Creating a safety culture on the farm

A safety culture is one in which health and safety are an integral part of everyday operations, it’s just part of the “way we do things around here”. As an employer, you are responsible for taking all practicable steps to ensure the safety of your employees. Creating and fostering a safety culture is key to making this happen.

If health and safety are viewed as just a legal obligation, then health and safety becomes about compliance, rather than a conscious decision to do things in the best way to protect everyone’s wellbeing. When the pressure is on to get the work done, people can cut corners, rush tasks and make mistakes. On a farm, these mistakes can lead to serious injury and even death.

A safety culture is a culture that sees health and safety as an investment rather than a cost. It’s also an informed culture, where employees, managers and the farm owner understand their responsibilities and the health and safety systems and procedures in place. A safety culture is also committed to continuous improvement. Improving health and safety on the farm is an ongoing process, where the aim is to get better year after year.

Safe work practices go hand in hand with good employment relationships. A positive and safe workplace culture relies on open communication and co-operation between the farm owner, managers and employees.

Safety culture snapshot:

The Safety Culture Snapshot is a free survey tool used to help businesses understand their safety culture. It takes 5 minutes to complete and should be undertaken by every employee on the farm. This is a good first step for a business wanting to improve their safety culture, as it identifies areas for improvement and provides a number of resources, such as safety briefing guides, action planning templates and other self-help tools.

Please visit OSH - Tools and Resources
Practical ideas:

- Show your commitment to health and safety by walking the talk. You are the boss and employees will take their cue from you. If you make it a priority, others will follow.
- Don’t cut corners - do things right the first time around.
- Always wear appropriate PPE, such as helmets when riding ATVs.
- Don’t undertake high-risk activities when you’re tired – fatigue is a major source of accidents.
- Discuss any accidents/near-misses you have been involved in with the rest of the team. Brainstorm what can be done to prevent this from happening again.
- Make health and safety part of everyday conversations. Include safety as an agenda item at farm staff meetings. Discuss hazards and their controls, any training that may be required, accidents and near-misses, what to do in the event of different emergencies and so on. Don’t assume that because a topic has been raised once people will remember what to do – ongoing conversations are needed and key messages need to be repeated regularly.
- Involve employees in health and safety. Employees are often the ones on the ground who are aware of potential hazards and problems - their feedback and participation is essential for developing a safety culture on the farm.

Make training and supervision a priority:

- Ensure all new staff are given a health and safety induction.
- Send employees to appropriate training courses e.g. ATVs, chainsaws, motorbikes etc.
- Make on-the-job training part of everyday activities – it can be time-consuming in the short term but it’s worth it. When employees know what they are doing, they do a better job the first time around. They make fewer mistakes and have fewer accidents.
- Ensure that all employees receive the appropriate amount of supervision for their experience level. Young and/or inexperienced employees generally require a lot of supervision, don’t take anything for granted.
- Training Records Form (Compliance Toolkit)
- Clearly communicate health and safety information through notices and signs around the farm.
- Include a commitment to health and safety in written employment documents, such as employment agreements, job descriptions, workplace code of conduct and the performance management system. This means doing things safely is an expected part of ‘what good looks like’ and is regularly assessed throughout the year.