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Australian Farmers need to ‘clock off’ to save lives

The average Australian farmer is aged 52. They are working longer days, failing to get enough sleep and can have up to four jobs on the go at any one time. Tragically, this scenario has contributed to 131 life-threatening injuries and 58 fatalities on Australian farms in 2020¹.

Prompted by National Farm Safety Week which launched on Sunday, Farmsafe Australia is calling on communities to take greater responsibility in promoting health and safety issues in all rural communities.

This year’s campaign highlights the health and safety issues that are most prevalent throughout the life of a farmer – from the age of 2 through to 92. Farmsafe Australia has a particular focus on those middle-aged Australians, better known as Generation X, who are independent, hard-working, self-reliant, and leading the way in agricultural production.

This generation relentlessly drives for productivity and efficiency, yet frequently positions mental and physical well-being towards the end of the priority list, as farmers focus on the jobs that ‘just need to get done.’

Charles Armstrong, Chair at Farmsafe Australia says our rural communities must be more determined to improve the well-being of Australian farmers and argues remodeling outdated health and safety practices is the first step to achieving this.

“Farm work exists 24 hours a day, seven days a week and clocking off can seem not to be an option for those trying to support their families and build upon their family’s heritage. We know that keeping up with the demands of labour intensive work can tempt farmers to cut corners to get a job done quicker, leaving little time for safety, and even less time for self-care. This can have devastating consequences for farmers, their families and their businesses.”

Farmsafe Australia says fatigue and labour-heavy work make for a high-risk combination, and all farmers must recognise when these factors are at play. It recommends farmers commit to regular checkups with General Practitioners, exercise more frequently, search for ways to eat healthy and prioritise a greater balance between work and lifestyle commitments.

31 to 55-year old farmers have an essential role to play in influencing both older and younger generations and Mr Armstrong stresses the importance of generational change, beginning with the role models on the farm.

“As a community we have so much to be proud of, but we must take greater responsibility when it comes to our practices and safety standards. We also must take the opportunity to slow down occasionally, looking after our own well-being. By being careless or cutting corners, we risk neglecting our own mental and physical health and can set a poor example for the next generation. Ultimately, it is up to us all to look after ourselves and each other,” said Mr Armstrong.

For more information on farm safe practices visit www.farmsafe.org.au.

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¹ [AgriFutures National Rural Issues Report, 2020](#)

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