

Meerlieu and District Rural Community Group Inc;

Submission RE: Inquiry into the cause of fatality and Injury on Victorian farms

Introduction

The Meerlieu and District Rural Community Group is a voluntary organization whose membership is drawn from the local community.

The area is a farming community and there is a spread of wool, fat lamb, cattle farming and cropping.

Many of the farming families have off farm income.

The average age of the farmers in the area is 54 years.

The Meerlieu and District Rural Community Group recently held a social function with the objective of raising awareness of OH&S on farms and in particular the importance of safe work practices.

The function also allowed community members to hear from other people about 'farm accidents' and generated discussion around safe work practices and improving safety on farms.

The Meerlieu and District Rural Community Group has also met on a number of occasions to review documentation, statistics and pool the general knowledge of members in preparation for this submission.

Identified issues

1. Validity of Statistics

1.1 Farms are worksites, homes and recreational venues.

An accident cutting wood for domestic purposes on a farm is recorded as a workplace accident; this is not the case when a 'townie' has an accident cutting wood in the forest.

Kids racing their bikes on farm and being hurt in an accident can also be recorded as farm accidents. It is more likely to have been a recreational activity and should be recorded as such, if this is the case.

A local farmer recently cut off his hand in a swing saw accident while cutting wood for domestic purposes. It was regarded as a 'work' accident

The statistics relating to injuries and fatalities on farms are skewed by domestic and recreational activities being recorded as farm/ workplace accidents. Statistics reporting farm accidents are therefore not a true representation of fatalities or injuries on farms

This in turn impacts negatively on the Workcover premium set for farming enterprises across the state.

There is no coordinated collation of recorded injuries on farms.

Farmers seek medical advice as a last resort due to the constraints of their farming activity and many minor injuries with the potential to cause a negative impact in the future, on the physical health of farmers are not reviewed by the medical profession.

1.2 Accidents and fatalities on 'Hobby farms' are also recorded as farm accidents even though:

- a) The person involved in the accident or fatality may have no experience or training in the use of equipment and machinery or any knowledge of working with 'stock.'
- b) The 'Hobby farm' is not a substantial part of the Hobby farmer's taxable income.

1.4. Recommendations:

1.4.1 That a process be developed to allow the separation of accidents, injuries and deaths on farms so that statistics can more accurately reflect the reality of workplace accidents and fatalities on farms.

1.4.2 That a voluntary 'Farm safety audit process' be developed to raise awareness of OH&S on individual farming enterprises and that an incentive be offered to farmers who undertake a Farm Safety Audit.
(The Farm Safety Audit could be carried out by Worksafe officers and could be linked to reductions in Workcover premiums for farm enterprises that pass an audit.)

1.4.3 That membership of Departmental consultative committees on farm safety include, actively working farmers and reflect a range of farming enterprises both big and small.

1.4.4 The definitions of farmer and farming enterprise need to be more clearly defined for the purposes of Workcover, Worksafe and the taxation department.

1.4.5 That a public promotions activity be undertaken to encourage farmers to record all farm injuries in their 'accident books'.

2. Older farmers

2.1 A high percentage of farm accidents and fatalities appear to involve older farmers.

2.2 The accidents and fatalities also appear to occur due to operating procedures and behavior which the farmer has been in the habit of following e.g. getting on and off vehicles while they are still moving, leaving vehicles in neutral when leaving the vehicle for short periods.

2.3 People's reflexes, ability to think quickly and physical strength are all decreasing with age and they are therefore not able to respond to situational challenges as quickly as in the past.

2.4. Recommendations

2.4.1 That an advertising campaign be undertaken to alert older people to the changes in their physical abilities and that shock tactics similar to those used by the TAC advertisements be used.

To include: - personal stories,
- examples of ways to do things better,
- use of supporting aides.

2.4.2 That free 'reflex and stress checks' to be included in health promotion seminars for farmers at public health promotions along with current blood pressure, diabetes tests and cholesterol testing.

3. Young people

3.1 Young people also have a high representation in the fatality and accident statistics.

3.2 Young people believe they are invincible.

3.3 Young people are largely motivated by their peers and the media.

3.4 Recommendations.

3.4.1 That a farm safety campaign be developed featuring current 'young heroes' and using shock value to alert young people of the need to follow safe behavior practices when working and playing on farm.

- Focus could be on motorbikes, paddock bombs and ATV's.
- Needs to have shock value.

3.4.2 That TV producers be encouraged to include 'safety' as a theme in popular serials showing at prime time.

4. Farm machinery and equipment.

4.1 Tractors and ATV's major cause of death and injury on farms.

4.3 Removing machinery and equipment from farms is expensive, time consuming and in the case of heavy machinery, can be dangerous. It also removes the equipment from operations for longer periods of time.

We believe it would be more effective for farmers to be able to undertake OH&S modifications to machinery on site. This would allow three options to meet OH&S requirements.

1. Transport equipment to tradesperson
2. Tradesperson attend worksite
3. Farmer to undertake modifications.

Certification could then be undertaken if required.

4.4 Recommendations

4.4.1 Target in advertising

- Advertising to be aimed at the general community but with a farm flavor
- Inappropriate use of farm vehicles needs to be highlighted
- Particular emphasis needs to be placed on ATV's and their appropriate use.

4.4.2 Specifications to be developed so that farmers can manufacture and fit their own roll bars, safety steps and other safety equipment for older machinery.

Specifications to:

- be readily available
 - in an easy read format
 - include step by step format
 - include flow charts
- as appropriate.

Specifications to be available via:

- local phone call,
- post,
- fax,
- internet.

4.4.3 Farmers to be able to manufacture and fit safety equipment and where required seek external certification.

- External certification to attract a rebate.

4.4.4 Worksafe to be responsible for undertaking certification.

5. Education and Promotion

5.1 Farmers informal discussions with their peers on farm and also at local field days and forums, facilitates change on farms.

5.2 Personal stories and events that impact on people we know have a profound impact on our own view of the world and are more likely to change our behavior.

5.3 The TAC Advertisements that showed everyday behaviors linked to horrific outcomes appeared to have a positive impact on motorists' behavior.

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1 Worksafe to find a way to more effectively communicate safe work practices on farm.

5.4.2 Worksafe to change the title of Workplace inspector to reflect a less threatening, intimidating authoritarian aspect for farmers,
E.g. Field officer

5.4.3 Additional Worksafe 'field officers' to be employed whose primary role would be to promote farm safety and entice farmers to adopt safer work practices.

Key selection criteria to include:

- Excellent interpersonal and communication skills
- Farming background or practical experience in a farming enterprise.

5.4.4 Worksafe to make available 'Farm Safety Kits' on farm safety days and events.

- Kits to have practical checklists and advice to farmers on how to assess their own work practices and general farm safety

5.4.5 That a process be developed to reward people who complete short courses and audit activities in relation to OH&S on their farms.

Incentives/ rewards could include:

- course fee rebates
- vouchers to purchase OH&S equipment
- OH&S equipment (proven effective for CFA)

5.4.6 That Worksafe liaise with training representatives from the farming industry and tertiary education representatives to develop recognized training packages, which focus on safe work practices, continuous improvement and include farmers obligations due to legislation.

Conclusion

Farms are not just work sites but also homes and recreational venues for farming families.

Injuries and fatalities need to be identified in relation to activity.

Personalized information and education together with public promotion of 'better' work practices and safer behavior on farms is the best way to change behavior and improve safety on farms.

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We would be happy to discuss the submission in more detail.

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