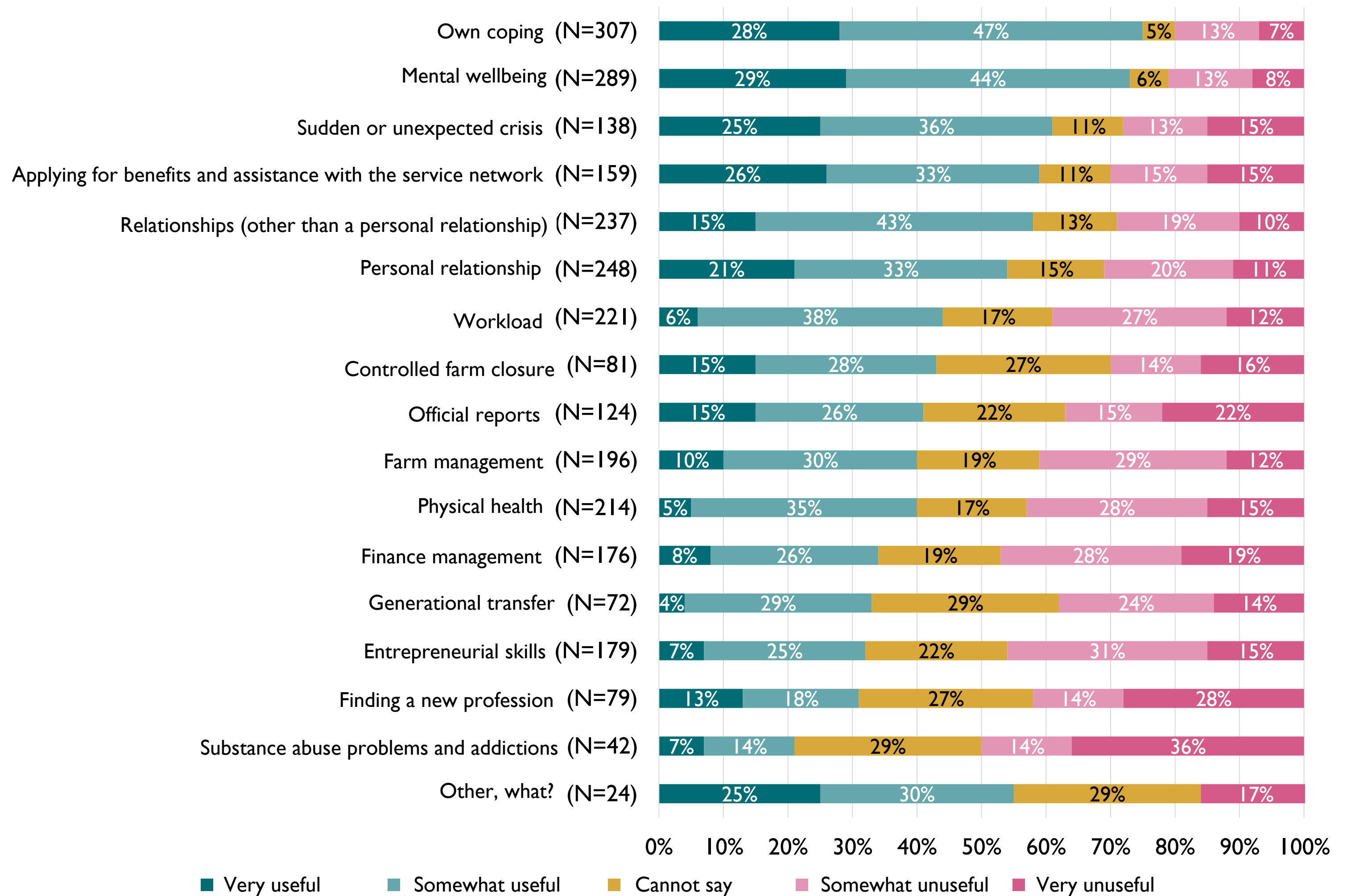
Support provided by project workers strengthened especially own coping and mental wellbeing

There is only a small relationship between gender and customer experiences of benefits, but age plays a bigger role.

Customers under the age of 35 feel that they have benefited from the support provided by project workers in nearly all areas more often than representatives of older age groups.

*It was also possible to respond to the question with “does not apply to me”. The percentages take into consideration only those respondents who expressed an opinion about the area in question.

Estimate how much you benefited from the support provided by the project worker in the following areas (%).* I found the support provided by the project worker in the following areas to be...



Impact of work performed by project workers: solutions to financial problems

As the graph on the previous page indicates, the work performed by project workers has wide-ranging impacts.

According to the interview data, concrete impacts include, for example, **solutions to financial problems** and getting the farm's **finances back on track** through various measures. Also, the **controlled closure of farms** and realisation of farm assets have sometimes been necessary and ultimately also desired. Similarly, a change in farm activity, for example due to physical wellbeing, has sometimes been necessary.

Since I knew that our financial situation was bad, every time we needed money for our private expenses, I had a really bad conscience that I had to take [a loan] and that I shouldn't take [a loan] and that I shouldn't use money for this or that, so once it was agreed that I can take this amount of money and use it for our private expenses however we want, it was such a great feeling of relief that I didn't have to feel guilty about spending money.

(Customer)

Having an outside expert go through these things and talk sense, and gradually regaining control of the situation, getting our invoices and financial matters sorted out, has really been a big relief, of course.

(Customer)

Impact of work performed by project workers: help with relationships

The work performed by project workers has also had an impact in issues related to relationships. Some relationships have ended in divorce, but others have been saved successfully.

In these situations, **the importance of being able to talk** with a project worker and its impact have been considerable. According to the interviews, the impact of this work has generally been good, **providing relief in these situations**, regardless of whether the relationship survived or ended in divorce.

The importance of being able to talk was also highlighted in connection with other relationships, for example with parents, children or siblings.

Already the fact that we discuss things quite a lot and that we have slightly different ways of thinking, so when talking with my wife, I have tried to be more forward looking rather than being the victim, like before. In other words, our communication has improved here on the farm and in the work we do.
(Customer)

It helped in the long term since... well, even if our relationship ended, and in my life situation I will be processing some things for a long time, but definitely it helped me get through this in a way.
(Customer)

We used to discuss these things differently, it was something that we didn't talk about [among the family], even if we were aware that we had no money and huge debt and that we wouldn't make it, we still didn't talk about it a lot... so now we began talking about it.
(Customer)

Impact of work performed
by project workers:
improved wellbeing, work
ability and coping at work

The aim of the project is to reduce psychosocial stress factors among farmers. According to the data, the project has successfully achieved this in many cases.

As the stress factors among the project's customers have been reduced, their **wellbeing has often increased**.

Similarly, their **work ability and coping at work have also improved**. These impacts can be seen clearly in the results from the questionnaire (p. 45). At times, however, work ability has been so weak that the farmer has been unable to continue their farming work. In these cases, a change of career has been considered.

It is also important to note that customers often mentioned how the project worker was able to **prevent a personal tragedy**, even if the work ability of the customer in question was not fully restored.

For sure, they [wellbeing and coping] improved and were restored. That same summer I began to slowly test my wings. Until the end of August, when I was on sick leave, it ended last year. So yes, through the project work I got the help I needed to cope moving forwards.

(Customer)

I had such a bad feeling before that it probably prevented a really bad kind of catastrophe.

(Customer)

...if one's work ability is insufficient for the farming work, or if the farm's finances are in such bad shape that the bank discontinues loans which leads to bankruptcy and losing the farm, so the project at least supports the farmer in that process and provides guidance for the future.

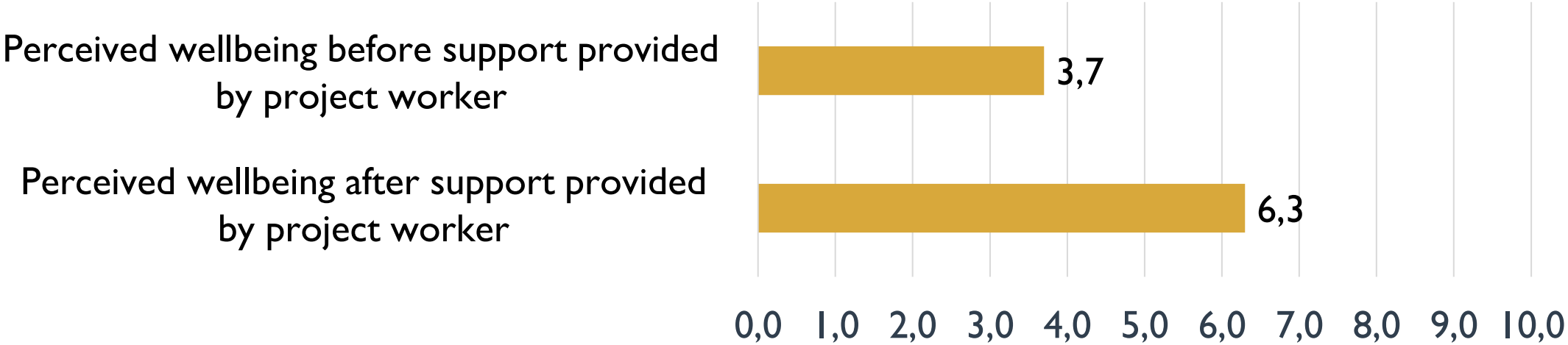
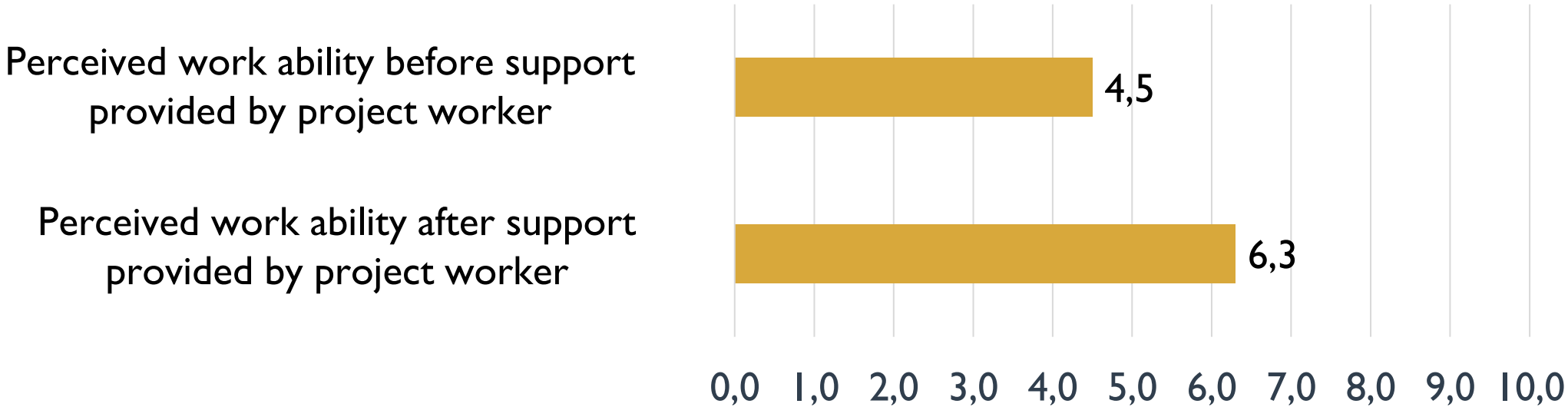
(Project worker)

