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Farmsafe Toolbox Talks – Transcript of Podcast #5

'We Are Not That Different – Child Safety USA and Australia' with Dr. Marsha Salzwedel

Host: Dr Richard Franklin, James Cook University

Guest: Dr. Marsha Salzwedel from the National Children's Center for Agricultural Health and Safety in the US

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, a podcast series focusing on farm culture leading to a healthier and safer working, living and playing environment. 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 I'm very excited to be here today talking to Dr. Marsha Salzwedel from the National Children's Center for Agricultural Health and Safety in the US, about child safety on farms - the similarities or differences, what they've been up to over the last few years."

"And this follows on with a workshop that we did in Adelaide and we're really going to, kind of I think, delve a little bit more into what we can do around child safety."

"The other thing that's exciting - it's been 25 years since the National Children's Center first came into being and they've been working towards keeping children safe on farms for that period of time. Their mission is to enhance the health and safety of all children, to hazards associated with agricultural work and the rural environment."

"For me, there've been a couple of major pieces of work that I think the Centre has really done that have shaped the way that we're working in that space and keeping children safe. The first one was the safe play area. And it was really interesting that came out, you know, probably one of the first activities actually out of the Centre. And we've taken it over here in Australia. And it's been a really, I think, a very simple idea, but just a great way of trying to keep people and particularly children safe on farms."

"The other one, which I really like, and Marsha and I've talked about this before, is this kind of work development, age development thing around children. And I think it's really important to think about, you know, what can children do at what level? I know with my kids, who have been bugging me to do things that that they probably shouldn't be doing, and so again, being able to kind of think about what should I look for when I'm letting children do what they can do on the farms?"

Committed to keeping you safer on Australian Farms

“They've been heavily involved in developing action plans, exploring childcare, which I think is another topic that we need to tackle a little bit more here in Australia, the agri tourism one, which I hope we get to talk a little bit more about Marsha, as well, and the list goes on.”

“So, it's been a really productive Centre. And they continue on, which is great. And so look, we've talked about child safety before on the podcast, and I guess the question that I have for you as we kick off was, what's the difference between Australia and the US around this child safety issue as we, we kind of looked into it?”

Dr Marsha Salzwedel:

“So, it was it was interesting and it was really enjoyable to put the workshop together because it gave me that chance to look at what's happening in the US, what's happening in Australia, and really do a direct comparison. And the similarities were phenomenal. I mean, it was almost shocking to me just how similar things were - the rates were very similar.”

“You know, the challenges that are faced by the Australian parents and work supervisors and the US ones are pretty much the same. Everything seemed to be really, really similar. About the only - even the causes of the injuries and illnesses and stuff were very similar - the only thing that I saw that was really different is that there was a little bit more injury due to motorcycles in Australia versus the US. But otherwise, you know, tractors and quads or ATVs and drowning and all of that was so you know those causes and those, those issues were the same.”

Dr Richard Franklin:

“Very interesting. Look, we should back up How was your trip to Australia? Did you enjoy being over here and hopefully got a bit of warmer weather?”

Dr Marsha Salzwedel:

“Oh, it was wonderful. I really enjoyed it. I have never been to Australia before. So, it was the first time for me and it was just beautiful. You have a beautiful country over there. And of course, then I got to come back to the US into the snow and the ice and everything else in the much colder temperatures at zero or below. So definitely was hard to leave Australia and I would love to come back again, someday. Spend more time just visiting.”

Dr Richard Franklin:

“We would love to have you back and hopefully get you to see a bit, little bit more of the agriculture that goes on here.”
“So, with the workshop that you put on at the World Safety Conference, what were you aiming to achieve out of that workshop? And it was great to have you here! But what was the point of it?”

Dr Marsha Salzwedel:

“Well, you know, for there was a couple of purposes for the workshop for us. One of them was to do that comparison between the United States and Australia. And then in the workshop, we had people there from Sweden and a couple of other countries as well. And so we were kind of able to gather a little bit of information from all these different areas and just kind of learn about what the challenges are and what the issues are and what the concerns are in all of these different areas around the country. Or excuse me around the world, and actually, from country to country, they were very, very

similar. It was really rather surprising that it seemed like no matter who you were talking to, from what country, that those same themes were coming through.”

“But then the other piece for us, and hopefully for you as well, was to kind of share information, you know, from country to country, and build some networks and build some future... some potential for future collaboration, so that we can continue to share that type of information, and to educate each other on how, you know, what the issues are and what the possible solutions are.”

