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**Farmsafe Toolbox Talks – Transcript of Podcast #13**

**'History of Farm Safety in Australia' with Lyn Fragar, Rural Safety and Health Alliance**

**Host: Dr Richard Franklin, James Cook University**

**Guest: Lyn Fragar from Rural Safety and Health Alliance**

**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:**

"Welcome to Farmsafe Toolbox Talks. 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. And today I'm here with Associate Professor Lyn Fragar, AO. Lyn's been around the safety area for a little while now, having started up AgHealth in Moree, and was an inaugural director. She was part of the group of people who set up Farmsafe Australia and was on its board for many years. She has developed a whole range of programs including managing farm safety and undertaken research across a whole spectrum of farm safety topics. She is currently the Independent Chair of the Rural Safety and Health Alliance, an alliance of eight agricultural research and development corporations. But she also comes from a farming background, having been on the farm, lived on a farm. But her major thing going through university was as a medico, which I think kicked off a lot of the work that Lyn did and led into the farm safety area, and she is currently tutoring and supporting the next generation of doctors. Hi, Lyn. Thanks very much for being here today."

**Lyn Fragar:**

"Good to be here, Richard."

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

"So, Lynn, how did you end up doing farm safety? What was the impetus for it?"

**Lyn Fragar:**

"Well, I'm a public health physician. That's my professional background. And I'd been appointed as medical superintendent to six small hospitals in Northwest New South Wales around Moree. So, my office was in Moree in Northwest New South Wales, the other hospitals extended across to Inverell, down to Narrabri, Wee Waa, that little clutch of hospitals. And this is back in the early 80s. And at that point, farm safety was not on anybody's agenda, really, at all. But as a medical superintendent, I was watching admission - hospital admissions, but also watching emergency department consultations across the hospitals and I was noticing that we had a large number of farmers come in with injury into our emergency departments and nobody had ever sort of looked at that before. So, I thought okay, we'd better

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have - I'd better have a bit more of a look at that. That's all well, it's that sort of a... fairly flows off the tongue quite easily now. But back then we have no way of even reporting farm injury. Injury Prevention wasn't a key discipline, even at that point it was in its infancy. And so, we had to sort of think about how to actually categorise the sorts of injuries that we were seeing. We weren't... they weren't just injuries, if we were just doing medically, you'd have fractures and, you know, strains and sprains and head injuries and stuff. But farmer? But what else would it say? Nothing. And so, we set about... I fortunately had folk - there were six hospitals that were very interested in working and I was able to put a research officer on briefly to just go and gather all the information for five years from each of those emergency departments. And then we... I sort of essentially had to make up a way of, of categorising as best I could using other... what we knew how other agencies were categorising agriculture. And then having some understanding about agricultural processes could then sort of, for each of those persons who came in if they were, they could categorise it by the sort of typical agent of injury. Whether they were animals, what sort of animals? If they were workshop tools, what sort of workshop tools? We had to essentially make that system up to be able to do it and you, Richard, will know that became the farm injury optimal data set. But back then we didn't know how to do it. And so, we set about doing that. And clearly, it was a big problem and the big issue that needed to be further taken forward. And we started to talk with local farmers in the Moree area about it. And then came Farmsafe 88, which was a conference and I was invited to present at it. The Farmsafe 88 Conference at the... UNE ran Farmsafe 88 Conference and that was the first time that anybody had focused nationally on farm safety issues and we presented that material and then it just all went from there."

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

"Yeah, interesting that your first delve into it was looking at the data. I mean, you know, we're talking 80s, the start of kind of computerisation. I'm sure a lot of it was still paper-based and needing to walk around and, and collect these sorts of things up. And, you know, for many of us, we don't think about how do you actually classify sort of farm injuries? And what sort of fields do you put them in? And it would have been I mean, I remember joining you sort of in the, in the mid-90s, and working on the data set, and still thinking about, well, what does this mean, and what does it look like? But really important kind of initial work, which I think has helped set us up into what we're doing today as part of it."

"Can I talk a little bit more about Farmsafe 88? Obviously, you weren't the only person that was concerned about sort of farm safety during the 80s, and it was popping up around the place. What was that like that sort of first conference around farm safety and what sort of people came along to it?"

**Lyn Fragar:**

"There were folk who came from the universities, but they hadn't really a lot of information to share. They were people who were doing some specific work in the areas of farm safety. I can't recall particular ones, but they were quite specific small areas of interest. There were... the National Farmers' Federation was there and this was the first time that they had had to confront the issue of the size of the injury problem. And Professor Webster at the University of New England had collated the data from the Workers Compensation Scheme in New South Wales and that was the first time that that had been presented to the industry as well. So, it was an interesting conference in that some of the... was quite a raw sort of conference, because some people were out of the industry, who hadn't had to think about - out of ag... ag industries, who hadn't had to think about... were quite reluctant to take on board that was a problem. Whereas others, and particularly other farmers, and other interested in, I think in terms of John Dawson from Victoria, saw it immediately as something that needed to be addressed. And so, it was a real quite a watershed conference in terms of the first time the issue of farm safety was actually before both the industry, the policy... policymakers and the research agencies."