Support provided by project workers has significantly strengthened the wellbeing and work ability of customers

” Already the fact that the project worker visited the farm helped with coping and made the future brighter. There was a solution for these issues.”

-Open response to questionnaire

How would you rate your work ability and wellbeing before and after the support provided by the project worker?
(average on a scale of 0–10, in which 0=work ability/wellbeing at its worst, 10=work ability/wellbeing at its best)



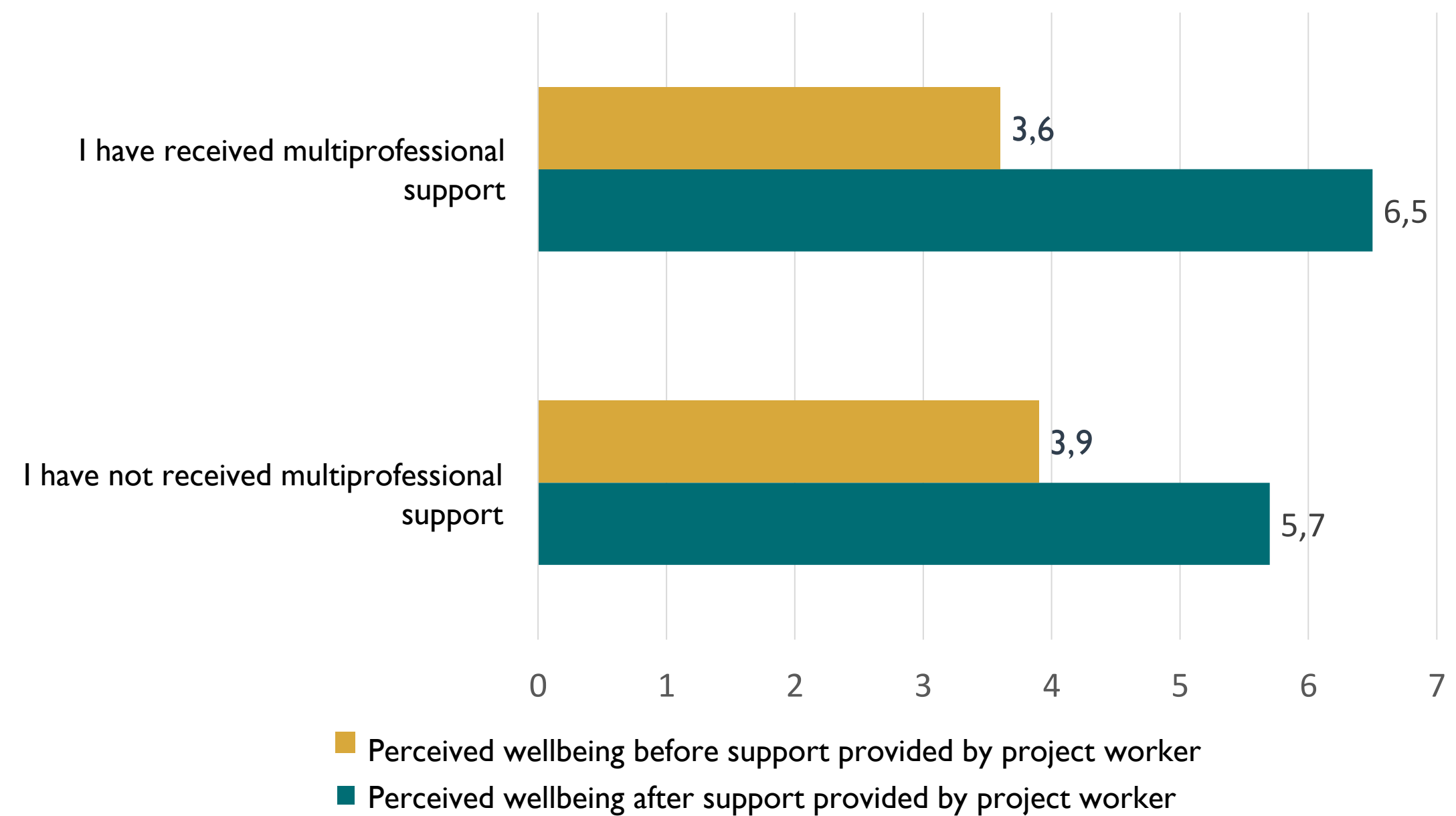
Multiprofessional support increased wellbeing

*Did the project worker also gather other experts to help resolve your challenging situation?

Impact of multiprofessional* support on wellbeing

How would you rate your wellbeing before and after the support provided by the project worker and after you received a payment commitment for outsourced services?

(average on a scale of 0–10, in which 0=wellbeing at its worst, 10=wellbeing at its best)



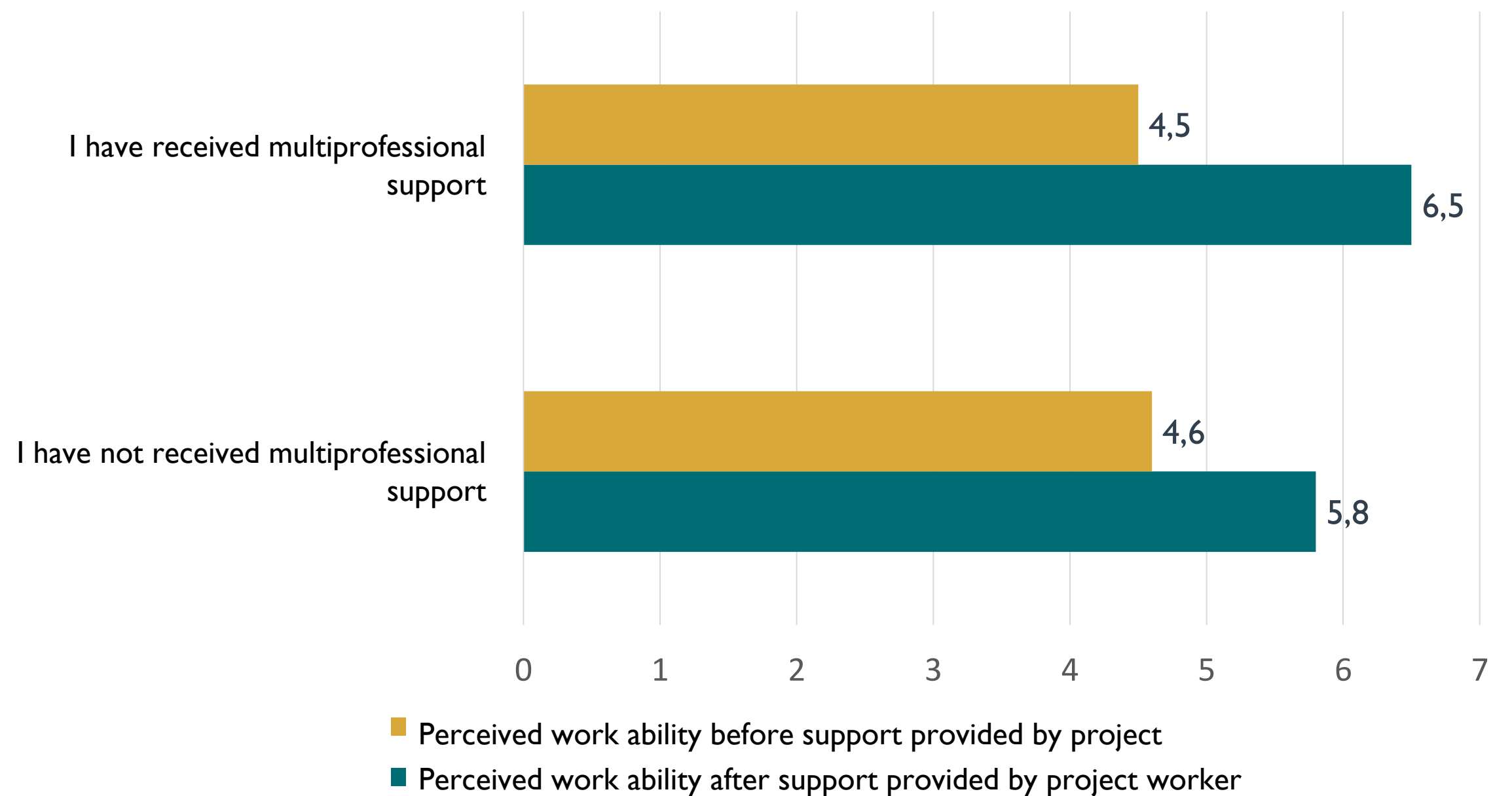
Multiprofessional support increased work ability

*Did the project worker also gather other experts to help resolve your challenging situation??

