

Safer Farms 2021

Agricultural Injury and Fatality

TREND REPORT

Safer Farms, Safer Farmers



Farmsafe
AUSTRALIA

Message from the Chair

Charles Armstrong



They say hindsight is 2020 and what a year it is to look back on.

Unfortunately, quad bike incidents were again topping the safety issues, with a total of 14 on farm fatalities. We are pleased to see our numbers relatively low for the first 6 months of 2021 but any death on farm is still one too many.

With the quad bike roll over protection standard set to take effect in October, this year will hopefully be the beginning of significant decreases in quad bike fatalities. We won't know the impact that this standard will have until we have enough data to note identifiable trends, but I am optimistic that we will now have safer quad bikes on the market.

In March this year, Farmsafe Australia released the National Farm Safety Education Fund Strategy, a key achievement under the three years of Federal funding we received from the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

In the past, Farmsafe Australia has provided educational resources, awareness campaigns and advocacy around issues-based safety programs and improvements to try to reduce the injury and fatality rates on farm. However, this Strategy allows us to set the agenda for the next ten years of programs, so that we can make a significant impact, not just on the statistics, but on the entire culture of farm safety in Australia.

The Minister for Agriculture has opened up another round of funding under the National Farm Safety Education Fund, and \$1.6M has been allocated for projects that aim to deliver on key components of the Strategy. Two of the five impact opportunities were chosen for funding:

- investing in the next generation of farmers (child safety) and;
- investing in industry endorsed training and continued learning.

On average over the last 10 years, 15% of fatalities on farm have been children. This funding will provide us with the opportunity to tailor farm safety programs, educational material and safety campaigns for our next generation of farmers.

We also need to improve our efforts on farm to teach and train our employees. Agriculture is a great career choice but we are struggling to attract a skilled and permanent workforce. Not only does this make it difficult to run our businesses productively, it makes it nearly impossible to run them safely. We push ourselves to our absolute limits and that isn't good for our bodies, our minds, or our bottom lines.

Very soon, we will know which projects will have funds injected into them and we will be able to monitor the impacts of their implementation over the next few years. Progress will be detailed in future iterations of the Safer Farms Report.

We are grateful to the Government for the opportunities that have been provided to us through the National Farm Safety Education Fund. Investment in farm safety is critical and we will be focusing on bringing more partners into the mix to ensure that resources are available for further investment in safety projects. But it isn't just the Government and corporate stakeholders that have an obligation to invest in farm safety.

Our farmers need to make a commitment to invest in themselves as well.

I understand that we walk a tightrope when it comes to making decisions about what to spend money on in our farm businesses. We have many competing priorities between environmental sustainability, animal welfare, machinery upgrades, new infrastructure, etc.

I want to be very clear – sometimes making a decision to invest in animal welfare outcomes is also an investment in safety – that vaccination you just gave your cattle? It protects you too! That new tractor you bought – it has updated safety features in it.

Investing in safety doesn't always have to be in addition to other business investments. We need to change our mindsets from seeing safety as an optional extra to seeing safety as the foundation that all our other business decisions are made from.



Message from the EO

Stevi Howdle

It's been an interesting year, to say the least.

I have had a brief window from March-June to engage at a number of industry events such as Beef Week in Rockhampton, NT Food Futures Forum in Darwin, Hort Connections in Brisbane and a handful of the National Farmers' Federation Towards 2030 Forums (Darwin, Roma, and Launceston). The border restrictions in different states have meant some opportunities have been postponed, but I am planning to be out more regularly again as restrictions lift.

I have enjoyed every second of getting to speak to farmers across Australia about what we can do better to support them.

But we've discovered a few challenges.

Farmers are very clear about the importance of farm safety on their farms. But nearly every one of them has said that they don't have time to read guidance materials (or that if they aren't specific to their farm, it isn't worth their time), they don't get much value out of current training courses and they don't trust the organisations that deliver information to them.

