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Farmsafe Toolbox Talks – Transcript of Podcast #14

'The Importance of Inductions' with John Darcy, Victorian Farmers Federation

Host: Dr Richard Franklin, James Cook University

Guest: John Darcy, Senior Farm Safety Advisor, Making Our Farms Safer, Victorian Farmers Federation

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:

“Today's podcast is brought to you by Farmsafe Australia, under funding from the Australian Government, Department for Agriculture, Water and the Environment. I'm your host, Richard Franklin. And today we explore inductions with John Darcy from the Victorian Farmers Federation. Inductions are a critical part of bringing people into your workplace. And many of you may have heard of them or may not. And you might remember them doing them as you started a new job. Or you might not because you're so busy focusing on those other essential items like am I going to get paid? What's the name of my boss? Where are the toilets? But they really are a part of what you need to do as you bring people into your workplace. You...helping you detail the policies, the way that you want to see people work, the procedures that you want people to do, but also ensuring that the person that in your workplace understands their roles and responsibilities as well. And hopefully understands that if they see a problem, they can report it as part of that process. I say new to kind of, new people. But however, my feeling is that induction should be used throughout the working life. If you've got a new job or a new procedure, then you should talk about that with all of your staff before the job starts. Sometimes you might not do a job for 12 months. So, it's a good time to do an induction about how you're going to do that job and how it's going to work. But let's talk a little bit more about inductions with John.”

“John Darcy is a senior farm safety advisor with Victorian Farmers Federation and has over 33 years experience in safety and workers compensation across a whole range of different industries. And at the moment, he's helping the VFF get to terms with what they need to do to help particularly small and medium sized enterprises be better at workplace, health and safety. John has also done a lot of work around looking at critical incidents, and what can be done to prevent future incidents from occurring, but also been looking at people that have been injured and how we get them back in the workplace. So, it's really great to have you here today, John. So, how did you get into workplace health and safety in the first place?”

John Darcy:

“So, 33 years ago, I started in a large organisation in a junior role. And then after a short while, I moved into help their human resources department. And they had a very bad worker's compensation profile at the time, a lot of claims, and then needed some extra administrative resources. And I quickly realized that they weren't going to get on top of their workers compensation problems until they got on top of their OHS. And so, the people I worked with, left the organization and I inherited that space. And my...that became my passion. And from there on in, to manage health and safety and

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workers compensation, that's where my interest grew. But the second half of my working life has been with employer groups with VACC, and Masterbuilders, and now with the Victorian Farmers Federation. And through that I've had involvement with at the coalface with WorkSafe, and other regulators involved in...in crafting of the Acts and Regulations and on both sides of the fence, OHS and workers compensation, and...and so I've had good industry exposure."

Dr Richard Franklin:

"Yeah, it's interesting. I often hear people kind of surreptitiously ending up in workplace, health and safety. And I think that chicken and the egg scenario that you're talking about before where, you know, often we spent a lot of time dealing with the workers comp side of it and kind of thinking, well, actually, could we be preventing it? And where do I put my resources? And certainly for big organisations, it's one of the real challenges. And I think for small enterprises, we've got a real opportunity for us to get in first and actually try and prevent things from occurring in the first place. And look, luckily, these you know, while they are common events, are not necessarily frequent on your farm or property. But you do want to make sure that they don't occur. And at the end of day, we want people to get home safely. So, what are you doing at the VFF? What's your role at the moment? And, you know, how are you going about it, John?"

John Darcy:

"So, I'm one of four people in a team which is called the Making Our Farms Safer team. We have a project manager, a contracts person, a media/coms person, and Richard and I are the two advisors, Richard Versteegan and I. Richard and I spend three to four days a week on farms all over Victoria as part of the project. The project itself is funded by the Victorian Department of Agriculture under their Smarter Safer Farms Initiative, and we're funded through to July 2023. And the services are available to all Victorian farmers, free of charge. Apart from safety, our farm safety visits, where we spend two to three days a week on farms all over Victoria mostly with Mum and Dad small businesses at the dining table, we've also established the Making Our Farms Safer website which was launched just a week or two ago, we have the monthly safety newsletter, and we also run a lot of events - townhall meetings, and attend field days throughout the course of the year. And we're funded through July 2023 but I'll try and do as much as I can humanly possibly do in between that time, hopefully beyond, to try to influence the safety culture and outcomes of the industry as much as I can do in the times provided."