Impact of multiprofessional* support on work ability

How would you rate your work ability before and after the support provided by the project worker and after you received a payment commitment for outsourced services?

(average on a scale of 0–10, in which 0=work ability at its worst, 10=work ability at its best)



Impact of work performed by project workers: improved farm profitability, restored life satisfaction

When assessing the impact of the work performed by project workers, what is essential is lasting and long-term change.

For example, this can be seen in the data if the impact has been the recovery or improvement of farming operations or the customer's work ability and this leads to an **improvement in the farm's profitability or new investments** as farming operations continue.

It can also be seen even if farming operations have been discontinued but the customer's **life satisfaction has been restored** after changing careers.

In fact, our average output has increased and in a way our earnings too have improved... We just went to the bank and were told that, since we have everything in such good shape now, we will be awarded a small loan so that we can make an offer on our neighbour's farm.
(Customer)

Impact of work performed by project workers: farm finances under control again, less stress

The impact of the work performed by project workers on the financial situation of customers is often related to their experiences after finding numerous concrete solutions. **A certain lightness or reduction in stress is an important theme,** according to the data. Through their actions, project workers promote solutions to financial problems, after which stress levels often fall.

Of course, in addition to reducing stress, the recovery in the farm's finances often leads to a **continuation in the customer's farm activities.**

These factors could have a major impact on possible generational transfers in the future, as it can be easier to find someone to continue the operations of a farm that is doing well.

...I got a much calmer feeling, and I still have a much more relaxed feeling all the time in terms of finances. I no longer have to stress about them all the time...And also at the bank, [name of banker] said to me that I can take a big breath now and live a little and not just keep up this farming, that one also has to live.

(Customer)

This farm too is somehow making progress now that these money and other issues are under control and there is no other shareholder messing with them...so now the future outlook is quite good for the time being, even though its still quite tough.

(Customer)

Impact of work performed by project workers: mental wellbeing

The improvement to mental wellbeing is one of the most important reasons why customers have been satisfied with the work performed by project workers. The discussion support provided by the project workers and the wellbeing achieved by untying difficult knots has in the long run **improved the quality of life** and renewed the customer's emotional life.

The cycle of silence has been broken, which in turn has improved the quality of family life. If the project worker has succeeded in helping to prevent a divorce, the impact of the project worker's support can be evaluated perhaps through the happy years to come. Finding a new relationship after participating in the project has also sometimes been credited to the project worker.

Yes, in a way the self-reflection thing got going, having been raised to prioritise work, that it is number one, so through that it was possible to process why I have acted this way in one situation and that way in another, and all of this has helped me accept myself much more because of this [support], that I have been able to analyse, which has been very important.

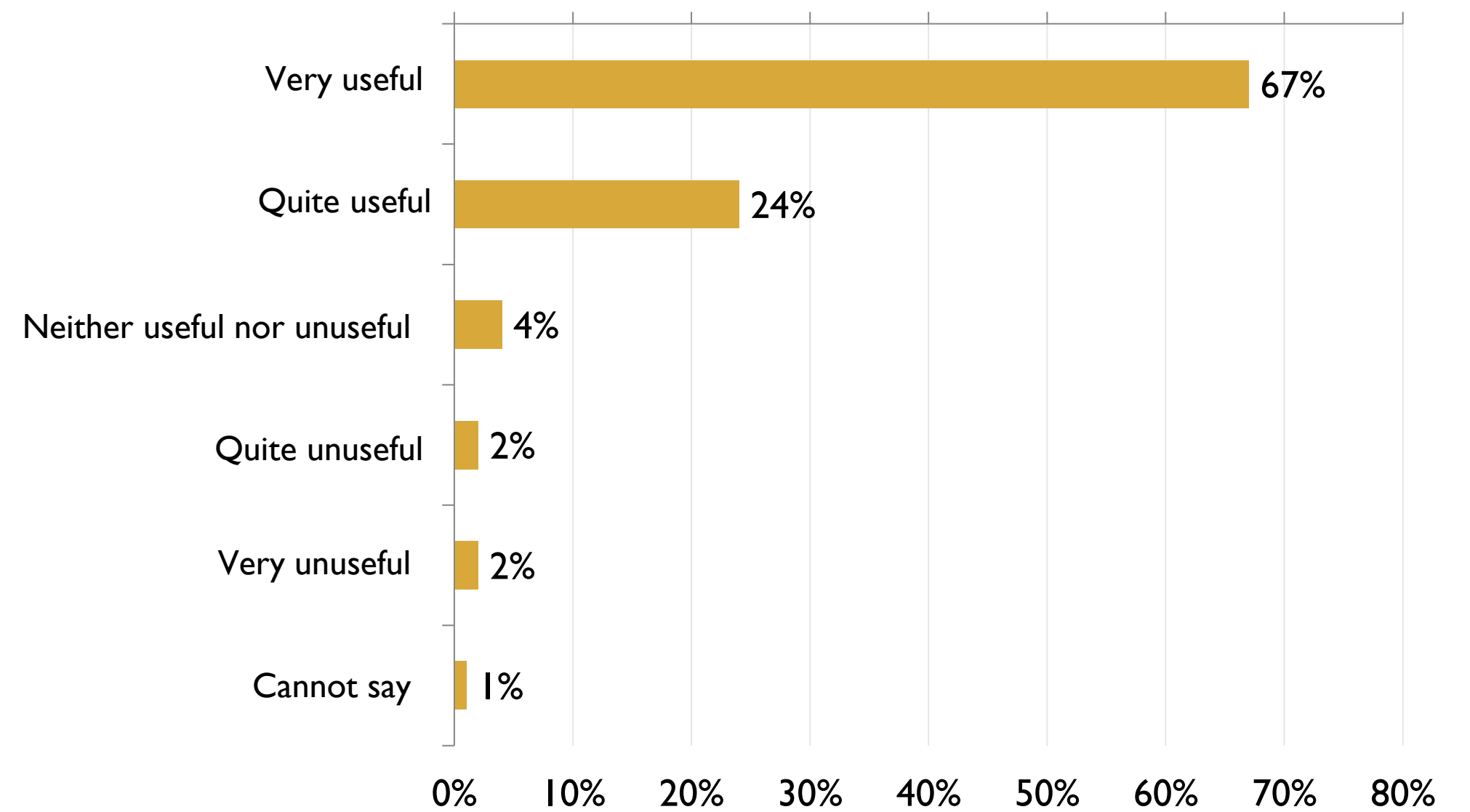
(Customer)

The quality of life has indeed improved, although not too much, but in everyday life, family life, it has added a lot. If it is possible to travel somewhere, even a small trip during the quiet time of the year, the little variation it brings [helps]. At least I am satisfied with life at the moment...it has been a tremendous change.

(Customer)

Altogether 91 percent of respondents found the work performed by project workers to be very or quite useful

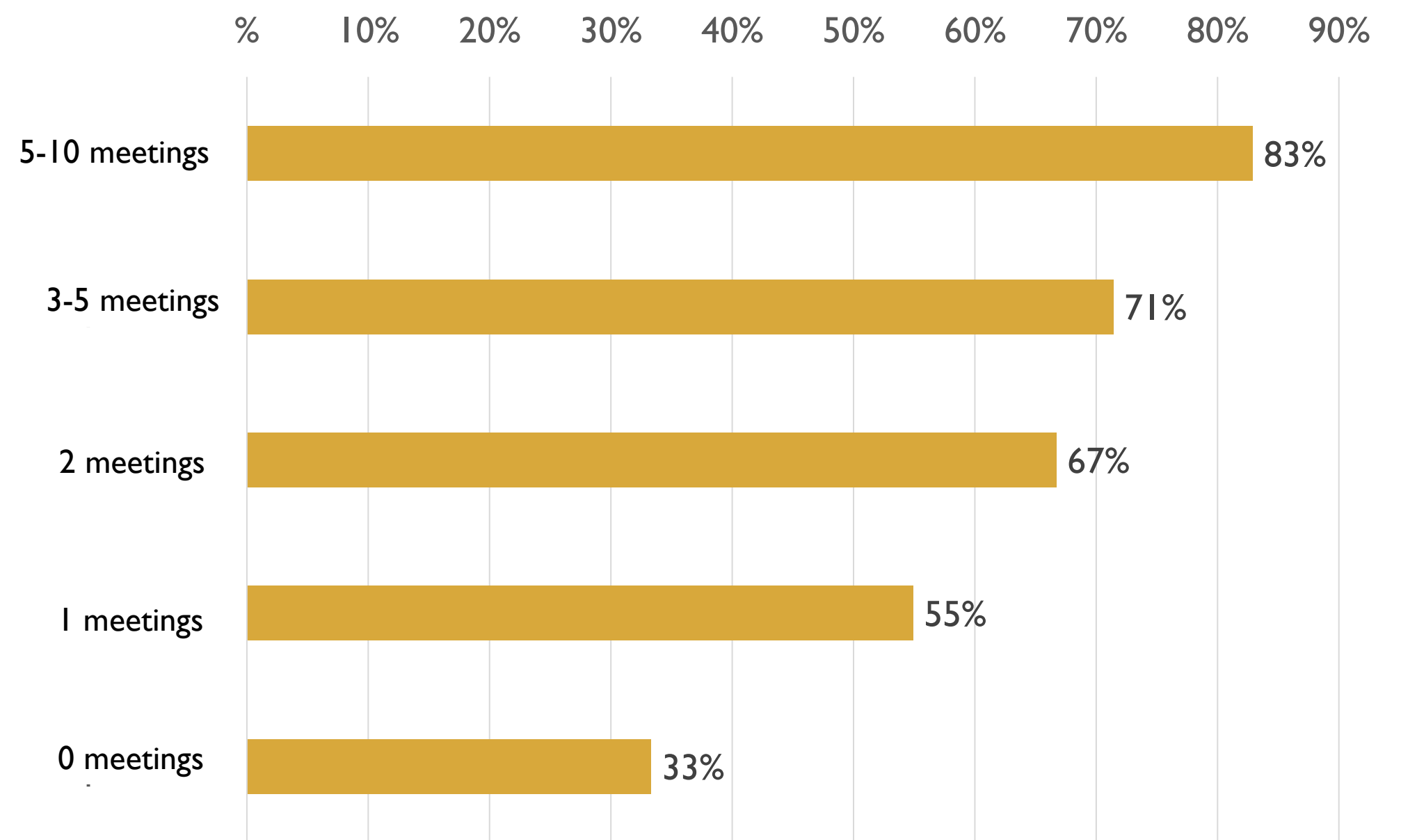
How useful did you find the work performed by the project worker?