So, I think it is important to use this issue of the Safer Farms Report to clear up a few misconceptions about who

we are and why we are so passionate about on farm safety. The Farmsafe Australia network grew out the establishment of a number of locally based farm safety action groups and state Farmsafe Committees in the late 1980's. We have recently had an injection of grant funding from the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment thanks to the advocacy of the National Farmers' Federation. We work with and for farmers and connect people across industries to advocate for industry programs and work together to make our farms safer. Our key objective is raising the profile of safety on farms understanding better why farms are consistently one of the top three industries for workplace deaths in Australia. We want to work collaboratively with farmers and others to try to reduce these deaths.

We are not the regulator and we are not a safety consultant. We are 100% not-for-profit.

Many of us are farmers ourselves. Those that aren't are still really passionate about agriculture and Australian farming. That means our motivation is not just seeing farmers survive, it's seeing them thrive.

Obviously, we advocate for safer equipment and tools that will hopefully make the farming environment safer but for the most part, we are trying to influence the thinking of the farmer to instil a 'safety first' mentality. We are well aware that most of the tools and machinery that are used on farm, coupled with the environment and the livestock, make for a highly dangerous worksite. However, the thinking and subsequent work practices of those who live and work on farm can have a major impact on safety outcomes.

We know that fatigue often plays a part in injury and fatality. We also know that mental stressors such as financial strain, drought, labour shortages and family drama can take our minds off the job at hand, putting us at even greater risk.

So because we are all human, our approach is two pronged – Safer Farms, Safer Farmers.

And that's what we are about – that's it. Promise.

Snapshot

We are currently tracking much better in 2021 than we were at this stage of 2020 when 33 fatalities had already been reported. Although it's much too early to claim a downward trend or analyse the why, we will definitely celebrate the current milestone and continue to keep farmers aware and engaged with a **safety first** mindset.

The following data has been collected from the information provided by AgHealth Australia and their Australian Farm Deaths and Injuries Media Monitors Snapshot.*

2019 Statistics



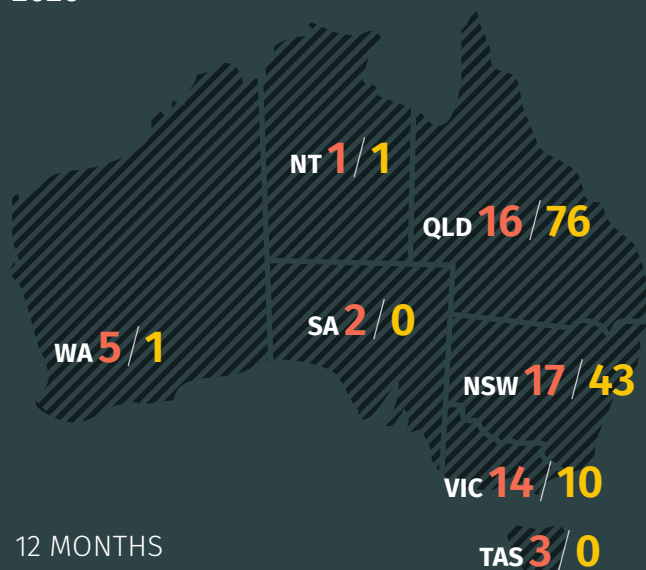
**FATALITIES
TOTAL 58**



**NON – FATAL INJURIES
TOTAL 133**

Injury and fatality statistics were nearly identical between 2019 and 2020.

