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**Farmsafe Toolbox Talks – Transcript of Podcast #16**  
**'Keep it Simple' with Jim Conn of Logan Lagoon Pastoral**  
**Host: Dr Richard Franklin, James Cook University**  
**Guest: Jim Conn**

**Voiceover:**

“Welcome to Farmsafe Toolbox Talks, a podcast series focusing on farm culture, leading to a healthier and safer working, living and playing environment. Here's your host, Richard Franklin.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Today's podcast is brought to you by Farmsafe Australia under funding from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. I'm your host Richard Franklin. Today, I have with me Jim Conn from Logan Lagoon Pastoral at Flinders Island in Tasmania. He is a beef farmer on Flinders Island and owner of a small beef breeding property, manager of a second beef property and overseer of a third property. He's also heavily involved in the dairy farm side of the business over his vari...various locations in Victoria. Jim, I don't know how you do it all and manage to squeeze it all in. But tell me a little bit more about what you do, what you get up to and how you work.”

**Jim Conn:**

“All right. Well, thanks. Thanks, Richard, for having me. It's a pleasure. Basically, I finished university after working different places around the country and overseas a couple of times. I went to university and I got home at the end of 2021. At that time, I was lucky enough, I had already purchased a couple of properties myself and I returned back to the family business, basically, and transitioned through succession planning with that. And with that, comes the management role, as well as overseeing a second beef property here on Flinders Island and then being involved in the dairy side of the family business over in Victoria. To get through it all, we're just big on communication. And we're all very fortunate because we really love what we do. So yeah, it's great industry to be in. I love it.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah, excellent. And so, for those that don't know where Flinders Island is, it's just...just off Tasmania somewhere, is that right?”

**Jim Conn:**

“Yeah, that's right. So, we're just off the northeast coast of Tasmania, between Wilsons Promontory in Victoria and near the Northeast tip of Tassie - just a small but 70 by 40 kms population, about 800 people, I think, yeah.”

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**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah, produces some very nice beef and other agricultural produce out of Flinders Island. So, it is really great to be talking to you about it, and I guess to get anywhere it's a ferry ride to back into Tassie and then a plane to somewhere else. Is that right?”

**Jim Conn:**

“Yeah, well we usually actually catch the plane. To be honest, a ferry can be 8 to 12 hours back to Tassie, so.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah, right, so what...you drop...drop cattle onto a boat to get them back to Victoria or Tasmania?”

**Jim Conn:**

“Yeah, exactly, everything is live export. So yeah, goes to feed lots or to be killed in various places.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah, very nice. So I mean, with all this stuff going on, I've asked everybody this question and everybody said, ‘There's no such thing as a normal day’. But what does a normal day kind of look like for you?”

**Jim Conn:**

“Well, I'll get out of bed to start with! And then, usually, it's usually shift cows first, that's the first priority got to shift cows, because if there's a water problem, or a broken fence that takes second priority, and then from there on, just depends on what's going on in the time of the year. And what staff are up to. It could be fencing, or waters or shifting machinery. I'm big on planning ahead so, I've got a calendar on my phone and usually things are booked in and sort of run with it from there. Again, that communication thing, we've got to keep it open. Just standard farming, I suppose it's nothing special to what I do, just a standard farmer!”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“So, tell me, do you kick off with a kind of toolbox talk in the morning with your employees? Or how are you communicating with them across the different properties that you got?”

**Jim Conn:**

“Yep. So the structures we have either share farmers or managers or contract milkers. So they very much actually run their own show. On the day to day, I might have casuals every now and then. But otherwise, with the safety aspect, we don't have to have a toolbox meeting on a day to day it's just an open conversation that always continues. We've got safety management plans for each property here on Flinders Island and in Victoria. We've had Safe Farming Tasmania jump on board with us or well, we've jumped on board with them to get those into place. So, these safety management plans cover

induction checklists, contractor inspections, work safety procedures, farm safety checklists and risk registers, chemical safety guidelines and then just basic farm safety management on machinery operations for the different types of machinery- through motorbikes, tractors, post drivers, chainsaws, etc. And we've got a bit of a training register with that as well. But it depends on the...on the contract that that employee has as to how in depth we go with it. The majority of our direct employees are contract managers or share farmers. So we provide this safety management plan to them through Safe Farming Tasmania. I, myself, sit down with them, walk it through with them and we'll go look around the farm and highlight anything that might need to be done or looked at and then it's up to them to pass it on to their staff. So, I don't have a whole lot to do with their staff directly because that's all about our business. We've got these other people in place, so that's up to them. We don't want to overstep that mark. But at times I'll have casuals come on board here with me on Flinders Island and yeah, definitely like, sit down with them go through a safety management plan. If they're just here for the day, it's more about just, if we're in the yards just point out hazards, you know, the yards of muddy today. Don't get stuck! You know, there could be a gate that doesn't work properly. But yeah, sort of where we go from there. Yeah, if that makes sense?"