Dr Richard Franklin:

"Look, that sounds fantastic. I mean 2023 doesn't sound like that far away. So, lots of work to be done in the interim, hopefully. And hopefully it continues on after that time. But I guess, you know, we have been chipping away at this - agriculture is still one of the most dangerous industries to work in, in Australia. So, lots of work for you to do. And for us as a whole, you know? We know each other, obviously, through the Farmsafe group."

"But let's talk a little bit about inductions. I mean, what are they and why should they be undertaken, John?"

John Darcy:

"So, when we meet with small business farmers at the dining table we... so we talk them through their legal responsibilities, and we explain to them obviously, that they have the primary duty in the Act, which is a duty to provide a safe workplace and systems of work. But that duty in the Act is actually underpinned by a couple of pillars, and one of the most important pillars is the duty to provide adequate information, instruction, training and supervision as is necessary."

And training and instruction on important safety issues from day one is critically important to the induction process, and we talk to employers about making sure they have a checklist that they were taking the employee through, starting with the employment stuff they have to cover like Fair Work information, tax file numbers, and banking details and that sort of stuff. Then moving quickly into the health and safety space, covering off on policies, procedures, emergency procedures, reporting of accidents, injuries, first aid, fire extinguishers. But then take them through the safe operating procedures, making sure that they are taking them around the...around the farm so they know where the hazards are, where the personal protective equipment is - instilling that confidence...so, with new employees that they can comfortably walk into the workplace where the...the workplace is safe. But with the policies, procedures, also instilling that confidence that the employer does take safety seriously. And then a new employee knows that they can come to their boss with confidence and raise any concerns they have and ask questions. That's really important, especially with young and inexperienced workers to instill that confidence in them. Yes, if they've got any concerns, they can come and talk to the boss and, and not be afraid. And that's something that Worksafe are really are pushing. They're running a campaign at the moment called 'Um...; in Victoria, and that's really aimed at trying to give that confidence to young workers to talk up and not be afraid to raise their voices."

Dr Richard Franklin:

"Look, that sounds fantastic. And look, I totally agree with that. I think it is very daunting as a new worker in a workplace even, even for those that are a little bit more mature, asking questions and knowing who you should ask and what you should or should not know. So I think it's really important, that's where inductions, I guess play a massive role. I mean, just between you and I and those that might be listening to this, I've been looking at some of your policies, because one of the things that I really like is that you've tried to simplify them down and get rid of all of the legal mumbo jumbo and all the catch words and those types of things to be, I guess, really clear statements of what we're trying to do and achieve on...on the farm. And I like that, you know, the induction part is very much a conversation. And we talked about communication in one of our past podcasts. But it is so critical for us to be able to have those conversations in a non-judgmental manner that allows you to kind of work towards a safer environment. So, I'm really excited by the work that you're doing. And I, I think that you talked a little bit about that flow into the policies process. And you know, what's needed there. I also liked that you're helping develop some of the policies and procedures so that there's kind of this grouping to keep paperwork down. But what else are we doing so that this becomes really something that keeps people safe rather than a process of doing more paperwork?"