2020



12 MONTHS

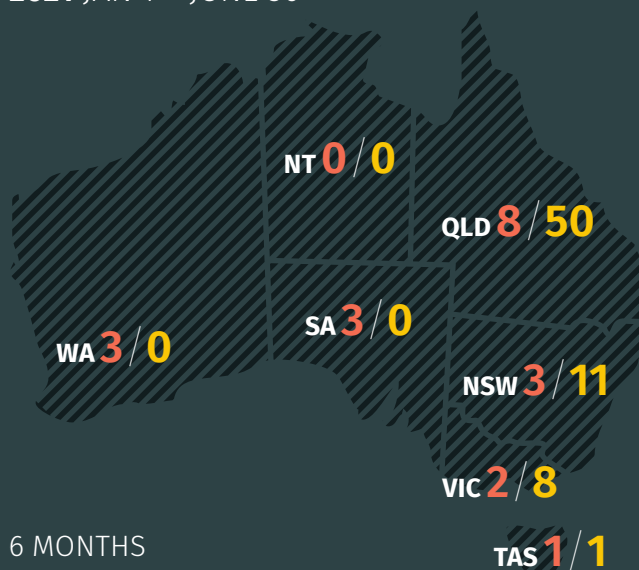


**FATALITIES
TOTAL 58**



**NON – FATAL INJURIES
TOTAL 131**

2021 JAN 1 – JUNE 30



6 MONTHS



**FATALITIES
TOTAL 20**



**NON – FATAL INJURIES
TOTAL 70**

Why do we use AgHealth Australia data in this report?

When the 2020 report was released, reference was made to minor reporting discrepancies between AgHealth Australia data and Safe Work Australia data.

AgHealth Australia data is a **snapshot** of the most current data that we have available to us mid-year when the Safer Farms Report is released. It is also based on **all** injuries and fatalities on farm that are reported in the media, not just work-related ones. This is important because Farmsafe Australia deals with both.

Workers' Compensation data, which Safe Work Australia uses to compile their statistics and reports, is not available in the timeframes that we require it and only captures work-related incidents.

AgHealth Australia understand that their numbers may change (mainly increase) once queries are run in the National Coronial Information System and cases close. Each year we update the information in this report and as such the numbers provided are accurate at the time of publication and subject to change.

Snapshot

2020 Statistics



82.8%

FATALITIES ARE MALE

62.1% **OVER**
45 YEARS OF AGE



13.8%

ARE CHILDREN UNDER 15 YEARS

A commonly perpetuated myth on farm is that it is the young adults, with their over confidence and lack of long-term experience, that are most at risk on farm. Yet year in and year out we find that males over the age of 50 are the most likely to be fatally injured. It seems that experience isn't always the best indication of safe practice.

When we commissioned interviews with farmers last year for our National Farm Safety Education Fund Strategy, there was a general consensus amongst them that complacency may actually be more dangerous than lack of experience. Habit, lack of time, stress, fatigue and even the absence of regular adverse consequences were identified as underlying causes for complacency amongst experienced farmers.

One of the key challenges that was identified was driving continued engagement with safety practices over the lifetime of the farmer.

'I think farmers are mostly aware, but when they have done the same behaviour 999 times, it doesn't seem unsafe.'

