

Creating a Safe, Healthy and Productive Farm

A Workplace Guide

A photograph of a man and a woman in farm attire standing on a farm. The man is wearing a hat and a plaid shirt, and the woman is wearing a plaid shirt and a vest. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The background shows a farm with a fence and some trees.

FARMING NOT HARMING

July 2021

FIRST THINGS FIRST



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Introduction

You may have described yourself as a **farmer**, a **manager**, an **owner/operator** or all of the above. But have you ever thought of yourself as a **mentor**? A **supporter**? A **teacher**?

Farmsafe Australia wants to encourage farmers to **stop for a moment and think** about roles that they take on that may not be so obvious.

Whether you realise it or not, **you are shaping the workplace culture on your farm** through your **actions**, your **behaviours**, and how you **prioritise the safety, health and wellbeing** of all those who live and work around you.

This guide has been developed to increase your awareness of some of the less obvious risks, known as **psychosocial risks**, that you and your staff face daily on your farm, and what your role is in mitigating those risks.

Recently, the media has reported a number of serious allegations on some farms including **sexual harassment**, **bullying**, **worker exploitation** and **wage theft**. Issues such as these have serious work, health and safety implications.

Did you know that the obligation to provide a healthy and safe workplace includes mental and emotional wellbeing?

Farmsafe Australia wants you to be aware of psychosocial risks on farm and point you to resources that will help you **UNDERSTAND AND MEET YOUR OBLIGATIONS** as an employer or farm business owner.

Safe Work Australia, a key member of Farmsafe and a statutory body that develops national WHS policy, has done some brilliant work in the area of psychosocial risks and creating mentally healthy workplaces. Instead of reinventing the wheel here, we are going to break down some of their tips and tricks, show how they are relevant to the farm environment, and provide you with a link to their resources. You can use their tools to help to shift your on-farm culture to one that is safer, more supportive and ultimately, more productive.

What is Workplace Culture?

Conversations about workplace culture can be confusing. *What is culture?*

Farmsafe Australia thinks of **workplace culture as the 'social environment' created by the attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours that employers and employees demonstrate regularly**. It should be noted that this environment can be quite fluid and dynamic, depending on the patterns of influence that dominate at any given moment. Have you ever noticed that it may be quieter when the boss is around (or when *you* are around if you are the boss!)? That doesn't necessarily mean that it is always a quiet workplace - it just means that most employees have learned that it is beneficial to be quieter when the boss is present - for whatever reason.

Although it is the work environment, and **professionalism is important**, everyone should feel **comfortable to be themselves and express themselves**. If there is an issue, there should be an opportunity and ability to raise it. If you need **support or advice**, there should be space to seek it. And every worker should feel **empowered to influence work, health and safety decisions** that impact their wellbeing.

As an owner or a manager, **you can influence this culture quite significantly** in a way that enables your workers to have a **higher job satisfaction**, feel **valued** and be an **integral part of your team**.

The Benefits

Fostering a culture that promotes physical and mental wellbeing is not just your obligation as an employer, it is also beneficial to your business. The number one reason for a better safety culture is **HARM PREVENTION**. But did you know that **by preventing harm, you are also improving your bottom line**? Effective work, health and safety practices are the best investment you can make in your business.

Check out the list below to see the other reasons for focusing on bettering your workplace culture;

- Increased productivity
- Better quality of work
- Increased teamwork
- Higher job retention rates
- Improved morale
- Reduced lost time injuries and compensation costs
- Increased commitment to your farm business
- Engaged employees who are more likely to provide beneficial business suggestions and look for areas to innovate
- More pleasant work environment (and who doesn't want to actually enjoy their job!)

What are Psychosocial Hazards and Risks?

Psychosocial hazards and risks are situations within the work environment that have the potential to cause psychological stress. Prolonged stress may lead to psychological or physical harm in some circumstances and there is the potential for it to **contribute to or even cause, work-related injuries and incidents to occur**. It is much more likely that workers will make a mistake, use poor judgement when making a decision, or feel extreme fatigue when stressed. There is also a much higher risk of suicide to those experiencing prolonged work related stress.

What Might Psychosocial Hazards and Risks Look Like?