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“So, how then did Farmsafe come out of that? I mean, obviously, the conference raised a whole lot of issues. And yeah, we've got people that do and don't want it. So where did Farmsafe come from? And how did it end up coming into being?”

**Lyn Fragar:**

“Well, again, I'm sorry, you're asking an old lady to tell stories and that oftentimes, its long winded! We had the conference, the report was written, and it's in a nice, thick book, the report that everybody did. But then I was asked to look more specifically at tractor injuries. And so, we pulled out more information that we could about tractor injuries presenting to hospitals, and I could, at that point, access New South Wales Hospital data. And we pulled out from workers comp data as well. And we ran a Tractor Safety Conference in Orange. And we had a smaller group than was at Farmsafe Australia, but a group of people who were very interested and out of that the conference made some recommendations and I can remember standing in front trying to coll... of the... of the conference, trying to collate the... the recommendations that came through. And at that point, we knew that other countries were putting safety frames on tractors and we weren't. We didn't have that as a requirement. Here in Australia, there were things that were happening overseas that weren't happening here that we saw needed to be done. And there were a whole range of recommendations that the conference wanted to make and I was there sort of thinking, we've got these recommendations being made, but who are we making them to? And who is making the recommendations? And some, I was literally sort of grappling in my mind, what are we going to do with this... with this information? And out of that, because we had some key industry leaders there, as well as key government people out of that conference...that little...little working group was made and eventually set up Farmsafe Australia, and that was the body then was able to speak for the ag industry and others and take information to the various government agencies at state level and federal level to have a voice.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah, interesting that it came out of the ROPS or the rollover protection structures sort of stuff and tractors. And I mean, for me, I think that's been one of Australia's greatest success stories is dealing with kind of tractor rollovers. What...what would you consider to be one of your great success stories out of your many years in farm safety?”

**Lyn Fragar:**

“That would be the absolute biggest success in that we saw before and after. We had data about tractor injuries and for quite a... and deaths for tractor rollovers, as well as tractor runovers...people being in front of the rear wheel and... or in front of a tractor and being rolled and crushed. But the big one was tractors rolling over. And we had state laws that could have been implemented, but the states were not implementing laws about safety... rollover protection. But what happened was out of the moves by Farmsafe Australia, Farmsafe Victoria made a resolution that it put to, and the Victorian Farmers Federation put a resolution to the Victorian Work Safety authority, that they wish to have a subsidy associated with retro-fitment of safety frames with a view that after a period of amnesty, then they would not be resisting enforcement of the laws that already existed to ensure that farmers or people who...people with tractors, actually had to have a safety frame or rollover protective structure. And so that occurred in Victoria, I think they really took the lead. Victoria was... provided a wonderful lead that other states then followed on. And we saw a dramatic decline over three years with that process in tractor rollover deaths. There are other things that weren't so easily measurable. I think we saw some very good improvements in safety practice with chemical handling, but they were not so measurable, but we were

aware that the industry...like the cotton industry and others, really raised their game in terms of safety measures associated with their use of...of farm chemicals.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah, it's interesting isn't it? I mean the tractor one is a really good example of good...good evidence base. Yeah, really constructive collaboration between industry and agriculture and government and the researchers to kind of bring that all together, you know, the subsidies program, which was excellent. And, you know, flowed from Victoria, I think, to most other states and territories was, was really beneficial. And I think it is one of the challenges that I'd like to... kind of thought before about. Well, where do you make recommendations go to? And I think one of the things that I do want to impress on those that hopefully listen to the podcast is if you do have a safety issue, that Farmsafe is a good spot to kind of raise that issue and think about how you bring people into the tent to kind of deal with it.”

“I know we also did a lot of work around child safety and unfortunately, I don't think we've had the same impact in the child safety spaces we did with tractors. I think that's probably one of the areas we need to continue working in. But are there any other areas that you're thinking about, that we kind of need to work on and do more working from a farm safety perspective?”

**Lyn Fragar:**

“Obviously, the quad bikes have been topical, in the last few years with the changing legislation. And that has come from years of work being undertaken by personnel of the AgHealth Unit, where we first started to gather the data about quad rollovers and deaths from quad bikes and for both adults and children. That negotiation has had to...has been ongoing for many years. It's involved courts, it's been...involved making representations to Commission's...a whole lot of agencies, a lot of manufacturer resistance earlier, and I think, perhaps even some at the moment that it's had to overcome. But Farmsafe again, has been...has provided a steady hand and a supporting hand and role in that. And I think what you're saying about the value of Farmsafe is that it's leadership come... there's been good people working like yourself and others in that it's leadership actually comes from...from the agriculturalists themselves. It's not saying that every farmer wants to be a leader in farm safety, but there've been very strong leaders out of agriculture that have I think, shown us a good pathway forward.”