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

"Yeah, it does make sense. So, do you reckon that those plans have helped in kind of that safety conversation that you've been having with your contractors and others?"

**Jim Conn:**

"Absolutely, yeah. That's the foundation of where it's, it's came from. For us for a long time, we would have a conversation with others about safety. And it was probably hard to have, for instance, I suppose a script. You can go around and talk about hazards and stuff, but now, thanks to Safe Farming Tasmania, we've actually got this on paper and in a booklet, so it gives us...literally gives us a script of what to talk about. So absolutely, it's been a massive thing for us."

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

"That sounds great. We've talked a little bit about some of the common risks, but I'm going to pick up a little bit more on that. You talked about sort of yards and obviously dealing with kind of animals and a bit of machinery stuff that you've got going on. What other risks are kind of coming through as you think about and walk around the farm and are talking to people?"

**Jim Conn:**

"Well, to be honest, our biggest risk would be probably livestock, because livestock they've got a mind of their own. We're big on low stress stock handling and having good facilities that everyone can be safe in, livestock can be handled safely, and in a low stress manner. And machinery, we are big on keeping machinery up to date, like we don't have new tractors or new utes or any of that. But mechanically, if there's a problem, it gets fixed as soon as we can, you know, if we've got to shut that machine down, we will. So, our biggest risk would really be to do with livestock, especially sometimes we could be running herds that are up to 800 or 1000 head in one mob. So, we have to have people with experience that are handling those mobs, especially when they're going through a 14-foot gateway, because they can obviously go through and smash a gate or take someone out. So, livestock would be our biggest risk and to mitigate that risk. training stuff through low stress stock handling, and, and being aware and keeping things up to date. Absolutely."

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Do you have people on horses or motorcycles or motorbikes?”

**Jim Conn:**

“We actually...we actually have a policy on the beef farms on Flinders Island, no quad bikes. We’re all two wheels. And then one person also has a buggy, a side-by-side buggy.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Do you move between properties? Or you just kind of keep them on one?”

**Jim Conn:**

“No, they pretty much will stay on one, yeah, absolutely. Yep. Got to wear a helmet. That's a must.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“And that’s been picked up well on the property, as a kind of...?”

**Jim Conn:**

“Yeah, absolutely. I suppose for me, I've got to lead by example. If I don't wear a helmet, why would anyone else? So,... and we were brought up like that as kids. My parents are the same. No helmet, no ride. They always wore helmets. So, I always wear helmets and so do the staff.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah, the modeling behavior is really important. It's great to hear you're kind of doing that and encouraging people to be part of that.”

“So, can I just say let's just change tack a bit. If I'm a visitor to your property, what...what happens? What's your processes that you've got in place to ensure their safety as well?”

**Jim Conn:**

“So, if you're a visitor, like as a friend coming on, or...?”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Well, let's...let's talk about friends. And then let's talk about, say somebody that's coming to read the meter, or, you know, do...do some of that work for you.”

**Jim Conn:**

“Okay, yeah. So, it would depend on the role that person was doing or contractors that come on. So, for example, a spreading contractor. If there's any hazards, we would make them aware, we now have contractor safety sheets. I can't exactly remember what they're called, but they now sign that to just say that they're aware of the hazards, and we've had a conversation and things just to cover ourselves and them as well, if something does happen. Again, it's just about having that line of communication. If...if...if there's a hazard known in that area, so for example, we might have a bridge that's a bit washed out, I'll call up the contractor and say, 'Don't go over that bridge', you know, it's been washed out underneath. It looks like you might get across, but don't risk it. So don't do it. So, again, that...just that line of conversation, keep it open. And if there's friends coming onto the property, well, they don't, you don't tend to send them out to go do your jobs, I suppose. But if we're going for a drive around, and if and if something came up, I suppose, we could have holes from wombats and stuff that can be a hazard. So, if they want to go and drive the ute, just say just 'go slow'. Myself and the staff and my parents tend to know where these sort of areas are because they tend to happen in the same sort of areas with wombat holes and stuff. But just so that people drive slowly.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“And how are you recording this? Do you keep a little log or what was your process for writing this down?”

**Jim Conn:**

“Well, like so contractors, they sign...they sign this piece of paper, and they've only got to sign up once and then that's done and the other new contractors that have to sign on as well. Otherwise, on a day to day we don't need to do a whole lot of recording for that sort of thing, because with this...since being on board with Safe Farming, Tasmania, I was under the impression that everything would have to be recorded, but it turns out that actually doesn't. And with incidents you know, they say only record if the...if that person has to go to hospital. We all get a paper cut or something like that. So, there's no need to look...well, that depends on the severity of the hazard or the injury.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah. So, so, you're recording your major, let's say major injuries where people have got some sort of first aid or particularly gone to hospital as part of it. If you're ringing up to say that something is broken, or not working properly, or having that chat, do you note any of that down? Or what's what's your process there to make sure that that happens, or is recorded?”