Number of meetings affected satisfaction

Among customers who met with the project worker 5–10 times, 83 percent found the work performed by the project worker to be very useful, compared to 71 percent among those who met with the project worker 3–5 times, 67 percent among those who met with the project worker twice and 55 percent who met with the project worker just once.

Effect of the number of meetings with the project worker on whether customers found the work performed by the project worker to be very useful (%).



Satisfaction of customers with the work performed by project workers

As with the questionnaire data on the previous page, the interview data also shows **that customers have been very satisfied** with the work performed by the project workers, regardless of the need for help.

Even customers whose problems had not yet been fully resolved at the time of the interview expressed their satisfaction.

The project workers too expressed that the customer feedback they have received has usually been very positive.

On the other hand, some of the open responses in the questionnaire expressed that the work has not been useful, but comments like this were isolated cases.

I was extremely satisfied with them. In my opinion, they were able to approach the issue very appropriately and in the right way, at least in my case, and were very respectful when visiting my home...they were able to grasp the essentials...

(Customer)

Well yes, very satisfied. As a person, they were very suited to their job. They had a realistic grasp of situations and doesn't, how do I say this, gloss over everything.

(Customer)

My poor work ability was due to mental and physical problems that the project worker really couldn't help me with.

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)

Situation of customers
would be worse without
project work

Several interviewees expressed how the work performed by the project worker **was able to get them back on track**. Their **faith in life was restored**. Their **work ability and mental wellbeing improved**.

The data also reveals the thoughts about customers about where they would be without the work performed by the project worker. These can be divided into two main themes: 1. The continuation of financial problems, even bankruptcies, and 2. an increase or continuation of poor mental health.

The interviews included quite radical views about the causes of poor mental health.

I think that right now we definitely wouldn't have this farm anymore without the help of [name]...we were in such a knot with our financial affairs that it would have been quite hard to continue anymore, so we would have definitely had to begin thinking about a bankruptcy or something at some point.

(Customer)

...something really horrible could have happened because of these feelings about how I could cope or whether I even wanted to live anymore, which I was thinking about quite seriously at the time.

(Customer)

Change requires commitment of the customer

Even though the role of the project worker was considered very important, the data also highlights the responsibility of the customer. None of the services (or support) received from the project or offered by the **project worker can help unless the customer is committed to the project.**

Sometimes, the customer also has to accept constructive criticism about how they manage their farm or finances. If the customer is not ready to do this, achieving any meaningful change is hard since the biggest needs for change are often those that have been addressed.

It was discussed right at the start that there is absolutely no point unless we commit to it.
(Customer)

It's good that it's been possible to ask or call, but ultimately it's down to you.
(Customer)

It's possible to change something on the financial side, to get invoices taken care of and in order, for example. But after a year, the customer can be in the same situation again, so we have to start all over again, so it feels like we are putting out one fire only to find ourselves in front of another fire if the customer is not willing to change directions.
(Project worker)



Factors influencing the usefulness of the work performed by project workers

Altogether, 91 percent of respondents found the work performed by project workers to be very or quite useful. According to the interview data, the high satisfaction percentage can be explained by the following factors:

- The holistic and dedicated approach of project workers
- The project workers' understanding of the operating environment of farms
- The assembling of a multiprofessional team to support the farmer
- Listening and discussing difficult issues
- Untying financial knots by assessing the overall situation of the farm
- Guidance with administrative questions and the service network

PART 4

Impact of payment commitments for outsourced services



Payment commitments for outsourced services

- This part assesses the impact of professional help received by means of payments commitments for outsourced services (“ostopalvelusitoumukset” in Finnish).
- In addition to the work performed by a project worker, the Support the Farmer Project also makes it possible to receive a payment commitment for 500 euros towards therapy services, work guidance or other professional help to support coping and mental wellbeing. These payment commitments have mostly been used by customers for professional help to support their ability to cope mentally, such as individual therapy, couples or family therapy, psychological or psychiatric services, or work guidance.
- When the project worker assesses the customer’s situation, a payment commitment for outsourced services is one possible course of action for reducing the mental load. The payment commitment is applied for together with the project worker. The choice of service providers is always made by the customer. (Mela, 2019)



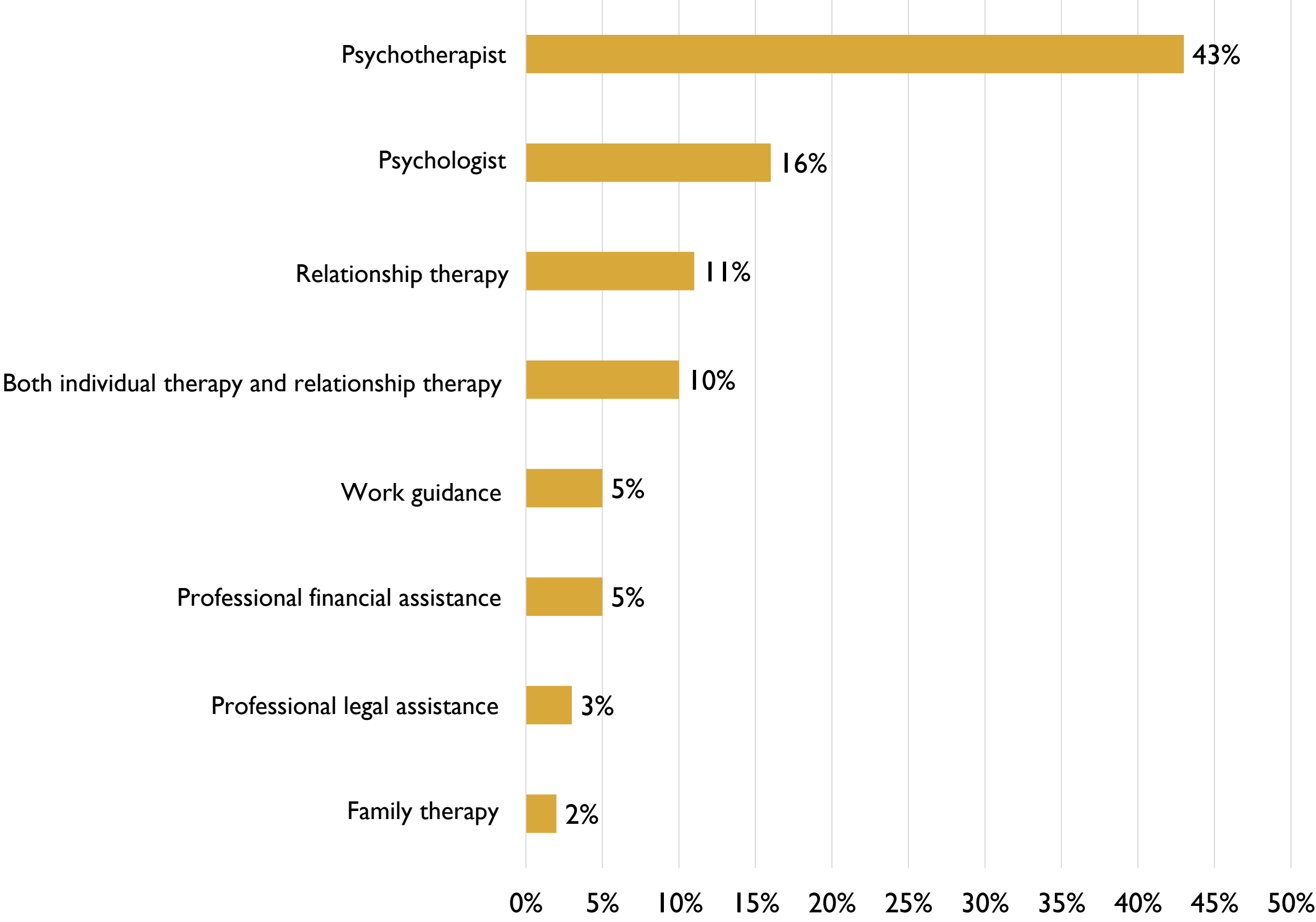
Payment commitments for outsourced services

- A total of 3908 payment commitments were granted during the period 2017-2022. If the need for professional help continues, the project has made it possible to apply for a second payment commitment for the same or a different service. Mela grants payment commitments in accordance with criteria drawn up for them. Receiving a payment commitment does not require a medical diagnosis, and decisions on the granting of payment commitments are made as a rule within a few working days in order to ensure fast access to the support of an expert.

Use of payment commitments for outsourced services

Various therapy services have been by far the most common object of payment commitments for outsourced services.

What kind of professional help did you use your payment commitment for?



Use of payment commitments for outsourced services

The interview data shows how the project workers together with customers have assessed and discussed their needs and the best place to get help.

Often, after these discussions, the customer has applied for a payment commitment with the help of the project worker.