“Because so many times we see people that are coming up with the same solution, and then realize that somebody else has already done that work. So, let's share those solutions and not recreate all those wheels, so to speak. So really, it was a great opportunity to accomplish all of that. And I think we did.”

Dr Richard Franklin:

“Yeah, look, I really enjoyed the workshop. And I think one of the things that I do like, working with your Centre in particular, is that it's not a culture of saying no, you know? No children on farms, no children working on farms, which we often hear, you know? Why did this happen? Why was the child even on the farm in that, in that workplace or working there in that situation? And I think that's the real challenge for us is to provide kids with a safe environment that they can grow up and enjoy the farm and learn from it. And then that they can go on and I guess, hopefully continue on the farm, if that's what they want to do, as part of that process.”

“So, you know, we talked a little bit before about some of the challenges. But can we go into a little bit more about what are the challenges for parents around keeping their children safe on farms?”

Marsha Salzwedel:

“Well certainly. So, you know, just to kind of reinforce a little bit of what you were saying, there are some really great benefits to having kids grow up on farms, you know, everything from teaching them responsibility, and they develop good work ethics. And it's a, as a kid who grew up on a farm, it's a wonderful place to grow up. All the fresh air and the animals and we had the coolest pets around!”

“But that, to go with all of that, of course, as you mentioned, comes these challenges. And so, one of the biggest challenges that most of the parents are facing is we want our kids to grow up, we want our kids to reap all these benefits. But we want them to be able to do it safely. We don't want them to get injured. So, you know, whether you're in Australia, whether you're in the United States, whether you're in Sweden, or one of those other countries, agriculture is one of the most dangerous industries in the most dangerous worksites that there is out there. But it's also the place where families live. So, it's not just a worksite, but it's also a home.”

“And so the question is, is how can you address some of those hazards and some of those dangers that you're seeing in that area, to keep those kids safe? And that's probably the biggest challenge that most parents worry about, and that they have is, we want our kids to be able to grow up here, but we want them to be able to be safe while they're here. And there are a lot of hazards in the agricultural environment.”

Dr Richard Franklin:

“I think it's it is a real challenge for parents and I was talking before about getting that balance right, between, you know, experiential learning and keeping them safe and, you know, helping them grow as a person and being like, often they want to be involved, like, you know.”

“People, people think, ‘Oh, why are you forcing your kids to work?’ but I know when I go to, to the grandparents, my kids are out straightaway, they're wanting to help, they're wanting to jump on equipment, they're, you know, they want to be with the grandparent. We're not on a farm, but - but they love it, you know, and, and I can just see with other families as well, that similar sort of thing happening with my sister-in-law and - and others.”

“So, what advice have you got for parents about how you navigate this kind of challenge around helping them develop and grow, but also keeping them safe?”

Marsha Salzwedel:

“So, I think one of...the piece of advice that I have is to, if they have an opportunity to learn more about it. So, and I'm going to just share a little bit of a story, when I started at the Farm Centre, I grew up on a farm, we still have part of the farm have kids that, you know, we...we raised on the farm with with the parents and the grandparents, you know, four or five generation farm now.”

“And until I started at the Farm Centre, I wasn't aware of just how dangerous this worksite could be, or this home site, if you prefer, could be. And I think that that's very common with a lot of parents that are out there. And even with some of the supervisors that are out there, is that people just don't really always realize that this is a really dangerous worksite.”

“And a lot of the farmer parents that I talked to don't realize that agriculture is one of the most dangerous worksites in the world. And so, part of it is just to kind of raise that awareness. But then there's also a little bit of a sense, I think, with a lot of parents and we've seen this not just in the United States, but in other countries as well, where they feel like these types of things happen to other people. It doesn't happen to me, it doesn't happen to my kids. And then when you talk to people that have had a serious injury to one of the children - or have lost a child - they'll say they thought the same thing, until it happened to them.”

“And so sometimes the big challenge is just to get parents to understand how truly dangerous this is. And to, to, you know, to fix those perceptions. So, to say that this does happen to us, and it's relatively more common than what most parents think. And then, of course, to give them the tools that they need, in order to safeguard their children is important as well.”