**Jim Conn:**

“I honestly, work as fast as I can to get fixed. Yep. If there's something wrong with a piece of machinery, shut it down. Send it to the mechanics or the mechanics come out, because it's...outside of the risk factor, if we've got stuff that isn't functioning properly and is unsafe, it's not profitable for us. I'm not saying...it sounds a bit arrogant to say it, mentioning profit in that sort of a sense, but that is also the reality of it. Things have to be running smoothly, and they've got to be going running safely for every reason, past just...past just employee safety. Like that's the number one priority, but if you've got machines that aren't operating properly, or, or fences that aren't up that are causing hazards, you know, you got wire going across the paddock - well, that's, that's a risk to your boundary fences, and you can't farm

properly.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“You know, I'm glad you brought that up. I think that people often do see safety separate to their risk management approach. And I personally think that it's more integrated, as you're talking about. And obviously, at the end of the day, we've got to make money out of the businesses, otherwise, we're not going to stay in business. But what are some of the other challenges that about, you know, doing things safely on your farm that you've come across? And any kind of tips on how to address them? I hear the Safe Farming thing is working well, but....but anything else that you can kind of give to people about how to do it?”

**Jim Conn:**

“I suppose it's just have that open line of communication and ask a consultant who to talk to or something or sorry, it's quite, it's quite simple. If there's a hazard fix it. If there's...if there's something that's unsafe, fix it or make it safe. Like why would I, myself, want to be working in an unsafe environment? So why would I expect someone else to? So yeah, again, like minimising hazards, so we don't get many injuries at all, because we don't allow certain machinery on the property, and you've got to wear a helmet, and livestock handling with low...low stress. And we're big on - when we get our cattle in the yards, get them in the yards, go have a coffee, leave them for an hour, let them cool down. Obviously, that doesn't happen every day. Sometimes, you've got to just get in and get done. That happened to me this morning. I had to get a mob of cattle in, there was people coming to buy them so I had to draft them off straightaway. But me and my sister were there, and I just said, ‘We'll just take them calmly - we're taking it cool. Let him calm down.’”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah, it sounds great. Sounds like you got a really good system kind of going there. And can I just ask you, if an employee find something that or one of your contractors find something that's not safe? What's the process there? They let you know, how does that work?”

**Jim Conn:**

“Call me straightaway or as soon as they can. And, and I've run a calendar on my phone. So I'll write that down to fix this, or get that organised. So call me directly. And if it's if it's a major safety issue, I suppose we would record it. But we haven't really had that in the past and touch wood, we don't. But it's part of farming, I suppose and any business. Unfortunately, it does happen. But we just do the best we can to minimise it. So farming, it can be safe. It can. It's a very safe industry, as long as you stay on top of it and have your front foot forward. It's not that complex with the safety thing. Training, especially chainsaws, you know, we're big on staff going and doing a... we pay for them to do a chainsaw operating course. I did one when I did my apprenticeship, I think I just turned 16 at the time. And before then I'd operated chainsaws a few times and I'd thought these are a wild bit of kit. But then I did this safety, this safe chainsaw handling course and...and now, you know, I know how to fell these massive big pine trees and stuff through that course. And I can do it safely.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah, good. Good. Sounds like you're really kind of working through having people prepared for safety. You've got your plans in place. How's the conversations been with your parents on the farm? You know, obviously, it's a transition from your parents to you. What what's those conversations been like? They've been pretty supportive, or..?”

**Jim Conn:**

“Oh, absolutely. They've been very supportive. They've always been conscious of safety. I think they just haven't put it down into a booklet, like, I sorted out with Safe Farming Tasmania. I didn't know it was such a thing until Safe Farming Tasmania. We actually came over...we invited them to look at a brand new set of yards we built. Just wanted them to go through and look at is there any safety issues they can see with what we built? And then I said ‘Do you want to come around to my farm’...I'd just bought this farm and I can see there's a lot of hazards around. I'd love for you to come around, have a look.’ And they said ‘look, we can...we can do up a safety management plan and bring it back over, we'll sit down and talk about it. We'll go for a farm tour, we'll highlight some hazards, and we'll talk you through what you need to do.’ And it was great. And then I took that to my parents. So, it went from one booklet to now about seven or eight, possibly nine across various properties. Yeah, so, my parents have just loved it. And just said to me, this is despite my other roles, I also take on that sort of safety role, which I'm more than happy to do so, and it's not a difficult role at all. It's easy. It doesn't take up that much time to be safety conscious. And if there's a hazard you just get it fixed. Delegate and delegate, you know?”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“That sounds awesome, then. So I'm just going to pick away a little bit of what you've been talking about around culture. So obviously, communication – a key part of your kind of safety culture.”