Not all customers have felt the need for outsourced services, or their opinion about therapy has been so wary that they have not wanted to participate in these kinds of sessions. According to the interview data, the threshold for beginning therapy has perhaps been higher for men than for women.

Well no, perhaps it was not [a big help] with the situation that we had worked on with the project worker, but in a way it helped with managing my life, coping and so on.

(Customer)

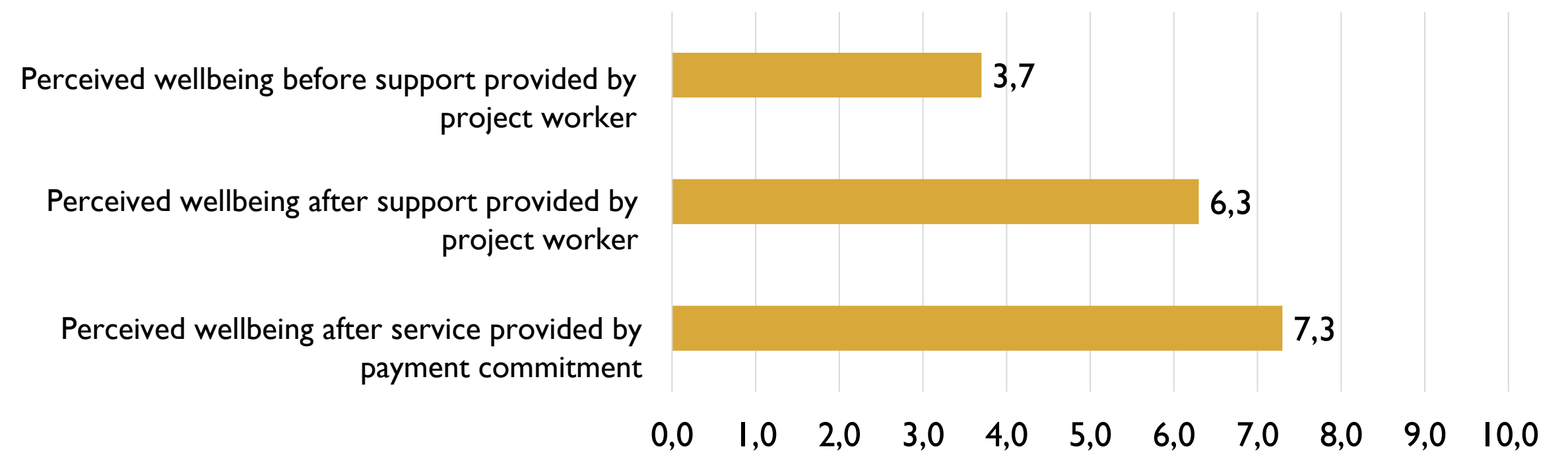
When we talk about therapy or work guidance, there has to be some aim or purpose for going there, so we don't systematically offer it to everyone.

(Project worker)

Professional help obtained with a payment commitment strengthened work ability and wellbeing

Already the support provided by project workers strengthened the work ability and wellbeing of customers, and payment commitments further strengthened them.

How would you rate your work ability and wellbeing before and after the support provided by the project worker and after you received a payment commitment for outsourced services? (average on a scale of 0–10, in which 0=work ability/wellbeing at its worst, 10=work ability/wellbeing at its best)



Positive impacts of multiprofessional support visible in perceived wellbeing also after the service provided by a payment commitment

*Did the project worker also gather other experts to help resolve your challenging situation?

Impact of multiprofessional* support on wellbeing

How would you rate your wellbeing before and after the support provided by the project worker and after you received a payment commitment for outsourced services?

(average on a scale of 0–10, in which 0=wellbeing at its worst, 10=wellbeing at its best)

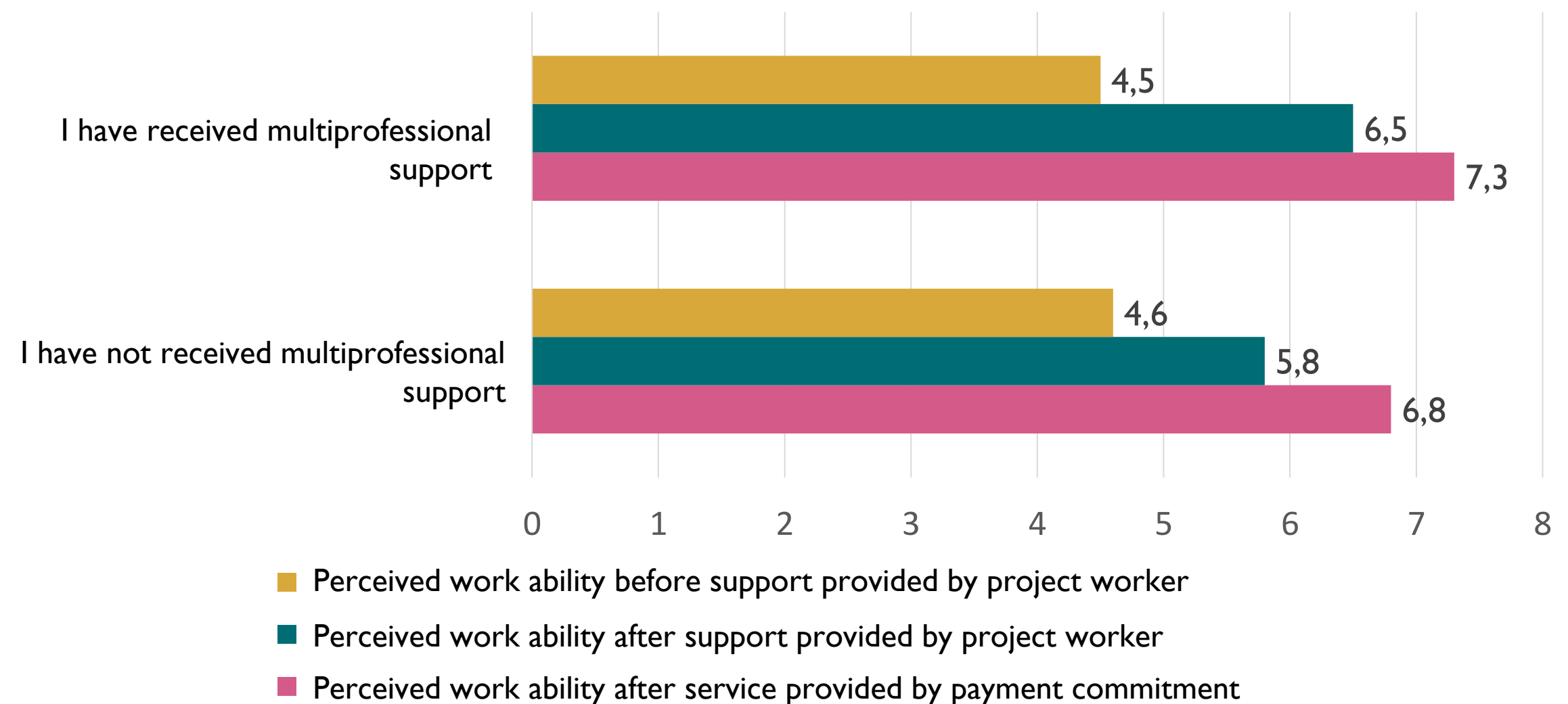


Positive impacts of multiprofessional support visible in perceived work ability also after the service provided by a payment commitment

* Did the project worker also gather other experts to help resolve your challenging situation?

Impact of multiprofessional* support on work ability

How would you rate your work ability before and after the support provided by the project worker and after you received a payment commitment for outsourced services? (average on a scale of 0–10, in which 0=work ability at its worst, 10=work ability at its best)



Experiences with impacts of payment commitments for outsourced services

If the impact of the work performed by project workers was manifested in untying knots, the therapy support provided by payment commitments unlocked the mental side even more.

In the interviews, customers related how their **feelings had improved** and how **their ability to talk** about the difficulties they face increased after receiving support. Some of the customers resisted the idea of therapy at first, but after receiving therapy, they have also **recommended it to their colleagues**.

Well yes, communication between us has already improved a little, but there is still room for improvement.

(Customer)

My mother helped me look after the kids in emergencies, and to prevent putting a burden on those around me, especially my mother or anyone else with my issues, it was important that I was able to talk with an outsider.

(Customer)

Impact of payment commitments – light at the end of the tunnel

Since mental wellbeing has been perceived to improve with therapy, customers have often begun to see a **light at the end of the tunnel**. The interviewees described how, after practical matters started to be taken care of, the therapy support went deeper and **helped in dealing with both old and more recent issues**.

Even though the payment commitments could not be used to treat physical wellbeing (which may have been a factor influencing work ability and wellbeing), customers have still experienced an **improvement in their quality of life**. In other words, their psychosocial stress is often reduced.

Yet it's been about mental [wellbeing] and processing these things and leaving the old things behind in a certain way, building that new life, that maybe that's where I see its most important impact. Old [issues] can be left behind and little by little the new road ahead will begin to appear. Even if it doesn't in the worst case and you can't see a single door even though you're standing right in front of three of them. Then you stay in the same fog until you start to see these new possibilities somewhere.

(Customer)

We got help on the mental side, but the project didn't help with issues that lower physical work ability, but that wasn't the goal at this point either.

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)

Impact of payment commitments – continuity of farming operations

Since **payment commitments helped decrease psychosocial stress and increase work ability**, it can be concluded that **the continuity of farming operations is often better ensured** after using the service.

The visible change in relationships also emerged as a positive aspect in the interview data. Therapy has taught many to talk about their issues, and conversation skills between spouses have also improved. In the long term, the impact of the service obtained with a payment commitment can help revive relationships and even the operations of family farms.

After our daughter's accident, our work ability was absolutely zero, [but] with therapy, our work ability has been restored again to an acceptable level.