BROADACRE FARMER, NSW

Common Agents of Fatality



QUAD BIKES

21%



TRACTORS

19%



SIDE-BY-SIDES

12%



UTES

8%



QUAD BIKES

39%



TRACTORS

13%



HORSE

10%



CATTLE

8%

Over the last 18 months

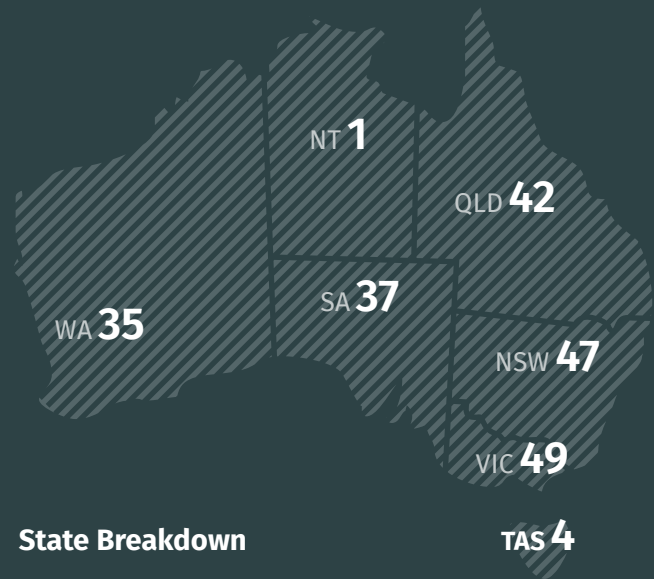


INTERESTING FACT
Nearly 60%
of reported injuries
were in Queensland

What our Farmers are saying...

**Yup – we actually want to hear from you!*

Engagement is key to what we do here at Farmsafe. To ensure that we are shaping our campaigns around the most prevalent safety issues that are causing you the most worry, we are doing our best to get out and talk to you. Our Executive Officer has been travelling around the country over the last few months, to conferences, forums and out on farms. However, with COVID-19 once again making Australian wide travel challenging, we thought it was important to follow up with some of you for some one-on-one questions and answers.



So, we interviewed 215 Farmers*

State Breakdown

Farmers Commodity Breakdown

**interviews conducted by KG2 in June 2021*



So what did we ask you?

Who is Farmsafe Australia and what do they do?

So the good news is, the majority of you have heard of Farmsafe Australia. The bad news is, the majority of you are *pretty confused about who we are and what we do*.

13% of you think that we are a regulatory body so we would like to clear up the confusion.

We aren't a regulator, however we talk to regulators often on your behalf about their programs for safety prevention. Regulators are sometimes feared by farmers as you often hear about them coming in when something goes seriously wrong on farms. This is part of their job, but the other part of the job of regulators is to provide education around preventing injuries and death *before* something goes wrong. Often farmers who meet inspectors in a prevention capacity get great advice and build a great rapport with them.

We don't want farmers fear any of us – we are here to help guide and inform farmers. You can call us, email us, send a carrier pigeon... whatever works. But if you have a question, we are here to help you find answers.

Who's who in the zoo (or on the farm!)

Farmsafe Australia – We are a non-profit network of state-based farming organisations, commodities and external stakeholders, most of whom are farmers ourselves who advocate for and educate farmers across all agricultural industries in regard to farm safety. Many of our members are independent not-for-profits who also offer tools and support to farmers.

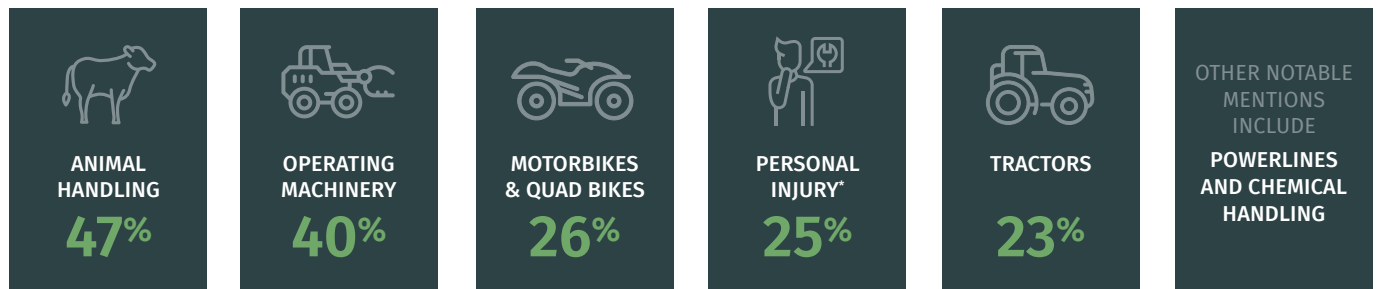
Regulators – Commonwealth and State bodies that monitor and enforce compliance with WHS laws.