See below for a few examples of common psychosocial hazards and risks;

- **Farming is well known for its pressure periods** - sowing/planting, harvest, shearing, joining, lambing/calving etc, - jobs that have **high demands** coupled with **low control** over variables such as weather, disease, market fluctuations etc can cause enormous amounts of stress
- **Lack of Recognition** - Farm workers are often **required to go above and beyond** in their jobs, rarely clocking off on time and often **sacrificing important family events** to make sure the jobs get done - however, **if this dedication is just expected**, instead of genuinely appreciated and compensated, it can quickly become a risk to a worker's health and wellbeing
- **Bullying**

Bullying is defined by Safe Work Australia as **repeated and unreasonable behaviour directed towards a worker** (or a group of workers) that may affect the workers' physical or psychological health, thereby creating a work, health and safety risk.

Examples of bullying may be;

 - abusive and/or offensive language
 - humiliating comments or practical jokes
 - constant criticism that is not constructive or complaints that are unjustified
- **Aggression/Intimidation/Violence**
- **Racism**
- **Sexual Harrassment**

Safe Work Australia defines sexual harassment as *'an unwelcome sexual advance, unwelcome request for sexual favours or other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature in circumstances where a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would anticipate the possibility that the person harassed would be **offended, humiliated or intimidated**'*.

What it might look like on farm - **sexualised posters** on the shed wall, **crude jokes**, **persistent unwanted** requests for dates, unsolicited **touching**, unwelcome staring or attention. Make sure you and your staff know what sexual harassment looks like.

*Please see the [Safe Work Australia](https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/) website for a more comprehensive list

So how does this link to farm culture?

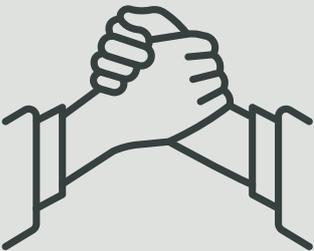
Farming is a bit different than your average 9 to 5 and most people that work on farms understand that. Weather systems, pests and disease, periods of high pressure such as harvest and shearing and many more variables combine to make the farming workload challenging to manage. Farmers and their workers have developed a reputation for being tough, hard working and resilient. And although these are great qualities to have, they can come at a very large cost to the physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing of those who make their living off of the land.

Because of this, **you have a responsibility to work with your staff to reduce the impacts of the farm workload.** By doing that, you will be proactively shifting the culture on your farm from one of 'get the job done at any cost' to one that gets the job done without unnecessary costs.

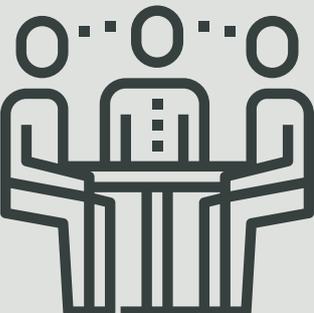
3 Things You Can Do To Shape A More Positive On-Farm Culture



***Are you mentoring your employees?
Doing it and doing it well gets better results for everyone.***



***Do you offer your employees genuine support?
Do so and you'll get to watch them grow.***



Are you taking the time to teach your employees? When you do, you'll see the results.

The next few pages will provide some insight into how you can incorporate mentoring, supporting and teaching into your daily routine.



What is a Mentor?

Put simply, a mentor is a person who gives a less experienced or less skilled person help or advice over a period of time. Great mentors are good listeners, they are not judgmental, they value different perspectives and they provide honest constructive feedback.

Mentoring your workers allows you to positively shape their future in the workforce. We want to encourage our people to stay working in Australian agriculture by providing them pathways for growth.

TOP TIP

Have a Conversation

If you want your workers to know that you take their health and safety seriously, you need to make sure that you **communicate** that *with* them. **Two-way communication is about talking *and* listening.** Everyone has a valued voice.

You must **consult** with your workers about any issues relating to their work, health and safety so why not **include them in the decision making process** as well - this will ensure that they are aware of any changes that might affect them and they will be more invested in the outcomes you are seeking to achieve.

And why not **ask their advice?** The workers on your farm are best placed to let you know what they find challenging or see as an issue in their workplace. This can feed into your **risk assessment and mitigation** documentation (just make sure you write it down!) as well as showing your staff that you are **listening to their concerns**.



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Providing Support in the Workplace

Often, our workers spend more time with us than they do with their own families and friends. This means we, as owners and managers, are often the first to notice when someone isn't 'alright'.