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)

It has already been several years since we ended therapy, but it has paid off in the long term and been a major factor in our work ability later. I also receive support for changing our farming operations in such a way that our own mental wellbeing improved.

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)

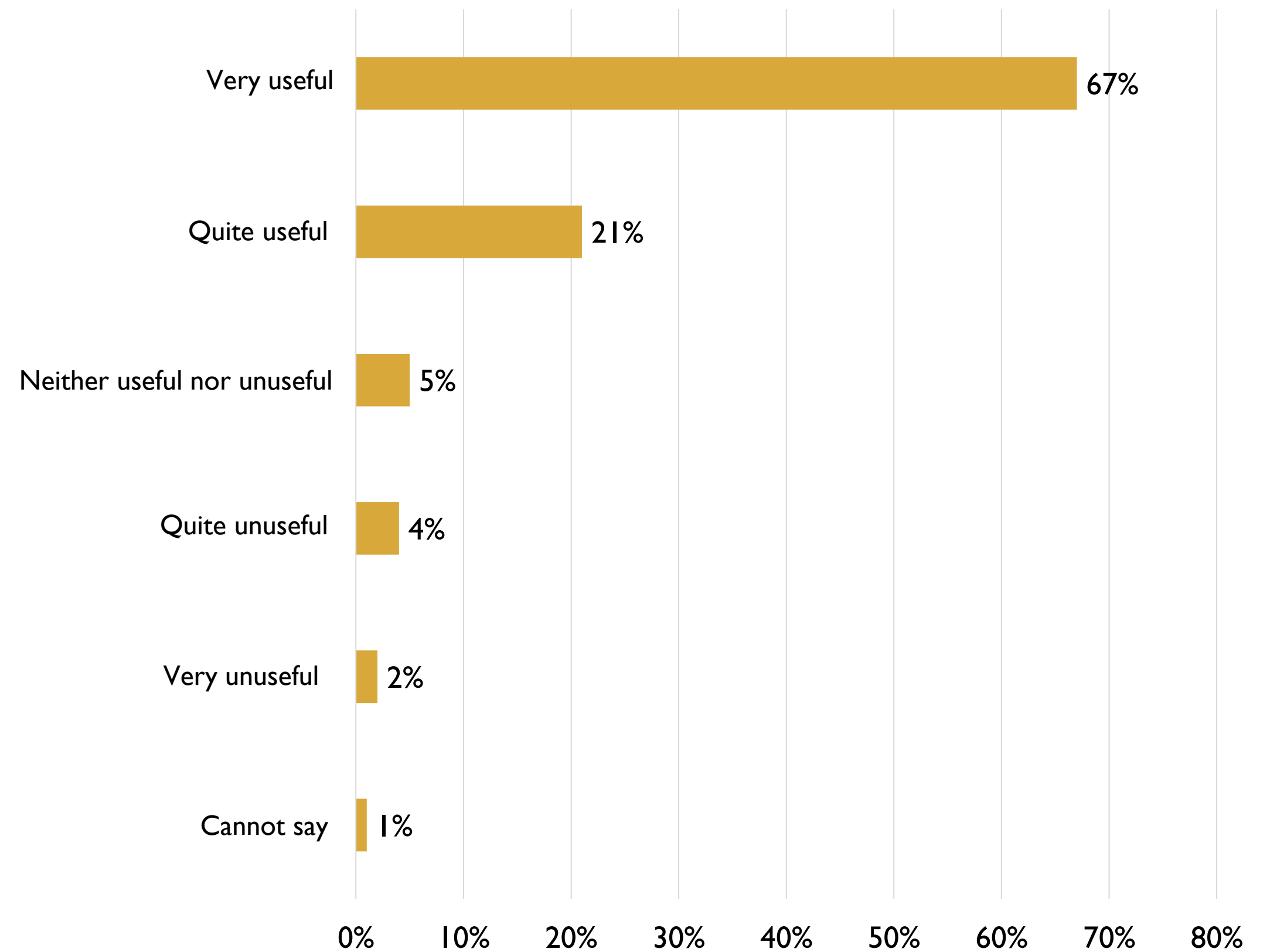
It's like cheering us on, looking at things and the course of life and building that new path to a new life...which direction we want to go in and how we can do the same things as before, yet in a different way and with different inputs and from a different point of view, so [we understand] what we can do and what we can't do. Or at least what not to do.

(Customer)

Usefulness of payment commitments

Altogether 88 percent of customers considered the service obtained with a payment commitment to be very or quite useful.

How useful was the service obtained with a payment commitment?



Satisfaction of customers
with service obtained
with a payment
commitment

The data shows that for the most part **customers have been satisfied with the support they received by means of a payment commitment for outsourced services.**

In particular, therapy has been perceived as useful and supportive of wellbeing.

Therapy has not suited a small number of customers, either due to personal chemistry or because the therapy simply has not been considered beneficial. For some customers, talking has been difficult, especially if the issues have been heavy.

The psychologist has supported my ability to cope and helped guide the way forward thanks to their professional skills. The services of both have been absolutely essential, and they have supported us well in a really challenging situation.

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)

The family therapy we obtained with a payment commitment was one of the most useless things I have ever experienced. It only caused irritation and frustration.

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)



Impact of payment commitments for outsourced services

Altogether 88 percent of customers considered the service obtained with a payment commitment to be very or quite useful. Based on the interviews, this is mostly due to enabling customers to discuss difficult issues with the help of therapy and the resulting reduction in psychosocial stress and improvement in work ability.

Therapy has also taught many customers to discuss their issues with their colleagues, family or spouse, who are often also work partners. Communicating has provided relief with many difficult issues.

PART 5

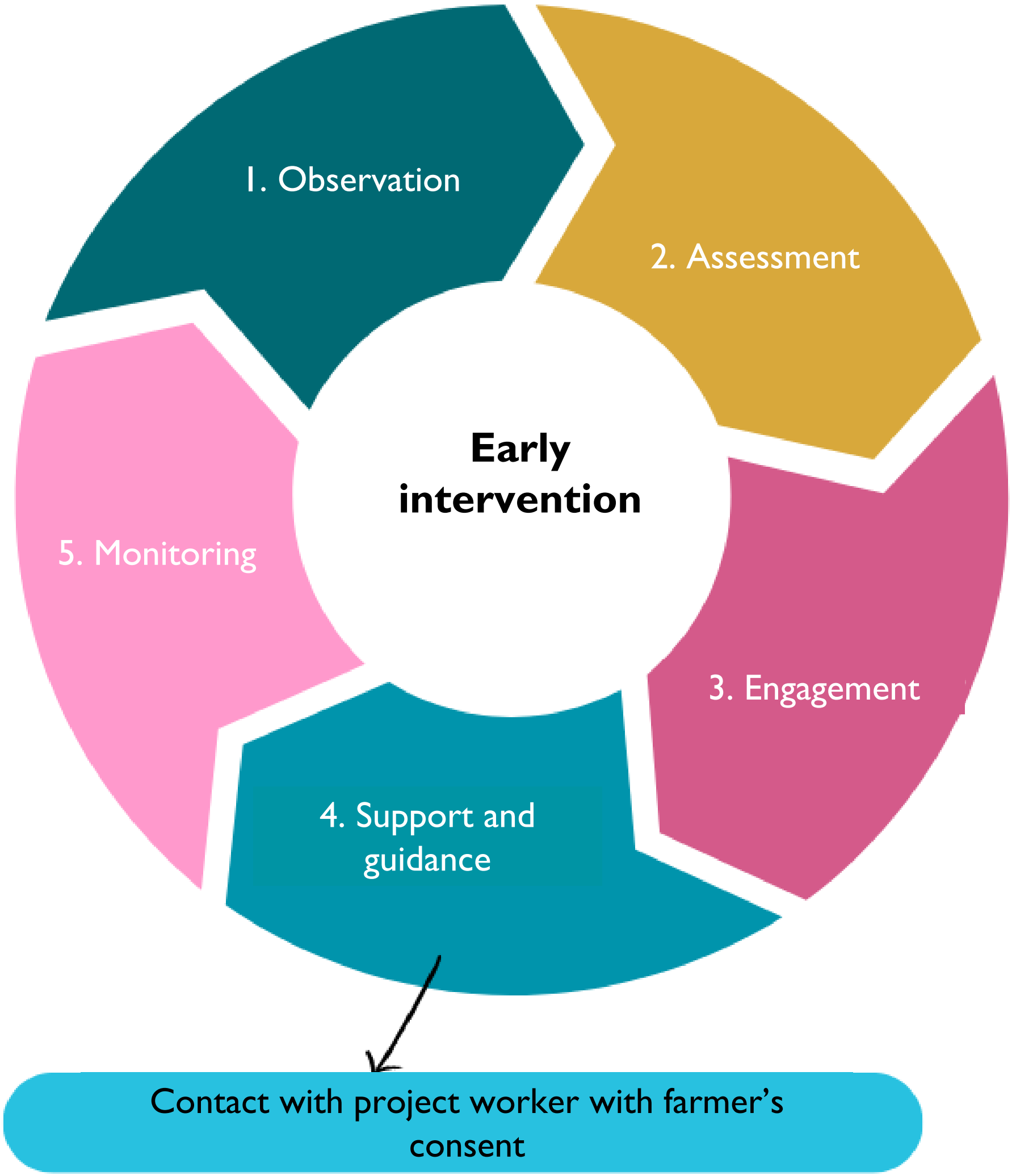
Impact of early intervention model and stakeholder network



Early intervention model and stakeholder network

- This part assesses the usefulness of the Support the Farmer Project's early intervention model and the stakeholder network in supporting the work capacity of agricultural entrepreneurs, as well as the usefulness of the project's measures to the stakeholder network.
- One part of the project has involved gathering a network of stakeholders in the regions and providing them with early intervention training.
- The idea behind the early intervention model is to tackle problems that threaten the agricultural entrepreneur's work ability or farm production as early as possible and preventively by guiding farmers to seek help.
- The stakeholder network includes experts who are in contact with agricultural entrepreneurs, such as advisors, veterinarians or inspectors, who want to help farmers and their ability to cope at work. (Mela, 2019c)

An early intervention model is created for agricultural entrepreneurs



Stakeholder network
comprises experts in
many fields

The Support the Farmer stakeholder network comprises several expert organisations that work with agriculture and agricultural entrepreneurs.