DID YOU KNOW: They also provide great safety advice to proactive farmers who don't want to wait for a reportable incident to meet their friendly state regulator.

Safety Consultants – work one on one with farms to address safety problems tailored to the farm. They charge a fee for their service, but some states in Australia have programs that fund safety consultants to come to your farm.

What (safety issues) keep you up at night?

We wanted to know what risks and hazards *on your farm* cause you to lose sleep so that we can determine whether your concerns align with the injury and fatality trend data. When asked what the top three safety risks on your farm are, these were the top mentions.



*common sense and training issues

Why is that important to us?

We are doing our best to provide relevant resources and awareness campaigns in line with trending injury and fatality data – but you know your

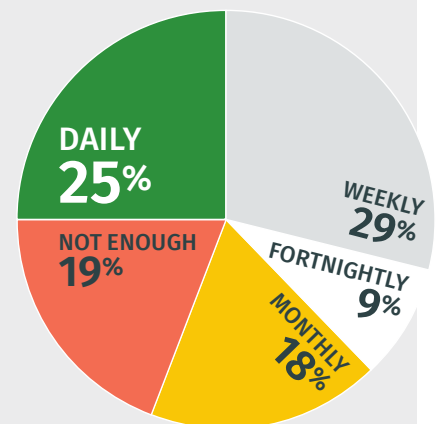
farm best and you might have had some near misses that we aren't aware of.

By letting us know what is concerning you, we can fill the gaps in our resources to make sure you have the information that is relevant to you and your farming situation (all free of charge, of course)!

Are you talking about Farm Safety?

Communication and consultation about risks and hazards with your employees, contractors, consultants, family and visitors is one of the most important aspects of managing farm safety. It is a legal requirement as well. And that doesn't just mean talking to them. It means listening as well. These two way conversations provide you, the employer/owner/manager, the opportunity to raise issues and discuss best practice – and it gives everyone else an opportunity to mention concerns, ask questions or make suggestions.

Most of you said you discuss safety on your farms, 81% of you to be exact! But 19% of you are discussing it much too infrequently. To ensure safety is a priority on your farm, we would recommend you have regular chats, **at least once a month**.



The Who

We delved a bit deeper into who you are having conversations with. We asked you to tell us who you had safety discussions with on your farm.

- 64% of you mentioned chatting to employees and workers
- 52% mentioned talking safety with your family
- Only 10% of you mentioned talking to contractors or truck drivers about safety. And this was a major **red flag**.

So we asked the question a different way. When we directly asked if you employ contractors, 80% of you said yes. When we directly asked if you discussed safety with them, 65% of you said yes.

Which is a bit better.

But we want to clear up a common misconception about contractors on farm.

DID YOU KNOW: That even though most contractors have their own insurances and policies/procedures, you still have an obligation to induct them onto your farm and you still have a duty of care to them under WHS legislation?

Safety conversations with contractors are just as important as they are with your own employees.

