

*Submission to the Victorian Government  
Parliamentary Committee on Rural and  
Regional Services and Development.*

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**Summary**

The causes of death and injury on farms are complex and this submission proposes that the solutions need to be multifaceted. In particular, solutions need to acknowledge and recognise the diverse roles played by farm women, children (both girls and boys) as well as men.

In this submission we are specifically addressing the issues around women and boy and girl - children.

**Terms of Reference**

1. The main causes of fatality and injury on Victorian farms and other primary industries compared to other jurisdictions.

**The farm is a work place as well as a family home. Parents need access to innovative and well-funded children's services including childcare.**

**A potential cause of 'accidents' on farms arises in circumstances where family members are called upon to "help" or be an extra labour unit, without attention to the necessary skill levels and experience.**

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2. The matter and type of these injuries compared to other industries and jurisdictions.  
(No comment)
3. Current programs and initiatives designed to improve occupational health and safety on Victorian farms.

**Building on programs which are already working in our communities and growing from our strengths, we support the expansion of the following successful programs.**

- **The FARMS model of delivering innovative rural children's services.**
- **School based farm safety programs, targeting rural and farm girls and boys delivered through primary schools and pre school centers.**
- **The Farm Safe for Kids Kit for pre school children.**
- **Using RIRDC data to research and record the costs of all accidents and deaths to the whole farm business.**
- **Extension of programs such as FarmBi\$ to provide courses which increase the practical, management and financial skill levels of all farm members.**
- **Removal of OH&S regulations and licensing requirements which act as disincentives for mentoring and role modeling on positive farm behaviours.**

4. Any impediments to sustaining improvements in farm safety.

**An assumption that the farmer, the worker and the one most likely to be involved in a farm accident will be male. In our experience all members of the farm family, men, women, girls and boys (and all ages) work on farms. It is essential to ensure that OH&S and farm safety information and education programs target all the workers on farms; and that these programs are evaluated for their effectiveness in reaching and having the desired impact on each target group.**

5. The financial and social cost of death and injury on Victorian farms.

**The actual and imputed cost of farm accidents and deaths involving all farm workers need to be research and recorded. (See statistics below on women's economic contribution to Australian Agriculture)**

6. The need for further strategies to reduce the incidence of injury and fatality on Victorian farms, what forms the strategy should take and whether they are best developed by government agencies, industry bodies, worker representatives or a combination of these. In particular the committee should consider the creation of further codes of practice.

**Detailed strategies need to be designed in close consultation and cooperation with relevant farmer and rural associations. Organisations such as Australian Women in Agriculture and the Country Women's Association, pre and school parents associations, as well as community groups such as Landcare, CFA and sporting groups all have a vested interest in farm safety.**

## **Children on Farms and Relevant Services:**

We believe that one of the common causes of accidents and deaths for farm children is the lack of adequate, relevant, professional child care services, delivered on site and in a timely manner.

In NorthEast Victoria and Southern NSW, following extensive research we have developed an innovative rural model for children services, which has proven successful. Called FARMS – (Farm and Rural Mobile Services). It has been in operation for 8 years. In the areas where FARMS operates there have been no on-farm deaths or serious accidents during this period.

The Commonwealth Government funds this rural innovative children's services model. It operates in Victoria in the shires of Alpine, Indigo and Tawong and also in NSW. Due to both the success of this model and its relevance to rural families there is a significant demand for this service. Unfortunately the service is limited in its funding and is unable to meet this demand.

The potential for this service to meet local demand is further restricted by regulations and funding requirements. In Victoria childcare services are based on 'urban models' (occasional and longday care) which are almost impossible to adapt to a rural environment.

We ask that rural models be developed for rural families. Innovative rural children services are meeting the needs of rural and farm families. They address the issues around the work of men and women on farms as well as children and their safety on farms.

