

MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSSIE FARMERS URGED NOT TO LET SAFETY SLIP IN OVERCOMING LABOUR SHORTAGES

Farmers nationwide are struggling to fill essential positions, as labour shortages continue in the wake of restrictions and hesitancy to travel following the pandemic. The circumstances are forcing many farmers to make difficult decisions to either reduce operations, or continue while understaffed, potentially exposing themselves to dangerous situations.

Richard Marsland, Operations Manager of Michael Farms, a broadacre operation in midwest Western Australia spoke about the complications surrounding labour shortages on farms in Australia.

“We live in a small community, where everyone mostly relies on farming as their primary source of income. Everyone is battling with labour shortages. Pre-Covid, we relied on casual and part time staff to assist with farm operations, especially when seeding. This made life problematic when the border restrictions came about,” Mr Marsland said.

“Michael Farms has expanded a lot in the past few years, and with that we have had to hire more fulltime staff onto our team. This has had positive effects when it comes to safety, as it means that our workers are first aid trained, proficient with machinery and tractors, and are across all of the farms management systems.”

Over the last few years, Michael Farms has developed a whole-farm strategy when it comes to safety. This involved implementing new procedures and policies and working through them with all staff members to ensure they are understood and practical.

Michael Farms implemented fatigue management systems to ensure workers are not pushing too hard. Workers can communicate if they are struggling with tiredness and there are no issues with coming forward and finding a solution that works for everybody.

As many farms look to expand operations and output, casual labour shortages have caused many farmers to seriously consider growth efforts. However, for Michael Farms, they are seeing the benefits that the employment of full-time workers has offered.

“Our full-time staff have more experience in the field and the fact that they know the farm and machinery makes life a lot simpler from both a management and safety side of things. Although when restrictions ease, we will still hopefully have some casual and part-timers to help to help during seeding time and other busy periods.”

However, Richard understands that hiring full-time staff may not be a feasible option for all Australian farmers.

Felicity Richards, Chairperson at Farmsafe Australia, believes that more farms need to regularly implement safety workshops and ‘toolbox talks’ to ensure that any hazards and risks can be minimized.

“Farmers need to put the safety of themselves and their employees as the core to their business. We need to ensure that people feel comfortable to have open conversations and raise safety concerns if they arise. By conducting weekly or bi-weekly safety meetings, you can ensure that all machinery and operations are running effectively, and that there are no hazards that a worker has identified,” Ms Richards said.

This Farm Safety Week, Farmsafe Australia are encouraging farmers to just take a moment to consider the intangible factors that can impact safety on-farm.

“Every farmer understands the unique risks that come with working on their own farm. Taking one extra moment to weigh up factors such as fatigue, mental health or complacency is a first step towards creating a safer environment.”

To find out more about safety resources and how to keep yourself and your family safe, visit: farmsafe.org.au

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