

MEDIA RELEASE
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BURNING THE CANDLE AT BOTH ENDS: FARMSAFE AUSTRALIA URGES AUSTRALIAN FARMERS TO MANAGE FATIGUE IN TRYING TIMES

Harsh and unrelenting environments, physically demanding work and current labour shortages are contributing to longer working hours and extreme fatigue among farmers nationwide. This Farm Safety Week, Farmsafe Australia is urging farmers to address fatigue to reduce farm workplace injury and fatalities, particularly as farmers work to overcome impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Michelle Mearns, owner of a cattle grazing operation in Durong in the South Burnett, spoke about the importance of checking in on yourself and others during periods of intense work.

“In 2019 we endured awful droughts, and the consequences on the mental health of our family was huge. Both my daughter and I were working long hours in the heat to feed our cows which was physically and mentally draining,” said Ms Mearns.

“In an effort to reduce the long-term impact of this fatigue, my husband Peter and I made the decision to avoid substances that contribute to my exhaustion on the farm. I leaned on resources such as “sober in the country” to help me with this. While we’ve never had a problem with alcohol, it is important to be aware of how we can lean on unhealthy habits during trying times.”

When farmers become fatigued there are profound consequences on their stamina and mental health, which can lead to farm injuries and fatalities.

“Farmers often need to be reminded that the hardships we experience are not easily remedied. In the face of current labour shortages many farmers are working additional hours to pick up the slack.

“Especially now, it is essential that farmers understand there are strategies and resources available to preserve our physical and mental wellbeing and understand the often-unexpected toll of working long hours.”

For Michelle this means putting herself first and accessing the necessary resources when fatigue hits.

“We belong to such a great community, so I know that I am supported through every challenge I face. I also know however that there are so many mental health resources for farmers combatting fatigue and have accessed some myself.”

Having married into farming, Michelle has quickly learnt the importance of fatigue management. Particularly when it comes to modelling behaviors to those around her.

Australian farmers who work long hours can access resources to help address fatigue during the workday. It is often the most simple remedies that can address fatigue.

“Remembering to take scheduled rest periods as well as carrying a water bottle and food with you at all times is key in ensuring you have the capacity to endure the day’s work. And most important of all is the ability to speak up when you feel your fatigue might be a danger to yourself or others.”

Felicity Richards, Chairperson at Farmsafe Australia, said that while conversations around mental and physical fatigue are improving, the Australian farming culture needs to grow to continue to support fatigued farmers.

“Tackling farm safety seems daunting for many farmers. Encouraging farmers to look at their physical and mental wellbeing as something they can work towards daily can help them implement strategies to prevent burnout and preserve the joy they find in farming,” Ms Richards said.

“I want to remind Australian farmers that taking a safe and cautious approach to farm safety does not make life on the farm any less fun. In fact it is vital to cultivate a safe place for people to work without fear of physical injury and mental burnout.”

This Farm Safety Week, Farmsafe Australia are encouraging farmers to just take a moment to consider the intangible factors that can impact safety on-farm.

“Every farmer understands the unique risks that come with working on their own farm. Taking one extra moment to weigh up factors such as fatigue, mental health or complacency is a first step towards creating a safer environment.”

To find out more about safety resources and how to keep yourself and your family safe, visit: farmsafe.org.au

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