*We recommend that this Committee actively support the funding and development of more innovative rural children's services for rural areas. That the Victorian Government negotiates with the Commonwealth Government to ensure funding criteria is appropriate for rural areas.*

## **Education Programs – schools and preschools.**

Local primary school children comment favorably on the programs run through schools. Parents also acknowledge the success of this approach. In one small rural school art, theatre, music, poetry, maths and language studies are all combined around the topic of

farm safety; the children become skilled in risk assessment, strategic thinking, problem solving, negotiating and designing solutions. A farm safe community BBQ ensured that extended families were included and the farm safe message moved into the home and farm work place. (Contact Mrs Chris Sleep at the Middle Indigo Primary School)

In NE Victoria, a dedicated teacher has been responsible for introducing the farm safe message to preschool teachers. Funded via a philanthropic foundation the "Farm Safe for Kids" program with songs, stories, books and plays have been very popular. (Contact Yackandandah Pre school and Ms Vicky O'Connell for more details)

*We recommend that this Committee works with the relevant education departments to ensure these programs are integrated into each school and child care centers. That partnerships between philanthropic trusts and education bodies, to develop innovative and exciting, materials be encouraged and supported.*

### **Financial and Social Costs of Injury**

Women's farm work – Any accident or death of a woman on a farm will have far-reaching economic consequences.

In 1998, The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) reported that "adding together the value of women's on-farm contribution, their off-farm income and the value of household, volunteer and community work, that women contribute almost 48% of real farm income. This contribution was worth \$14 billion in (1995-6). \$4 billion in actual on-farm work; \$1 billion in off- farm work; over \$8 billion in household work and almost \$0.5 billion in community and volunteer work." (Missed Opportunities report Vol. 2, p 53).

### **Regulations acting as disincentives to positive role modeling**

Some regulations designed to improve OH&S, in fact when applied to farm situations act as disincentives. One such example is the requirements for an aunt to buy a license in order to work on farm with her nieces and nephews. It is assumed that these regulations are designed with the best of intentions, when applied to the farming environment they act as a disincentive and can be counter-productive for encouraging positive role modelling

## **FarmBi\$**

The Farm Bi\$ program is jointly funded by the States and Commonwealth Government. It is currently under review.

One of the limitations of the 'old' program was that courses, which worked to improve practical on-farm skills, were looked at less favorably (actively discouraged) to courses offering 'management' or higher levels (Cert 4) skills.

It is our belief that FarmBi\$ subsidies offer an ideal incentive to improve the level of farm skills as well as increasing awareness of OH&S and related issues. As the program is currently under review it would be timely for this Committee to make recommendations which would ensure that OH&S as well as practical farm skills courses are encouraged and supported.



Australian Women in Agriculture is committed to promoting the profile of women in agriculture. As Australia's peak organisation for agricultural women, members are a part of a committed and dedicated network involved in the development of Australian primary production, rural industries and communities.

Your partners in rural Australia

**Submission to the Joint investigatory Committee of the Victorian Parliament.  
Inquiry into the Cause of Fatality and Injury on Victorian Farms.  
Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee.**

**Thursday 15 April, 2004**

- Women are under-represented in farm injury/death statistics due to –
  - social and cultural ignorance, particularly in an urban context, of the role of women on farms
  - authorities compiling farm injury/trauma statistics, (eg: GPs, hospitals, WorkCover, Workers Compensation Insurers, etc) narrowly defining farmers as male.
  - women themselves less likely to report injury, etc as farm related
  - women not identifying themselves as paid farm workers or "the bread winner"
  - academic/health/OH&S studies focussing, in almost all cases, on injury/death to farm males.
- Women account for a small percentage of injuries/deaths on farms compared to males (see above) but are disproportionately over-represented in the injuries/deaths per capita for the Australian female workforce. Economic pressures on the farm, lack of exposure/training to farm machinery and agricultural pesticides, time pressures and pressures of adequate child care all play a part in this equation.
- Farm injuries/deaths/ill health are not accurately reflected in the available data. Suicides, mental health issues (especially depression), long term muscular skeletal disorders, respiratory illness, back strain, hearing disorders, skin disorders and certain cancers (eg: skin and lung cancer) are all disproportionately represented in the farming population. A broader understanding of the term "health" in Farm Health and Safety is needed.
- Injuries to farm children are more likely to occur where childcare/supervision is inadequate or not available, particularly in highly mechanised areas such as dairy farming.
- Rural and urban communities are becoming increasingly mixed, particularly on the urban fringes of Melbourne and major regional cities, (the "Sea Change Effect"). Broad based strategies aimed at rural communities in general and not simply farm families are required. Eg – one third of on farm deaths of children under the age of 16 were children who were visiting/not resident on the farm.
- Education/information campaigns need to be aimed at whole farm families. The recent campaign by the VFF's FarmSafe Project is an excellent example of delivering information to ALL stakeholders.