The project organises regular **stakeholder training** (“Support the Farmer meetings”) in each region, during which stakeholders are trained in the early intervention model: observation, engagement and guidance for finding support.

Many stakeholders told how their work has not changed since joining the network, but that they have received **additional tools** for dealing with issues.

Up until then, we had already worked according to the Support the Farmer principle, it was already taken into account in our activities, [but] that maybe then it became more official through the stakeholder agreement, that we then began to promote the model publicly.

(Stakeholder)

...we have had these stakeholder meetings, which of course have offered a lot, and then our project worker has visited us to give us info briefings at our workplace, specifically for our experts who work actively with farmers.

(Stakeholder)

How do stakeholders work?

In the work they perform, stakeholders can get close to the farmer and notice if anything has changed.

The interview data shows how, when visiting farms, stakeholders may notice that the farmer is **avoiding a certain topic** or **appears tired**. **Untidy farmyards** and other areas may also reveal burnout.

Often, the causes of burnout are not related to the area of expertise of the stakeholder who notices it. This is when they can bring up the project.

Many stakeholder representatives told **how hard it was to raise an issue**. For this, they have received help from the project.

I tell [the farmer] about this project, that this Support the Farmer Project provides holistic support to agricultural entrepreneurs and farms with their current challenges, mainly financial or coping-related challenges, that there are usually several things that have been left undone or in bad shape, so it's good to recommend this [project] in that sense, since the project worker from the Support the Farmer Project can take the whole thing into account... however, it does involve interfering in other people's affairs, so [raising these issues] can be a bit difficult.

(Stakeholder)

These are familiar customers to me, so I dare to suggest things like this to them, since we have been working together for so long, so in a way they know me and trust that I am looking after their best [interests]... At that point I can also market the fact that as a farmer they do not have to be depressed, in financial difficulties or in a bad relationship, that instead they can use the project for their future plans...

(Stakeholder)

Guiding farmers to seek support is part of early intervention

Early intervention and the work of stakeholders are central to the Support the Farmer Project. If the customer cannot find information about the project or contact a project worker, **stakeholders direct them to the Support the Farmer Project.**

Do the stakeholders feel that they are able to intervene in the farmers' problems? They often mirror the success of their support through their own fields. For example, a veterinarian may prioritise animal welfare, a banking professional may prioritise finances, and an occupational health nurse may prioritise health.

Preventing burnout or recovering from it, however, is equally important in all fields.

I think that we have been able to intervene or have been able to offer help in such cases where there is still something that can be done, so that they do not burn out completely or get into such financial trouble that they face bankruptcy or something else, maybe the worst situation is that those animals would be left uncared for, so I think it has been possible to prevent these outcomes with the help of this [support].

(Stakeholder)

Early intervention can lead to holistic support

The importance of stakeholders is primarily emphasised at the beginning of the path leading to an improvement in the situation burdening customers. For this reason, their work and the effectiveness of the early intervention model cannot be assessed separately from the work of the project worker or the support received through payment commitments for outsourced services.

The direct impact of early intervention is, in principle, that **the farmer becomes a customer of the project.**

Based on the data, it is clear that **stakeholders find the early intervention model to be very useful.** The interviewed stakeholders emphasised **that the holistic support provided by the project is not available anywhere else.**

...they are heard through this project and, on the other hand, they also get the tools to manage their everyday lives or get help with various issues.
(Stakeholder)

Yes, in my opinion, it has been useful, and some [customers] have been directed to Kela for longer therapies, because they have been in a really bad situation, so they have gotten the start for better follow-up analyses. And if there are conflicts between generations, many times the outside discussion help around the same table has made it possible [to resolve], that it can be about very simple things, so let's bring them up and talk out loud and then they can be resolved surprisingly [easily].
(Stakeholder)

Impact of early intervention is greater the sooner help is received

Stakeholders are not always aware of what may have happened to the customer after they have contacted the Support the Farmer Project. However, they may notice changes at subsequent meetings.

The majority of stakeholders feel that the support received from the project has helped farmers.

Based on the interviews, it can be said that **the sooner help is sought or how timely it is offered, the better.**

However, the final results are individual and strongly depend on the severity of the problems. Stakeholders have felt that with the help of the project, the **work ability of customers has improved.**

Well, it would probably or indeed does have a very positive effect being able to intervene in these things before they get stuck in the mud, so to speak.

(Stakeholder)

Of course, the farmer must be ready to accept the help...but those who have [sought help from the project] have been, without exception, satisfied with it.

(Stakeholder)

Well, in some customer cases, they have really received great help, for example, by attending therapy. The ability of the farmer has been strengthened, in a way their coping, so they are able to take care of these things and the future looks brighter, but of course not always.

(Stakeholder)

Acknowledging the problem contributes to the impact

Interviews with stakeholders also reveal a high threshold for receiving help. Along with asking for help, **acknowledging the problem can also be difficult.**

Stakeholders and the early intervention model can help the farmer and anticipate the difficulties they will face, but **only if the farmer is ready to take responsibility for the changes.**

The **inability or unwillingness to make changes** was often mentioned as something that slowed down positive development. Of course, there are also many cases of the opposite, and then the help from the project has the best chance of promoting the wellbeing of farmers.

What I find most frustrating is denying things. When the other spouse categorically refuse to attend meetings. Acknowledge the facts or see any problem with this, so then you can't do anything about it...if they understand this and accept the help, then it usually works out better for them.

(Stakeholder)

...I feel that especially Finnish men have a terribly high threshold to call anywhere or ask for help, because everyone can manage on their own and help is not needed, and it is especially a sign of weakness if you are humiliated to ask for such help. But maybe the farmer will accept the help better when someone calls him, in which case the effort is to get permission to pass on that contact information.

(Stakeholder)

Stakeholders also benefit from the Support the Farmer Project

The importance of the Support the Farmer Project to their work as perceived by stakeholders is straightforward. They feel that it **helps them manage the larger group of farmers in trouble. The work of stakeholders is made easier when there is an entity that they can recommend to their customers.**

Stakeholders know that the **holistic support provided by the project can help when their own expertise is not enough.**

In the opinion of stakeholders, farmers who received support from the project are more open about their own situations. This makes cooperation with stakeholders also smoother.

*...the mental stress and the really huge responsibility and also dealing with all the bureaucracy, it is all really stressful, and this mental load is quite clearly something that we have noticed with our colleagues over the past couple of years, that we too should have much more this kind of financial expertise...And then, in a way, using this Support the Farmer [Project] in that respect has, in my opinion, somewhat **responded to my own uncertainty about not knowing how to advise these people in all matters.***

(Stakeholder)



Impact of early intervention model and stakeholder network

Project workers regularly train stakeholders in the early intervention model, which involves observation, engagement and guidance for finding support.

Through the project, stakeholders have received additional tools for supporting farmers.

Among the farmers who responded to the questionnaire, 25 percent received information about the Support the Farmer Project from a cooperation partner who visited the farm. Altogether 93 percent of these farmers had a very or somewhat positive attitude towards the proposal made by the member of the stakeholder group who visited the farm to seek help from the project.

The early intervention model can help farmers and anticipate the difficulties they will face, but only if they are ready to take responsibility for the changes.

PART 6

Broader impact of the Support the Farmer Project

Broader impact

- This part assesses the broad social impact of the Support the Farmer Project, focusing on the project's social and economic impacts, as well as security of supply. In addition to the collected qualitative and quantitative data, public statistics related to agriculture are used in the assessment.
- The broader impact of the project is strongly related to the impacts on the local community or society when farmers received support from the project. Relevant questions in assessing the impact include: Will farm operations continue? Is the customer's work ability at a level where they can continue working, either in agriculture or elsewhere? Has the customer received a disability pension? Has a successor been found to continue farm operations? Has the work had broader social impacts that continue after receiving support?

Social impacts: breaking the circle of silence

I would say that the biggest problem in Finland and in Finnish agriculture is that we don't talk...
(Project worker)

One recurring theme in the data is the importance of talking. It is vital for a person who has faced difficulties to be able to talk about their problems. Talking is also of great importance for **changing intergenerational operating models**.

Both customers and project workers repeatedly noted how talking improved painful situations. Many customers have children, and the data showed how the help received from the project has **contributed to the creation of a conversational atmosphere between children and parents** as well. *"It [the project] has also had a positive impact on close relationships, parenting and the future of the farm."* (Customer)

It can therefore be assumed that the **habit of talking in these situations continues from generation to generation**, and problems do not always have to be faced alone. It is possible to talk to someone about challenges that have to be faced. It is known that especially Finnish men find it difficult to talk about their feelings, difficulties or problems. The Support the Farmer Project has had a positive impact on this critical problem, and men have opened up.

Social impacts: making it easier to address problems and seeking help

...the threshold for receiving that help has been lowered once [the customer] has dared to talk about their issue publicly, that is, it was something they could not tell their neighbour on the next farm that yes, I am seeing a therapist.

(Stakeholder)

Talking makes it easier to ask for help and remove or reduce the stigma associated with mental health. Asking for help from the project and attending therapy are good examples of this. This became apparent in several interviews conducted as part of this impact assessment.

Customers said that they had told their colleagues about the usefulness of the project and the therapy, although many had prejudices. More and more farmers **“dare” to seek help** when facing or anticipating difficulties.