Dr Richard Franklin:

“Yeah, I totally agree with that. I think the other thing that we often forget is the perspective of the child. So, you know, we're now adults, we're, we're grown up. But if you get down on your knees, or, you know, and look at it from where they're looking at it, it's a much different kind of view that children have when they look at the farm, and they look at what's going on. And those hazards... I mean, yeah, you talked about quad bikes before and certainly, it's one of our great challenges here in Australia at the moment. And we're often seeing very young children on kind of the quad bike, because it's got four wheels that looks reasonably safe, but they don't necessarily have the weight, nor the cognitive skills to kind of be driving it. And so, I think it is that, that challenge, and we do look, to be honest, you know, it's kind of a human

nature, right to try and ignore some of those hazards. Otherwise, we might not get out of bed in the morning, if we were constantly worried about, you know, not making it home. “

“But-but, I think it is about putting those strategies in place, as you say, and thinking about how we can ensure that everybody on the farm is safe, particularly sort of the children. I think the other thing that I really liked about the workshop that I'm going to delve into is some of the myths. You've talked about one of them about, you know, this, ‘it's not gonna happen to me’ and that the farm is safe. But what are some of the other myths that you're... you're dealing with and help to kind of raise the awareness around child safety on farms?”

Marsha Salzwedel:

“So one of the big myths that we battle all the time is that I have to take my young children out for tractor rides, or I have to take them out into the farm worksite and show them what's going on in order to get them interested and around big dangerous equipment while the equipment is operating, and that type of thing and take them for rides on tractors. Because if I don't give my child a ride on a tractor when they're little, they're not going to be interested in farming when they grow up. And we know that's not necessarily true, we know that there are lots of children out there who didn't grow up on farms, and who never rode a tractor until they started working on a farm and or owned their own farm.”

“And we do know, there's lots of ways you can foster that interest safely. You can, you know, there's toys that you can share with kids, with the younger children. There's lots of sandbox toys, and different things like that, as the kids grow, there's video games that are out there. There's some of those like Farm Simulator, and some of those video games are just fantastic, and a lot of fun. And then there's also gardens. So, for younger children, and even some of the kids that are like 10-12 years old, a garden is a great place for kids to learn about how things grow and the growing cycle and soil and all that type of stuff. But it's still a very safe environment for them compared to taking them out into the field around that big, dangerous equipment.”

“So, there are alternatives to some of those myths. And, but that's probably one of the biggest myths that we deal with is that we have to give our kids rides on the tractor because we got to get them interested in farming at a young age. And there are there...are better ways to do that.”

Dr Richard Franklin:

“Yeah, that's very interesting, isn't it? I mean, we see a similar sort of problem with people taking them into the workplace.”

“For me, one of the big challenges is the group that kind of say, ‘Oh, well, they've got to be there with me while I'm working and, you know, plowing and harvesting,’ and, you know, doing those sorts of things that they get up to, but you know, your attention is diverted, you know, and this is one of the things that we try and say to people, you've only got a limited amount of attention and supervision is actually a key issue of keeping children safe on farms.”

“And, you know, if you're doing a job, then you're not supervising children fully. And so therefore, your attention is split. And so again, you know, I would say with the tractor stuff, absolutely no, if there's anything to do with work, they should not be there as part of it. If you wanted to have them in a safe thing and wanted to go a little drive, you know, where that's the only thing that you're doing, or that tractor is shut down totally, then consider it. But again, make sure that that's the whole thing that you're doing. You're there supervising them and that's the main activity.”

“But it brings me to one of the other things that I know you've been kind of talking about around childcare. Tell me about how does it work in the US? And what are some of the challenges that you're finding there? Maybe some of the solutions?”

Marsha Salzwedel:

“So, childcare in the United States is pretty much just the parents' responsibility. So, the parents have to find their own childcare, they have to pay for their own childcare. There's a few credits with the government, tax wise that they can sometimes get, but, but overall, it's pretty much up to the parents and their responsibility, which creates some pretty big challenges because when you get out into rural areas in the United States, childcare isn't always available. There's not always childcare centres out there where you can take your children and even if there is, they might be a long ways away, so the distance to get to them and the time to get to them can be very, very prohibitive. Or they might not match the hours. You know, in harvest season and planting season, the farmers like to get up and start work at the crack of dawn and oftentimes work until dark or well after dark. And a lot of daycares here in the US, and I'm assuming in other countries as well, just don't have those types of hours available.”

“And so it creates some really big challenges for farm parents when they're trying to find childcare for their children, because your typical daycare centre or childcare centre is just not always a good fit. So, we have some strategies we recommend to work around that. You know, as far as like we see some co-ops where farm families will get together and a couple of the adults will watch the children while the other adults work. And then they'll rotate through and work on different people's farms, while different people watch the children. You know, we see them hiring neighbourhood teens or grandparents. So, there are strategies and ways that they're working around it, but it's definitely a challenge here. And it's something that our Centre is trying to work on.”