John Darcy:

"So, with small businesses, despite their belief that they provide a safe workplace, often they've got nothing to back it up. And even though they might say they take safety seriously, it's really important that they do have policies and procedures that they actually should facilitate and use to instill that confidence but also to have evidence that backs up their belief they provide a safe workplace. With inductions, we say to farmers, 'policies are not just for induction'. There's also things they should reiterate and communicate to employees throughout the course of the year. This goes to what you're talking about re-inducting, or around safe operating systems or safe procedures, but also around the policies and procedures. An example might be to stress, say to a farmer, a good time of year might be to provide their drug and alcohol policy might be around festive season, a good time of year to pull out and talk about mental health might be around RUOK day. These are markers on the calendar. You've got bullying, harassment, and so yes, that should be a subject that should be put on the agenda, strategically sexual harassment - we have International Women's Day coming in just around the corner. And so, a timely time of year to put out the sexual harassment policy. And so, but if an employer puts a stake in the ground, and they start a journey, and start looking at these things, these things become second nature, and over time becomes

normalised. And you repeat these things. Summer doesn't come once...springtime doesn't come once. And so, you...these things need to be repeated on a yearly cycle, a continuous cycle of continuous improvement.”

“But with the inductions, a good thing to do is to actually get your existing employees involved. Go to them at that toolbox meeting with a question. ‘If you started here as a new employee tomorrow, what would you like to be shown?’ and they may see things or know things that they think are worth covering off as a new employee - putting themselves back in the...back in the shoes of that new employee walking through the door to think well, these are the things I'd like to be shown from day one, to instill that confidence that the workplace is safe.”

Dr Richard Franklin:

“Yeah, I really liked that idea about engaging other employees that are there back into the induction process. One, it helps reinforce the policies and procedures, that you've already got to make sure that they're working and good opportunity to think about them. But also, it's different from you as the employer, as an employee. And so, you know, they might see things differently from what you do. So, it's a really neat way of, of engagement and communication. I mean, I know other places talk about, you know, you kind of might have a mentor or, or a liaison person when you come into the organization to help them get to know things and where things are as part of it. But I like that group talk and bringing people along. And I think it's also then less daunting and helps reinforce stuff. It's a really, I guess, nice leadership role that you can kind of do there and bring everybody on that journey. Which brings me to my next question about, you know, what is workplace, health and safety leadership? And how do you see it working, John?”

John Darcy:

“So with the policies and procedures, it's still important for employers, when they put out their policies and procedures that they don't have what we would refer to as a ‘system on a shelf’, they've actually got to do what the policies and procedures say. We wouldn't give them to them and say, ‘There you go, put it on your letterhead, and think you're covered’. You've got to make sure you properly implement them and follow them. A good example might be personal protective equipment, if that's your expectations, and you communicate that, well, then you got to make sure that you follow your procedures - you enforce them.”

“But leadership is also about making sure you walk the talk and that you actually lead by example. And so, there's no value in putting a worker on a quad bike and you know, not expecting them to wear the helmet. If you don't yourself, go on the quad bike - which many farmers obviously do the work side by side with their employees - and they're not wearing the seatbelt themselves - sorry, but not wearing the helmet themselves. But seatbelts. I mentioned seatbelts. The side-by-side vehicles are a really good example where we have a problem in the industry - second biggest cause of death and serious injury in the country now, quickly overtaking tractors, and they are still prevalent. But why people are getting injured or killed on side-by-side vehicles is largely because they're not wearing the seatbelts, and they bypass the seatbelt, they've bypassed the secondary safety device, which is a speed limiter hooked up to the motor. Now we walk on the farms, and we can see, even through the back windscreen, to the side-by-side vehicle with seatbelts already clipped in. And we know that the farmer is the person who primarily drives those vehicles. Well, how can I expect that employees are going to wear the seatbelts if they're not wearing themselves? And so, they've got to lead by example. But if they involve their employees, and they talk to them about these things, and they do lead by example, and then engage them, then hopefully, everyone's on the same page. And...and everyone understands what the expectations are.”