As the feeling of shame associated with seeking help and attending therapy decreases, **the stigma attached to them also evaporates**. The stories seen in the media contribute to this (see e.g. Koskiahde, 2023, Ala-Siurua, 2023). It can be concluded that the help provided by the Support the Farmer Project and the resulting reduction in stigma related to mental health issues will also have a broader social impact.

Economic impacts

I just think that this is hard to calculate, that such human tragedies and others have been avoided by this, and what they would have cost if people had completely lost their ability to work or gone bankrupt or committed suicide or something...

(Stakeholder)

Improving the wellbeing of agricultural entrepreneurs helps them continue operating their farms, which in turn has a positive effect on employment and business activities in the region. In addition, improved agricultural production and its stability can support local food chains and small businesses, which also **enriches the region's economy**.

On the other hand, closing the farm has also sometimes been perceived as a good option if, for example, economic factors do not support the continuation of farming operations. In these cases, it is important to note that farmers who are still able to work will move on to other jobs, either in the agricultural sector or elsewhere. At the societal or local level, this has a positive effect on, for example, employment and tax revenues, as well as reduced applications for social benefits and unemployment benefits.

Switching to a disability pension or the costs caused by sickness absences can be at least partially avoided with the help of the project, since customers emphasise their improved work ability and wellbeing after participating in the project. "In a certain way, they have also become better taxpayers and members of society in that they have been able to continue working, and that has really encouraged them." (Project worker)

The interview material reveals the kind of human tragedies have been avoided with the support received from the project. It is difficult to assess their economic impacts, but **everyone who continues their working career has a positive effect on the economy at the local and societal level**.

Security of supply

Of course, we are the first to think that this domestic food is our main support, that we cannot live solely on foreign food production under any circumstances and when even large farms are closed.

(Customer)

...the whole of Finland benefits from the fact that agricultural entrepreneurs now and in the future and from time immemorial are doing well and can cope with their work and are able to work according to their profession, and that benefits us all. We will continue to get clean Finnish food in the future.

(Project worker)

Finland's security of supply refers to the country's ability to secure the basic needs of those in the country both under normal conditions and in exceptional and crisis situations. The work of farmers is central to Finnish food production. **Therefore, improving the work ability and mental wellbeing of farmers can have a positive effect on Finland's security of supply.** Although the number of agricultural and garden farms and MYEL-insured persons continues to decrease in Finland, the cultivated land area has remained the same (Mela, 2023 and Luke, 2022).

It is still of primary importance to **invest in the wellbeing, coping and work ability of farmers so that security of supply remains as it is now.** With the help of the Support the Farmer Project, agricultural entrepreneurs can better cope with challenges and continue their production. Healthy and motivated farmers are more productive and better able to take care of production than sick and unmotivated farmers. The transfer of MYEL-insured persons to a mental health-based disability pension or rehabilitation, both in number and in percentage compared to all causes, has decreased during the project (ETK, 2023). In this assessment, however, we cannot say that the decrease is directly due to the project's actions.

The physical, mental and financial wellbeing of farmers can help them cope better than before in crisis situations. At the same time, the maintenance of food production in difficult times is also promoted. In addition, the wellbeing of farmers can affect their willingness to invest and commit to long-term plans in the agricultural sector. This promotes the stability and predictability of food production.



Areas for development



Improving the ability to anticipate needs

Many stakeholders and project workers brought up foresight as one of the most important areas for development. Although it has been possible to access support from the project in advance, before the issue turned into a crisis, for example in situations related to generational transfers, still **the importance of anticipating needs was often emphasised**. Addressing issues at an early stage would probably also be more cost-effective than dealing with crisis situations. There is a need to inform about all the support offered by the project. The early intervention model and role of stakeholders are emphasised in the ability to anticipate needs.

Necessary, but help should be received/applied for in time and not only once "the milk has been spilt".

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)

There should be more information about this, that you can apply for support, as prevention is everything.

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)

...these agricultural entrepreneurs often ask whether they can apply for help now even if they don't have financial difficulties...There has probably been more news about those farmers who have been really deeply [in trouble] and have then received help through this project. But I think it's sad that one has to in such deep trouble first. That's why I try to have a preventive effect.

(Stakeholder)

Development suggestions regarding payment commitments for outsourced services

Although customers were largely satisfied with the services received through payment commitments, some also offered further development suggestions.

While customers are able to choose their own therapist, some customers felt that their therapist was not the right person to help them. It is important to emphasise that **the therapist can be changed** if their chemistries do not match.

More payment commitments were wished for so that the therapy or other support could continue for longer. This would be important especially for those who have gone through traumatic situations.

Additional payment commitments could also be helpful if a farmer who has received help with one problem still needs additional help.

...it would be encouraging, because when you go looking for these psychotherapy services, not everyone is able to resolve the problems.

(Customer)

Payment commitments would also be needed later... situations recur and changes happen.

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)

The amount of the payment commitment [should be] bigger so I could attend therapy more often.

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)

The project is really good. Even less social people dare to ask for help through the Support the Farmer Project. I used the service years ago, but sometimes crises can come up again. I hope that payment commitments could be received on a repeat basis.

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)

Wishes for more continuity
and a broader service
selection

Since the Support the Farmer Project has been perceived as important in reducing psychosocial stress among farmers, it is not surprising that farmers, project workers and stakeholders **hope that the project will continue or become a permanent part of Mela's activities.** More information is also called for in order to increase awareness.

Continuity means the continuation of the project's basic activities, and raising awareness means that all farmers are made aware of the project.

It's not possible to get help in time from anywhere else.

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)

We primary producers are used to taking care of our own problems, but too many and for too long is too much even for us. I hope that the project continues. It saves lives.

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)

As for the project, I think, unfortunately I have to say this, but I suspect that the need is much greater than there are [project workers] out there in the field doing this. In other words, if we think about the impact of the project, it would be much bigger, I think, if one more person were added to it, if I think about this region, then they would be fully employed right away, I bet.

(Stakeholder)

Project workers require support

Customers and stakeholders of the Support the Farmer Project recognise that the work performed by project workers is hard.

Project workers themselves mentioned that they are offered **job guidance**, but some stressed that there could be more. They also told how important the mutual support of colleagues is when dealing with difficult issues.

Based on the interview material, it can be said that project workers have a lot of work and customers. It is important to make sure project workers have all the support they need. It would also be good to explore **the possibility of hiring additional resources and new project workers.**

It's a great project. Hopefully it will continue, but one thing concerns me: who supports the staff of the Support the Farmer Project?

(Customer, open response to questionnaire)

I too need to unload these things so they don't remain in my own head for long periods of time. That maybe, after all, there is [a need for] peer support and employer support. It too is extremely valuable.

(Project worker)

A few more people would be needed on the Support the Farmer Project, or then their regions should not be so large.

(Stakeholder)



Conclusions





Support needs of customers

- The reasons for seeking support are diverse, but own coping is the most common reason for eventually seeking support.
- Based on the questionnaire data, the most common reasons for seeking support are own coping, mental wellbeing, relationship-related problems, sudden crises, physical health problems, and problems in managing finances.
- Seeking support can be mentally difficult.
- The commitment and responsibility of the customer are extremely important factors when seeking positive change.
- Farming is often done as a couple, in which case the family is at the same time the work community. The quality of relationships has an impact on business activities.

Impact of work performed by project workers

- Wellbeing and work ability of customers has significantly strengthened.
- Personal tragedies have been avoided.
- The multiprofessional approach of project workers, their discussion support and the wellbeing achieved by untying difficult knots has in the long run improved the quality of life of customers.
- Altogether 72 percent of customers received support from other specialists, and 91 percent of these customers found the multiprofessional approach very or somewhat useful.
- The average wellbeing experienced by customers who responded to the survey, on a scale from zero to ten, increased from 3.7 to 6.3 and their work ability from 4.5 to 6.3. Among those customers who found the multiprofessional support to be useful, both their wellbeing and work ability improved more than among customers who did not find the multiprofessional support to be useful.
- Altogether 91 percent of respondents found the work performed by project workers to be very or quite useful. According to the interview data, this was due to the holistic and multiprofessional approach of project workers, the help in seeking other services, the discussion support, the feeling that they are being seen and, for example, the project worker's understanding of the operating environment of farms.

Impact of payment commitments for outsourced services

- The professional help obtained with a payment commitment for outsourced services have helped customers increase their psychosocial wellbeing from 6.3 to 7.2 and their work ability from 6.3 to 7.3 even after the work of project workers was completed.
- The vast majority of respondents (88 percent) considered the service obtained with a payment commitment to be very or quite useful. Based on the interviews, this is mostly due to the reduction in psychosocial stress and improvement in work ability achieved with the help of therapy.
- The ability of farmers to cope and talk about the difficulties they face has increased.
- The continuation of farming operations is often better ensured after using the service.

Impact of early intervention model and stakeholder network

- In the work they perform, stakeholders can get close to the farmer and notice if the farmer is suffering from burnout.
- Often, the causes of burnout are not related to the area of expertise of the stakeholder who notices it. This is when they can bring up the project and direct customers to seek support from the project.
- The early intervention model has had a two-way effect. With it, farmers have been able to access support from the project, while stakeholders have felt that the project has given them additional tools for supporting farmers.
- The interviewed stakeholders emphasised that the holistic support provided by the project is not available anywhere else.
- Stakeholders and the early intervention model can help the farmer and anticipate the difficulties they will face, but only if the farmer is ready for the change process.



Broader impact of the Support the Farmer Project

- Breaking the circle of silence and its transgenerational impacts.
- Reduction in stigma related to mental health issues.
- Improved agricultural production and its stability can support local food chains and small businesses, which has a positive impact locally and on the Finnish economy.
- Costs incurred by early retirement or sick leave can also be avoided, at least in part, with the help of the project.
- The positive impact of prolonging working careers on employment and thereby also on tax revenues and the labour force, for example.
- Improving the work ability and mental health of farmers can have a positive impact on Finland's security of supply.





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