

MEDIA RELEASE
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STAY ON THE SAFE SIDE: KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Farmsafe Australia is asking farmers to 'Stay on the Safe Side' this Farm Safety Week, by emphasising the importance of combating fatigue and prioritising wellbeing on the farm. With the demanding and often strenuous nature of farm work, it is crucial to recognise the impact of fatigue and mental health on the wellbeing and safety of farmers and agricultural workers.

Farmers and agricultural workers often face long hours, physically demanding tasks, and periods of high stress from influences that are out of their control. These factors can lead to fatigue, exhaustion, and poor mental health. When you consider that many farmers undertake high risk work, like operating heavy machinery, as part of their day-to-day business, it's critical they stay alert to fatigue and poor mental health impairing their judgement.

Earlier this year, The National Farmer Wellbeing Report, released by Norco in partnership with the National Farmers' Federation, raised the alarm on 'farming's silent crisis', revealing that out of 1338 farmers surveyed, 45% have had thoughts of self-harm or suicide, while 30% had attempted self-harm or suicide in recent years. This data provides context to research findings that show that Australian farmers are twice as likely to suicide than their urban neighbours.

"Poor mental health is often compounded by fatigue. Our ability to cope with things that are outside our control like drought, bushfires, floods, and market fluctuations might have been high when we first started farming, but as time goes on, our ability to deal with consecutive challenges weakens," says Farmsafe Australia Chair, Felicity Richards. "To make matters worse, every sector of agriculture is currently experiencing labour shortages that are leading to farmers working even longer hours than normal. Knowing when to rest and when to ask for help is important. We all have a limit. Pushing through fatigue or ignoring our mental health can have grave consequences."

Farmsafe Australia is highlighting the following strategies this Farm Safety Week to help farmers combat fatigue and prioritise mental health on their farms, particularly when operating machinery:

- **Schedule Adequate Rest:** Establishing regular breaks and ensuring sufficient rest periods throughout the workday are essential for combating fatigue and ensuring farmers have the ability to make safe decisions. This includes resting even when the work is not strictly physically demanding, such as sitting in the harvester.
- **Promote Healthy Sleep Patterns:** Prioritising quality sleep is vital for physical and mental well-being. This includes proper sleep environments, consistent sleep schedules and avoiding drugs and alcohol late at night.
- **Eat Well and Stay Hydrated:** Proper nutrition and hydration play a crucial role in combating fatigue. Eat balanced meals, drink enough water, and ensure regular intake of healthy snacks to sustain energy levels throughout the day.
- **Encourage Communication and Support:** Foster an open and supportive environment where farmers and workers feel comfortable discussing their wellbeing or any concerns they may have. Encourage peer support, establish mental health programs, and provide resources for accessing professional help when needed.
- **Manage Workload and Prioritise Tasks:** Help farm workers develop effective time management strategies to avoid becoming overwhelmed. Encourage prioritisation of tasks and delegation when appropriate. Balancing work demands and setting realistic goals can alleviate stress and reduce the risk of burnout.

"Maintaining good mental health is not only essential for personal wellbeing but also plays a critical role in making safe decisions on the farm. Clear thinking, focus, and sound judgment are the byproducts of a healthy and well rested mind, allowing farmers to identify potential hazards, assess risks, and prioritise safety measures. Prioritising mental health cultivates a safer environment, ensuring the wellbeing of farmers, their families, and the agricultural community as a whole," says Ms Richards.

By raising awareness and implementing supportive measures, we can foster a culture of wellbeing on farms. Farmsafe Australia remains committed to promoting farm safety and advocating for the wellbeing of farmers and agricultural workers. For more information on fatigue management, mental health resources, and farm safety information, please visit www.farmsafe.org.au .

IF YOU OR ANYONE YOU KNOW NEEDS HELP

ifarmwell ifarmwell.com.au

Lifeline 13 11 14

Beyond Blue 1300 224 636

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467

Headspace 1800 650 890

About Farmsafe Australia:

Farmsafe Australia is the national voice of farm safety and is dedicated to promoting farm safety, providing educational resources, and advocating for best practices in the agricultural industry. With a mission to reduce the incidence of injury and fatality on Australian farms and protect the wellbeing of farmers and their families, Farmsafe Australia actively collaborates with industry stakeholders and raises awareness about the importance of safety and wellbeing in agricultural operations.

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