The important thing is that when one of your workers begins to exhibit signs of stress, be proactive and ask them if they are ok. It might seem uncomfortable or intrusive, but it is extremely important that you let them know that you care.

What does genuine support look like?

- **Checking in** with your workers to make sure that the jobs you have tasked them with are achievable with regard to timeframes, skill level, tools, etc
- **Encouraging** your workers to voice concerns if they feel unsafe or just generally unwell
- **Talking** about the workload - we are all human and sometimes the demands of our job **ON TOP** of juggling the demands of our personal lives and global pandemics can be overwhelming - a quick check in to make sure someone is coping might make all the difference.
- **Referring** on to another support network or professional when you feel out of your depth - and then circling back and following up to make sure that the worker is being supported

Develop Your Support Skills

If you would like training on how to hold supportive conversations, the [Mental Health First Aid](#) program can help you develop your support skills. This course is available online as well as face to face, so you can have access to the training from your own farm.

A photograph of two men in a workshop or garage setting. The man on the left is wearing a light blue button-down shirt and has sunglasses on his head. The man on the right is wearing a dark, patterned jacket and has a beard. They are both looking at a smartphone held by the man on the left. The word "TEACHER" is overlaid in large, white, bold letters across the middle of the image.

TEACHER

Take the Time to Teach

Farming is not just a job, it's often a lifestyle for those involved in it. Many farmers have been 'on the job' since they could walk - **growing up on the land** and 'becoming a farmer' simply by virtue of being born into it. But **no matter how many years we have been on the land, there is always something new to learn.**

Training is Important

Farming is the last industry in which there is **really no formal training process.** Many of us were taught by our parents and grandparents. And in many cases, they taught us well. However, sometimes our informal training contained traces of complacency or practices that have become a bit out of date due to modern technological advances or just plain and simply because we now have safer ways of doing things.

So, it's **really important that we take the time to teach our modern practices to our workers,** especially because our farms are different than the last one they may have worked on. It is just as important that we take on feedback from our workers - **we can learn from the next generation just as much as they can learn from us.**

It's also important that we **provide formal training opportunities for our staff.** There are many courses out there that are available to farmers - heavy machinery licenses, quad bike training, mental health courses, chemical handling training, first aid certification, chainsaw training, working at heights or in confined spaces...and many of these **courses are available in online formats to make it more accessible for those on farm.**

Lead by Example

The best way to teach your staff acceptable behaviour at work is to **role model those behaviours yourself.** As humans, we tend to 'mirror' what we perceive as socially acceptable behaviour, because we want to be accepted by those in positions of power. As an owner/manager, you are the leader in the workplace and when you role model attitudes and behaviours that create a safe and healthy work environment, your workers will likely develop those behaviours to fit in, and ultimately, to survive.



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Looking for More Information?

Safe Work Australia has a wide range of resources available to provide information for business owners as well as for employees who may find themselves in a work environment that is potentially causing harm. Below is a list of links to relevant guidance material on their website.

- [Preventing workplace sexual harassment](#), January 2021
- [Workplace Sexual Harassment](#)
- [Work-related Psychological Health and Safety](#), A systematic approach to meeting your duties, January 2019
- [Preventing Workplace Violence and Aggression Guide](#), January 2021
- [Guide for Preventing and Responding to Workplace Bullying.](#), May 2016
- [Dealing with Workplace Bullying – A Worker’s Guide](#), May 2016
- [Guide for Managing the Risk of Fatigue at Work](#), November 2013
- [Fatigue Management – A Worker’s Guide](#), November 2013

Disclaimer: This guide is intended as a **general guide only** and is designed to be used to increase risk awareness and safe work practices - it is **not legal advice** and does not take the place of proper individualised on-farm workplace inductions, WHS training, or any other tailored steps which may be necessary to protect health and safety at specific worksites.

*****If you or any of your employees are experiencing any form of harassment that may be considered a criminal act, seek help immediately. These matters should be referred to Police and you may also wish to seek help from the Fair Work Ombudsman.***

A photograph of two men standing in a field, talking. The man on the left is wearing a blue shirt and a cap, and the man on the right is wearing a checkered shirt and a hat. The background is a blurred field with trees.

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