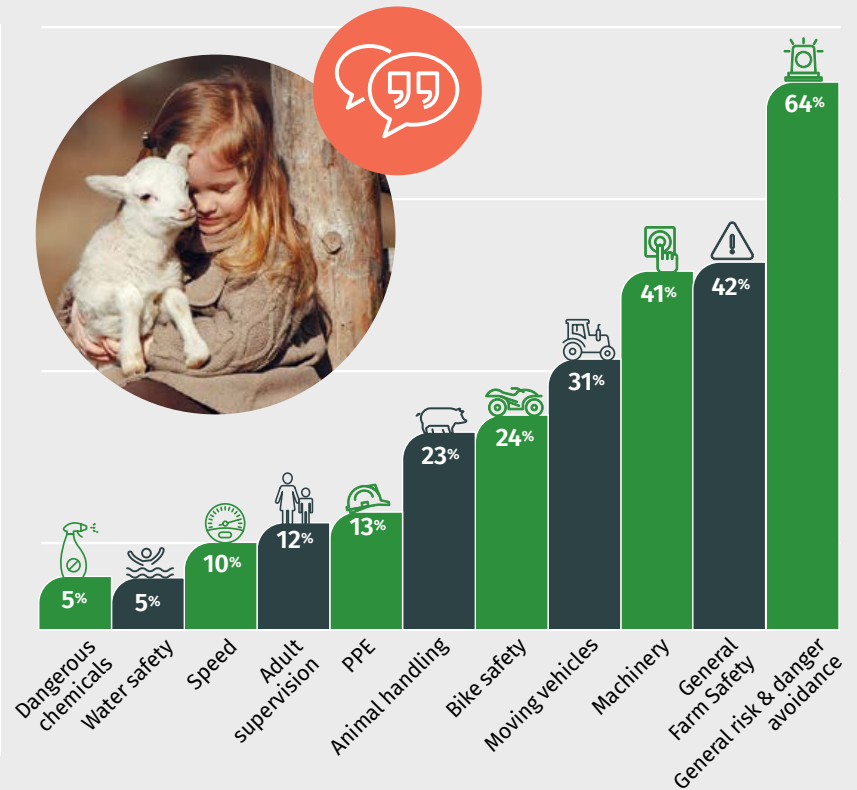
Jack'n'Jill-eroo and all their city friends too

Talking to your kids and other little visitors that might venture onto your farm...

On average, children account for 15% of fatalities on farm and already in the last 6 months 10% of fatalities and 11% of injuries were children under 15 years of age.

The majority of farmers worry about the safety of their children on farms. You told us very specifically what safety issues you discuss with the kids. **We've outlined your mentions within the table.**

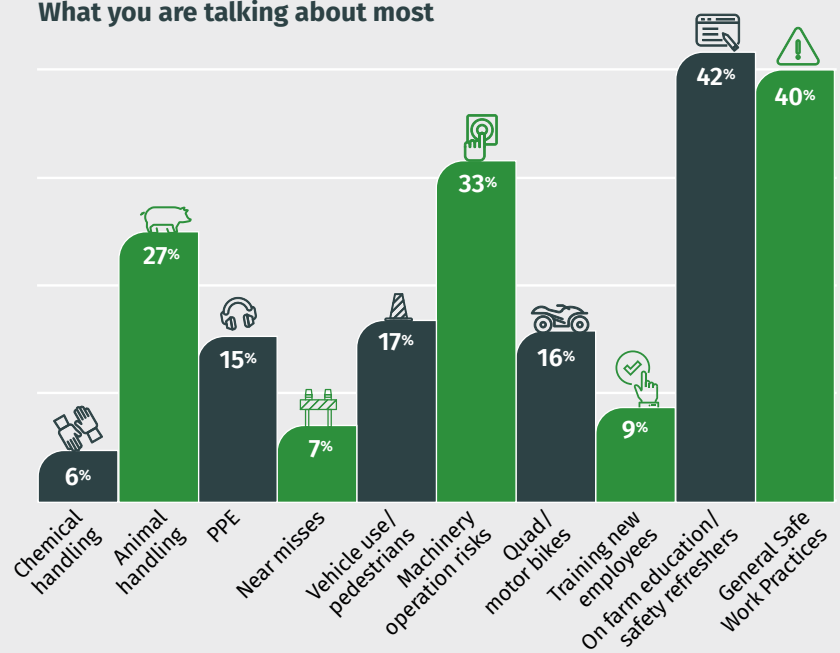
Talking to children about safety on farm is critical. Farms are usually homes and workplaces and that's why kids are at a high risk of being injured on farms. As you have told us, it is important to make sure that your kids know their boundaries, understand where the risks and hazards are, know how to react in an emergency and are only engaging in age appropriate tasks under appropriate adult supervision.



Do the risks and hazards that you mention most often during safety conversations correlate with the prevalent safety issues that are trending in the injury and fatality data?

