

National Farm Safety

EDUCATION FUND STRATEGY 2020-2021



Safer Farms, Safer Farmers



Farmsafe
AUSTRALIA

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“Farm safety is not a one-off investment. We need to be committed to long-term cultural change programs that ingrain safety practices and behaviours across generations. We need commitment and buy-in from all levels of government, industry, the supply chain, stakeholder partners and of course, farmers, farm workers, and the rural communities that support them.”

EXECUTIVE OFFICER, FARMSAFE AUSTRALIA



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Water and the Environment

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Foreword

Farmsafe Australia is committed to making Australian farms safer places to live and work. Farms are dangerous workplaces with geographically hard-to-reach audiences, who can be resistant to traditional safety messages. However, farmers are equally innovative and resilient. To cut-through and change behavior requires a deep understanding of the audiences we are trying to reach and engage with.

Farmsafe Australia has been asked to develop a robust, actionable strategy that provides the Minister for Agriculture and the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment the insights required to deliver a National Farm Safety Education Fund that improves on farm safety and achieves ambitious targets.

Consultation has been ongoing in the background for the past six months, gathering information through phone calls and emails as well as face to face meetings where possible with farmers, researchers, safety professionals, industry representatives, educators, agribusiness representatives and others, to seek guidance on the direction this strategy should take. In October of 2020, Farmsafe engaged Redhanded, a communications agency who was tasked with further investigating the common themes that were occurring in Farmsafe conversations. Personal interviews were conducted (sample was split to ensure national cross-sectoral representation as well as commodity specific representation) to dig deeper into farming attitudes on farm safety policies, programs and behavioural change techniques, and to gain a solid understanding of where government investment would be best placed to drive a reduction in on-farm injury and fatality.

The result is a roadmap that guides us towards a much more sustainable future for Australian agriculture as it focusses on our farms most precious resources; our people.

Collaboration is a core tenet of this strategy and there are significant opportunities for engagement and involvement as we head towards 2030. As an industry, we must drive the improvement of our safety culture and best management practices with strong and inspired leadership.

Safer Farms, Safer Farmers - that's a commitment we all need to make.

Charles Armstrong
Chair
Farmsafe Australia

Stevi Howdle
Executive Officer
Farmsafe Australia

Aspiration

[aspə'reɪʃ(ə)n]

A hope or ambition of achieving something.

- **Zero farm Fatalities.**
- **Healthy and productive farmers, farming families, and rural communities.**
- **A farm safety culture that is embraced nationally through effective leadership and increased rural industry and farming community engagement.**

The National Farmers' Federation's 2030 Roadmap has set a bold vision for agriculture in 2030 and has outlined an ambitious target of zero fatalities on farm by 2030. This has encouraged many sectors to consider the importance of our human assets and communities, the importance of health and safety to their sustainability, and the need to prioritise and invest in improving current health and safety performance.

We recognise that zero will not be easy to achieve.

One accident is the difference between success and failure.

To some, zero means nothing. We can assure you – zero means everything to the friends and families whose loved ones never returned home.

So, zero it is.

Strategic Vision

Safer Farms, Safer Farmers

The National Farm Safety Education Fund Strategy delivers outcomes that:

ENABLE farmers, and those that live and work on Australian farms or in related industries
WHO have varied levels of understanding about, and motivation towards, the topic of farm safety
TO engage with safety and cultural change practices
BY communicating farm safety in terms that resonate and motivate
THROUGH credible and relatable voices
SO they can make positive choices that improve overall farm safety, productivity and well-being.

Farming Culture

Farm safety is a serious consideration on Australian farms. It has increased in profile over the years and is currently a hot topic due to industrial manslaughter laws that have been newly implemented or are being considered in some states.

A number of those consulted throughout this process believed farmers were generally aware of risks and hazards on their properties, especially if they (the farmer) took the time to think about it. Typical hazards were obvious to farmers, such as a broken piece of machinery, missing guard or a wet surface. **What was less obvious were risky behaviours that might have become normalised through habit.**

From their perspective, the main issue was that farmers **did not always take the time to stop and think. Habit, lack of time, stress, fatigue, and even the absence of regular adverse consequences** all conspired to cause farmers to become complacent even when the risk is clear.