“I'm guessing it's probably pretty similar by you, or at least some of the challenges.”

Dr Richard Franklin:

“Oh, absolutely! No, we definitely have some of the same challenges. And I think one of the things for me is that, you know, once upon a time, if you thought about the intergenerational farm, you know, you - you had children from birth through to, to young adult into their adulthood, which could, as you say, be kind of childcare workers. And then you had often aunts and uncles on the farms and grandparents as well.”

“But as we've become more corporatised, and, you know, there's less of that intergenerational, you know, large child cohorts, I guess, it certainly has become more challenging. And I think it's one of the areas.”

“The other thing that we're seeing as well, in that kind of preschool space is the early, early education activities coming in as well. And, you know, trying to ensure that your child gets the best start in life. And that then throws challenges up as well, in what does that look like for those that are not attending that? And how do you integrate some of the great activities like collecting the eggs and, you know, feeding the dogs and think about some of those responsibilities that we were talking about before?”

“So yeah, I think it's - it's a challenge that we haven't resolved yet. We will kind of see how it, how it plays out over the next - next little bit.”



“So, what brought you to farm safety? I mean, you talked about growing up on the farm, but and I noticed that this is, you know, you didn't start off doing this straight out of school or anything. So, what was your journey to getting into this space?”

Marsha Salzwedel:

“So, I decided to go back to school and work on a master's degree about, well, probably close to 20 years ago now. And at that point in time, I am very interested in outreach, I always have been very interested in education. And of course, with growing up on the farm, the agriculture is kind of a natural fit as well. And I had anticipated that I was going to work in the laboratory, which is where I was working in a healthcare facility at the time. And just a couple months before I graduated, they shut down the program, the educational program that I thought I was going to be working in.”

“And so, when I started looking around, I saw this physician at the National Farm Medicine Centre with the Children's Centre focus on it. And given the fact that I had grown up on a farm and had the strong interest in agriculture, but also was very interested in education and outreach, it seemed like a really good fit. And so, I applied for and got the position, and I've been here ever since. And it's been it's been great, I love it.”

Dr Richard Franklin:

“That's great. It's always for me interesting, people's journey into the safety space. I don't think we ever grow up at school going ‘Oh, I'm going to be a be a person working in safety and doing those sorts of activities’. So great to hear that you've been able to bring both your background and your passion to, to the work. And it's always good to have educational specialists helping us, guide us on the journey around how we do that.”

“Is there any last words that you say to people about keeping the children safe on farms before we finish up?”

Marsha Salzwedel:

“You know, there's just some really basic strategies that we always try to offer out to people. And one of them is we've kind of already talked about is to make sure that you keep those young children out of that worksite and keep them off of that equipment as much as possible. But another key strategy that we like to communicate to people is when those kids grow, they can start working. You know, as you mentioned before our Centre is a big proponent of having children and youth on farms. And as those kids grow as those children grow, then it's time for them to, and you feel it's time for them to start doing work on the farm, just make sure that you assess those children and their abilities and their personality characteristics and then match those abilities to any task that you're going to do.

“Because the research tells us that a good share of the injuries in the deaths that we're seeing on farms in our youth, are due to a mismatch between the ability of a child to do a task and the tasks that they're assigned. And so if we can get parents to actually take a look at their child and do an honest assessment of their abilities, and then match that to the tasks that they want the child to do, then we know and provide adequate supervision, of course, once they're doing the task, but then we know that that child can do that task safely. And it greatly reduces the likelihood of an injury or fatality. And so those are two big strategies that we always push forward to people is, you know, keep those young kids out of that worksite and off that equipment, especially when you're working. And make sure that when you do start assigning tasks to youth that they have the ability to do that job safely.”



Dr Richard Franklin:

“Well, thank you very much, Marsha, for being on the podcast today and giving us some really great advice there to kind of finish up on. I just want to say a big thank you for the comparison work that you're doing. Keep it up. If people want to know more about how to keep their children safe on farms, please go to farmsafe.org.au.”

“And today's podcast is brought to you by Farmsafe Australia, under funding from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.”

“Thank you very much, Marsha. Thank you, everybody for listening. That's the talk for today. I'm your host Richard Franklin. I look forward to chatting to you in the future. Bye for now.”

Voiceover:

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