Not really... quad bikes, which account for the largest proportion of injury and fatality on farm weren't mentioned that often. We've noted that personal protection equipment like helmets, and training refreshers are discussed quite minimally as well.

What you are talking about most



FACT

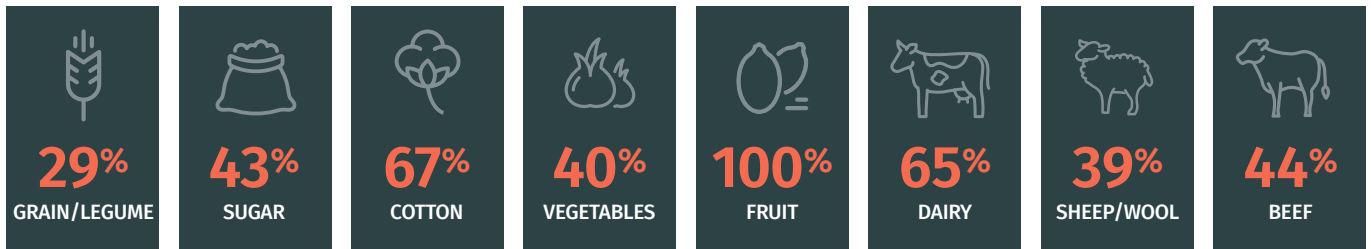
OF QUAD OWNERS INTERVIEWED

30% HAVE QUAD BIKE

ROLLOVER PROTECTION

WHS Documentation - What's the Point?

Only 43% of those interviewed said they had a range of safety policies and procedures documented on their farms. The difference between commodities was quite sharp.



23% of respondents said that they store their policies and procedures in their head. 27% of those who store it in their head say that they rely on their own levels of experience and their employee's common sense.

But as we showed you before – the more experienced farmers (those aged 50+) are actually the highest risk age group for injury and fatality on farm.

And as for common sense... *well it just isn't so common anymore.*



Why Policy and Procedure are necessary

Do we think tick and flick checklists and policy documents that you sign your name on the bottom of necessarily make you safer on farm? Not really – not in and of themselves – but what they will do is provide you with talking points for safety discussions and ensure that you have evidence that you've discussed risks, hazards and mitigation techniques with those who live and work on your farm if you were ever investigated for an incident.

The thing is – documentation and policies and procedures are like insurance – if you do have a reportable incident, you are able to provide proof that you have spoken to your employees about safe processes, taught your employees safe procedures and documented those conversations. It's all well and good to say you do, but why should a complete stranger believe you? The regulator will require evidence. Employers have a duty to provide adequate training, instruction and supervision on day one of employment, through a proper induction process. A thorough induction ensures that new employees are aware of the rules and the standards of behaviour that are expected in the workplace and instils confidence in new employees that the employer takes safety seriously and that they can come forward should they have any concerns.

Induction records form an important record for an employer, that in the unfortunate event of an incident, demonstrates that the employer has been provided training and instruction on day one.

Employers should also use their policies and procedures intermittently throughout the course of the year to continually consult with their employees on safety issues and ensure that a strong safety culture is instilled.

But you don't need to go over the top with it – we aren't suggesting that you spend 3 hours a day going through checklists and paperwork. Just ensure that you are comfortable with the evidence you have. Even your maintenance logbooks are seen as evidence that you maintain your vehicles.