**Jim Conn:**

“Absolutely. That's part of being a team player – communicate, so...”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah, making sure you get in and fix things up as soon as you can, and making people aware of that. I guess, putting the systems down on paper has been very valuable as part of your kind of safety culture. Reflecting the behaviors that you want to see, I guess it's been part of your culture. Anything else that I'm missing that you would like to talk about around your safety culture??”

**Jim Conn:**

“Keep it simple!”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Great one!”

**Jim Conn:**

“Yeah. Keep it simple. As soon as you make it too complex, I get confused myself. Keep it simple, because then everyone understands that it's easy to pass on. Chinese whispers probably doesn't become as much of a thing because it's simple. It's not that complex. Keep it simple. And whenever I get a question, I just call up the boys from, Safe Farming Tasmania, and I asked them and there's always that line of communication open. I know if there's a change in policy or, or something of that they they call me up, and they say, 'Look, this is....this has happened, this is a change, we're going to put this in your safety management plan or send it through.' I'll print it off, put in there and it's got to be simple. It has to be simple. You can't get everything done. Otherwise, you can't...that communication line will then die if it gets too complex.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah. And I like the conversation you've been having about training as well and making sure people are well prepared for the jobs that they're going to do and you're obviously, as you get people in check out what their skills are like and what they can or can't do and have those conversations as well, as you're talking about before. I'm just gonna flip quickly to the dairy stuff that you're doing down in Victoria, what are some of the hazards that you're seeing in the dairy industry there and, you know, what have you done to try and manage some of those?”

**Jim Conn:**

“Geez, that's a whole 'nother thing. As far as the Dairy industry, the biggest hazard like livestock are generally a lot more quieter in a dairy farm, rather than a beef farm. Probably fatigue in the dairy industry, fatigue. So, have enough staff, have a roster, be planning ahead and minimise risks of things being done last minute and rush, rush, rush, to try and get the cows in in time that afternoon. Another big thing - a lot of slippery surfaces. So, we're big on having either rubber matting down in our dairies or the backyards and the dairies, you know, they get...the concrete gets cut every couple of years, so cows aren't slipping over, as well as staff. Machinery has to be up to date - shafts on ptos, big thing, especially feeding out grain. And then you've got grain augers - guards on everything - got to be on everything. If there's a guard off, I don't go ripping people's heads off. But you know, point it out. Say 'that's, that's not right, that's got to be...it's gotta be fixed, shut it down. But obviously, it does get difficult at times. But that's where you can also just say to people, 'look, the guard on this auger is missing. Don't go near it, you know, and just mark it off with some tape or make sure everyone knows about it. We've got whiteboards in most of the dairies too. Each manager or share farmer - that's also up to them. But we've all got whiteboards and stuff, so you can write down if there's a hazard or jobs that need to be done. And I'd probably say fatigue is the biggest thing in the Dairy industry.”



**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah, that sounds interesting. And we've heard that come out with other industries as well. And obviously, there are key times in any industry, but sounds like proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance. And you're well on top of that as you work through. And I guess that's a key message to go out to everybody that it's easy to do. But you just got to be a little bit prepared and try and manage I guess the fatigue part of it and look after your workers as part of that process.”

**Jim Conn:**

“So absolutely, yeah, have rosters in place and things so they know what's coming up. They know when they're required, and they've got days off.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah. Awesome. So, any last messages that you'd like to give out about safety? It sounds that you'd like to have a Safe Farming Tasmania group everywhere across Australia. Sounds like they've been doing a great job.”

**Jim Conn:**

“They're awesome. They are awesome. Phil and Stu. They're great. Thanks, boys. Last measures, I'd probably just say, 'look, safety is easy'. It's not...it's not that hard. It's easy. Just keep on just keep on in front of it and keep communicating. Yeah. And it's so important. It doesn't just keep workers safe. It also drives profit, and it creates a happy, healthy work environment, you know. Who wants to go to work and not enjoy it? I love what I do. Fortunately, I love what I do. So, and safety is part of it. But it's not...It's not a hard thing. It's just what we do. And as I said, it's easy. Keep it simple.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Well, that sounds awesome. Keep it simple as a great message. Communication is key. I think you know, you're talking there also about staff retention, safety's part of that, which sounds really nice as well. So Jim, thank you very much for being on the podcast today. It's been really interesting talking about your safety experience and you know, what you've done and the way that you've kind of worked through it. If people would like more resources, they can certainly jump on farmsafe.org.au. Today's podcast is brought to you by Farmsafe Australia under funding from the Australian Government, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. Thanks very much for listening to Farmsafe Toolbox Talks. I'm your host Richard Franklin. I look forward to chatting to you in the future. Bye for now.”

**Voiceover:**

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