Dr Richard Franklin:

“Yeah, totally agree. I mean, you gotta walk the walk and talk the talk. But mostly, you've got to do it yourself, you know, and the problem that you walk past is the problem that you accept. And so at the end of the day, you know, if you're not willing to do it, then how do you expect anybody else to do it as part of that process. So it is very much a mindset. And I like also that you guys have been working on to kind of addressing some of those myths around workplace, health and safety that...that it takes too long, or costs too much, or these things that we constantly hear. And there's lots of things that you can do, including, as you say, just putting a seatbelt on, which takes literally two seconds. And it's not that hard to do, as part of what you do. So, I think really good as we start to think about this kind of leadership, what sort of leadership style do you want? I think what's interesting for me, and it's one of the questions I ask everybody is, what's the wider benefit of doing kind of Workplace, Health and Safety and inductions. And one of the things for me is that if people see you doing the right thing around your workplace, health and safety space, they see you doing the right thing around everything else that you do, you know, and so that then becomes a way that people respect you, and you get better performance, obviously, out of your workers. And we see that not just in agriculture, but across a wide spectrum of what we can kind of do. And so, with safety culture, you've talked about walking the walk, is there anything else that you think we can do to try and improve it? And I guess, what's the VFF doing in this space, besides your project, to really kind of move this area along?”

John Darcy:

“Well, just...culture or climate? There's a lot of definitions applied amongst safety professionals on that term, but my favorite is ‘the way we do things around here’. And that's how it is with a lot of small business employers. If I walk into a Town Hall meeting and ask them just off the cuff, do you think you provide a safe workplace? Many of them will say yes, instinctively. Or they will often say, ‘Well, we think that there's always opportunity for improvement’, which is a concession that they probably know that it's not quite right, but they don't understand the detail in terms of what the law says, or you know, all the things they need to think about. But I don't believe from all my experience of dealing with accidents and fatalities that anybody set out to hurt anybody and to the belief, they think they provide a safe workplace. They believe in their hearts or their minds, but they've got nothing to show for it. And this is the importance of engaging and involving employees and consulting with them about safety. Culture is a shared belief. It's something that it doesn't matter if the boss thinks the workplace is safe - if the employees don't think it's safe, and it's not a shared belief - well it doesn't mean anything. This goes to the importance of getting your workers involved and getting the getting them involved so that they would say, ‘Well, this is a great place to work - geez, our boss is hard on safety’, but actually embrace it, they become part of it. And everyone, it's not just the boss walking the walk, talking the talk, but everyone walking that same walk and talking that same talk.”

Dr Richard Franklin:

“Yeah, I totally agree. And I think yeah, we see this with, say smoking policies, you know that what the people do at the top makes a big difference. So, you know, if you've got a team leader that smokes, funnily enough, many people in the team smoke. If you've got a team leader that doesn't smoke, then most of the team don't smoke, nearly none of them do nowadays. So, I think, you know, that's what I see as well as if we're leading by example, then people follow. And people also then respect what you say around safety, rather than just telling them what to do. So, I think some really good advice there, John. And I think, you know, coming back to the induction part of it, what are the three things that you want people to take away from today, around inductions and around safety more generally?”



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John Darcy:

“So, the key things I'd ask them to do is to obviously, take heed of the advice about providing adequate training, instruction and supervision from day one is critically important. And make sure you do have a robust induction process. And if you need help in that regard, then we can certainly assist. But the...do go back to your employees, it's a great thing to talk to them about, that question - 'If you started here as a new employee, what would you like to be involved?' – add it to your toolbox meeting agenda. And, and yes, don't just issue your policies and procedures once...or your safe operating procedures - use them systematically throughout the course of the year. And...and that's re-inducting, that's re-...re-iterating, re-instilling that confidence. And if you get them involved and get your employees involved in health and safety, you're going to have much greater confidence that you have a good quality safety culture in your business.”

Dr Richard Franklin:

“Yeah, some really good words of advice there. And induction is a critical part of the communication that goes on in the workplace. And we know that it's now embedded both inductions and kind of communication in the legislation. So really think about the way that you work on your farm and think about how you can make your farm safer at the end of the day. As you said, John, none of us want to have an incident on our farm we want everybody to come home safely, and this is just part of that conversation that you have. So, thanks very much for being here, John, really appreciate you being part of the podcast. If people want to know more about what you're doing, they can go to Making Our Farm Safer website www.makingourfarmssafer.com.au . And as always, if they want more farm safety information, they can also visit www.farmsafe.org.au . So, know your responsibilities, do an induction and make sure that you engage your staff as part of it. Thanks very much for being here today.”

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