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Yeah. I mean, I'd agree with you there. Thinking back of the people that we've had, both on the committees as well as Chairing have been fantastic. And I think the other thing, you know, you talked about the quad bikes is that, yeah, we do need to move with the evidence, right? I mean, I remember early on we had the three wheeled kind of, obviously not a quad bike, but the three wheeled bike, which was super dangerous. And, yeah, we did some work there and they kind of left the market. And then when the quad bikes came in, we saw a few little early things with them rolling over, but the early evidence was putting any extra weight on would cause them to do more rolling. We've then got better evidence and I think this is a real challenge as we kind of think about safety is...if we do need to take this evidence-based approach, and certainly, you know, that's one of the things that we worked with, at AgHealth there, and trying to make sure that we had kind of the evidence to meet the need of the questions that will come up. And I think for me, you know, talking about quad bikes, I still think that there's a real challenge around helmets, you know, getting the helmets right. That the weight of them, the...the heat of them, you know, understanding that sort of space as well, I think is, is sort of challenging.”

"I think the other thing that I just did want to pick your brain on, Lyn, was some of the work that you did in trying to embed safety in...in the training, you know? You're working with the TAFES and working with the competencies. Can you talk me a little bit through how that went and the conversations that kind of made that happen in the background?"

**Lyn Fragar:**

"Well, again, there was no one big sort of breakthrough in that it was an ongoing discussion with training organizations, not..., the TAFES clearly were the big ones, getting on their agendas. But also working with Universities who were doing rural studies, like farming, agricultural studies, trying to ensure that they themselves were putting into place the principles of managing farm safety on their own university farms. And it's been quite, it's been good. My daughter is actually doing some other agricultural research, not in farm safety, but it's good to hear her in Western Australia on the university farms, sort of see all the safety precautions now, that are just routine, that were not at all routine on university farms before that. So, it's been...it was just a bit of a slog, continuing to...to work with the TAFES, and to make sure that...that safety, in accordance with the practical safety measures that we were identifying, that were being identified with and by farmers as solutions to, as effective solutions, were actually incorporated."

**Dr Richard Franklin:**

"Yeah, I'm glad you kind of mentioned that ongoing kind of work. And I guess, you know, that's partly what the Rural Safety and Health Alliance is up to, is to try and continue that work as it brings the different RDC's together. You're the Independent Chair of that, what...what....what's the....what are they up to at the moment? And what does your role look like from an Independent Chair?"

**Lyn Fragar:**

"Yes, so So eight of the Rural Research and Development Corporations, they're jointly government and industry fee funded research arms of different industry bodies, have come together and they have recognised that if each...each recognised that they needed to have some investment in the...in farm health and safety issues, but if they tried to do it independently; one, there could be a lot of overlap and duplication if they were all doing the priority ones, but the other is that the, the economies of scale are just not there. And so, by coming together and jointly investing in a health and safety research program, they could identify key priorities and...and enjoy the joint benefits from that and have consistency of outcomes that would be valuable. Similarly, they could work with Farmsafe Australia - align their work with priorities of Farmsafe Australia, and NFF, that has set goals and targets for safety itself now. And just to see things like that happen, for me, is just a delight. So, it has come together that there are a number of priorities that it has worked on. It's worked on communication in the past before I took on the Chair of it. At the moment, it's working on mobile plant safety...on mobile plant and then looking at what are the critical changes that...that now need to happen with what...what we know now and what people are doing now with mobile plant and machinery. And then the other one is trying to set in place to ensure a sustainable farm injury data management center or rule or collection that...that...that isn't subject so much to the vagaries of, you know, a funding that might finish in a couple of years' time and what can you do with that? And that was the way AgHealth always was, always working with sort of small chunks of funding that...that came on in but no, no likelihood of enduring funding for it."



**Dr Richard Franklin:**

“Well, that's all we've got time for. It's always wonderful to talk to you, Lyn, and I'm sure we could come back and have another chat about other things that happened and some of the anecdotes that you would have from your travels around Australia spreading the word on farm safety. Really a big thank you for being here today and being part of the podcast and for all the work that you have done over the years and continue to do in the safety area. Remember, for those that are listening, if you want to know more about farm safety, please visit [farmsafe.org.au](https://farmsafe.org.au) And today's podcast is brought to you by Farmsafe Australia under funding from the Australian Government, Department for Agricultural, Water and the Environment. Thank you very much for listening to Farmsafe Toolbox Talks. I look forward to chatting to you in the future. I'm your host Richard Franklin. Bye for now.”

**Voiceover:**

“This has been a Farmsafe Toolbox Talks podcast with your host Richard Franklin, brought to you by Farmsafe Australia.”