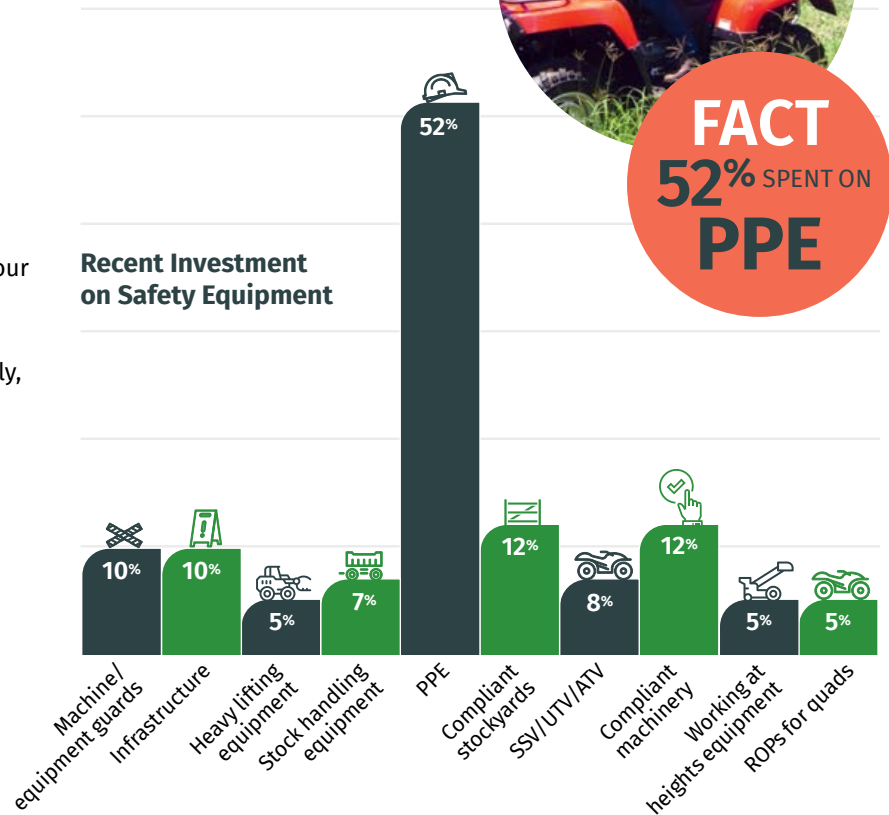
'Complacency, coupled with an 'it will never happen to me' attitude is a dangerous combination and the statistics are a strong reflection of just how wrong that belief is.' LIVESTOCK FARMER, NSW

Investing in Farm Safety

By investing in safety, you are investing in your bottom line.

We understand that the majority of farmers make safety investments on an 'as needed' basis but there is a real benefit in planning your investments during your annual budgeting process. We know that it is unreasonable to expect you to upgrade everything immediately, but holding off on upgrades just to wait until 'it breaks' is genuinely increasing your risk of a serious incident. And anyway, often new equipment provide new efficiencies so you may even increase your productivity!

Be proactive - every little bit counts.



What does Farmsafe want you to know?

We are here to help

Whether it is creating resources to fill gaps in your management system, finding creative ways to keep the conversation of farm safety front of mind, advocating on your behalf or referring you to on-the-ground support (did you know that State Farming Organisations like the Victorian Farmers Federation, Safe Farms WA and NSW Farmers have Farm Safety Teams). We are here for you, the Australian farmer. So if you need a hand, reach out.

What are we doing next?

In March of this year, we released the National Farm Safety Education Fund Strategy.

This document will provide you with insight on what issues and projects we will be focusing our attention on over the next few years.

We have 5 impact opportunities outlined:

- Leadership and Cultural Change
- Next Generation of Farmers
- Physical and Psychological Well-Being
- Industry Endorsed Training and Continued Learning
- Evidence and Incentivisation.

In next year's report, we will provide an update on how we are tracking against the strategy, so that you are aware of the programs and initiatives that you can access to help you with your safety goals.



Safer Farms, Safer Farmers



Australian Government
**Department of Agriculture,
Water and the Environment**

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Committed to keeping you safer on Australian farms



Farmsafe
AUSTRALIA

NFF House 14-16 Brisbane Avenue Barton ACT 2600

Stevi Howdle – Executive Officer

P. +61 2 6269 5622 / E. info@farmsafe.org.au

farmsafe.org.au