One of the key challenges identified is **driving continued engagement** with the behaviours associated with farm safety. Lack of engagement, coupled with complacency, is understood as a greater challenge than awareness. Nearly every person interviewed could speak about their own near misses and knew of others who had been involved in minor or even serious accidents. However, with time, the immediacy of danger and the perceived probability of another accident tends to fade, instead of becoming an experience that drives positive change in behaviours.

“I think farmers are mostly aware, but when they have done the same behaviour 999 times, it doesn’t seem unsafe.” BROADACRE FARMER NSW

It therefore requires ongoing ‘topping up’ of messages, reminders and strategies to drive longer term behaviour change and avoid relapses into short cuts and poor decision-making. For this reason, there is overwhelming support for educating children early and driving awareness of safety as an ingrained behaviour, in much the same way as wearing seat belts in cars has become ingrained over time.

“We don’t like being told what to do. There’s a real head space that we’ve done it this way for generations. So farmers are quick to get their backs up.” LIVESTOCK FARMER, QLD

“Farmers see external hazards but they don’t always identify their own patterns of behaviours as risky.” AGRI SECTOR REP, AGRONOMIST

“It’s not like they don’t know people who have died because everyone knows someone. It’s just the connection to their own attitudes and behaviours that needs reinforcing.”
FAMILY LIVESTOCK FARMER, NSW

“Farmers aren’t finding new ways of killing themselves. It is the decision-making of the farmer that is the issue.” LIVESTOCK FARMER, QLD

Snapshot

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
INJURIES	68	81	87	102	94	92	85	179	155	133
FATALITIES	44	59	50	59	54	69	63	68	67	58

*data sourced from AgHealth Australia's Australian Farm Deaths and Injuries Media Monitors snapshot.

DATA GAPS

We are well aware of the significant gaps in detail that exist within agricultural work, health and safety reporting and important work is being done by the Rural Safety & Health Alliance and AgHealth Australia to understand current frameworks and find ways to rectify the data architecture issue nationally.

Over the last ten years, as work has been done in this area, significant increases have been picked up on as different ways of measuring and collecting information has become possible. However, we know that any injury statistics are grossly under-representing true injury prevalence and as these challenges are met through further research and extension work, we will most likely see our reported injury number rise sharply, as they did in 2017. This is an important step in truly understanding the extent of under-reported WHS issues. The next step will be to focus on reducing that number significantly.

Australian Statistics

5.8 WEEKS
median time lost
\$7700 = median compensation for serious claims¹

Estimated cost of on-farm fatalities
\$113M
Over **\$1.9M** average cost per fatality²

Agriculture employs
250,700
Australians³

The average farmer is
FIFTY SIX
17 years older than the average worker⁴

89.3% fatalities are male

with over **50%** **50+** years of age⁵

In the last 10 years
15%
of fatalities are children under 15 years of age⁶

2.6% of workforce
21% of fatalities⁷

¹ Work Health and Safety in The Agricultural Industry - 2016, Safework Australia

² Agrifutures Annual Statistics 2019, AgHealth Australia

³ 2030 Roadmap, National Farmers' Federation

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Safer Farms 2020 Report, Farmsafe Australia

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Work Health and Safety in The Agricultural Industry - 2016, Safework Australia

FROM HERE TO ZERO

If we want to achieve success by 2030, we need to take action now.

And it needs to be coordinated action – this strategy needs to be embraced by agriculture’s entire network of leaders. Critical collaborations built between the stakeholders listed below will provide a solid foundation from which we can move forward with the delivery of this strategy.

- Government: Federal, State/Territory and Local
- Individual Farmers, Farm Families and Farm Businesses
- Farmsafe Australia and Member Organisations
- National Farmers’ Federation, State Farming Organisations, Peak Commodity Councils and Industry Representation Bodies’
- Agri-Business and the Agricultural Supply Chain
- Rural Communities
- Educators
- Registered Training Organisations and Safety Professionals
- Research and Development Corporations
- Universities and Independent Researchers.

IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES

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

Success will require determination and on-going commitment from all of our stakeholders. We must work together under a collaborative partnership framework, to ensure the long-term viability of Australian farms and Australian farmers, and the vital communities that live and work within their reach.

Achieving our target of zero farm fatalities will require significant investment of energy, capital and human resources. We may have many challenges on our way to zero, but we also have many opportunities. *It’s time to make the most of the opportunities.*

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Increased farming and rural community engagement with farm safety cultural change and positive attitude shifts towards farm safety practices.

Trend towards zero fatalities on farm.

What does success look like?

Continuous and sustainable reduction in serious injuries on farm.

Increase the psychological wellbeing of farmers and strengthen rural community resilience.



“The thing about farmers is we’re at our workplace 24 hours a day, so you never leave your problems behind.” LIVESTOCK FARMER, VIC

IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES

Investing in Leadership and Cultural Change

CHALLENGE

Although farmers are quick to identify ‘problems’ with safety communications directed towards them, they are also able to recognise issues in their own circumstances that limit the ability to engage with, and action, safety messages.

The key takeaway message was that too often, what is said in farm safety communications is not fit for purpose - it could be overly wordy, legalistic, complicated, and failed to take into account the circumstances in which a farmer or farm employee receives the message. There can be unintended consequences if this style of messaging becomes the normalised way of speaking about safety and it is the most cited reason for avoidance of engagement with safety practices by our interviewees.

“We need less of the ‘no’ and more about contextualising safety in their life. Why it is important to their family and business and why they should prioritise.” EXTERNAL REP

Our interviewees agreed that there were also too many different organisations pushing out farm safety messages that didn’t align. This tended to create fragmented communications impacting on engagement and uptake.

“Messaging needs to be simple language with no legal speak and reduce the level of information, so it isn’t perceived as all too hard.” CROPPER, NSW

INSIGHT

There is a need for more united, community originated and led communications to drive engagement with farmers, their families, and their employees - voices who are trusted and understand the day-to-day challenges and lives of those in the farm sector. Whilst compliance-focussed messages remain important, they need to be balanced with alternative styles. Messaging could be presented by credible and reliable community voices such as;

- Farming neighbours and peers who can tell first-hand accounts that resonate, and provide simple, practical messages that get farmers started on farm safety culture improvements.
- Partners and children.
- Local community groups such as the CWA, football and netball clubs, Lions Club, scouts, Men’s Sheds etc.
- Industry groups and farmer groups: For example, Farmsafe Australia, the National Farmers Federation, Farming Organisations, Peak Commodities, RDCs, etc.
- Community emergency services: CFA, RFS, SES, Ambulance.
- Accountants and agronomists, rural retailers and others who understand our audience, and the risk that they manage to carry out their livelihoods.

The challenge is marshalling and using these different voices to ensure that the message is not fragmented and that all groups and people speak with one consistent, and powerful voice. There is a unique role for organisations like Farmsafe Australia to play in coordinating campaigns that can be delivered at a local level.

There is also an opportunity to leverage how quickly news travels on the ‘bush telegraph’ in rural communities. By leading with human stories which are relevant to the local farmer and their community, and delivering them in a respectful, collaborative, practical and solutions-focussed style, messengers can start to build personal relevance with the farmers.

“If you could target the agents and rural merchandise people who have the dealings with the farmers who can go in neutral with nothing to gain, then they will listen. More than (a regulator) where they will bury their heads in the sand out of fear. Fear that they have non safe workplaces leads to avoidance, which is a bad outcome.”

AGRI SECTOR REP NSW

“Messaging needs to be wrapped in storytelling. Farmers are gossips and have a yack in the silo line at harvest.” AGRI SECTOR REP

IMPACT OPPORTUNITY	TIMEFRAME	AREAS FOR INVESTMENT	IMPACT
Investing in Leadership and Cultural Change	SHORT-TERM 12–18 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in the development of relatable and credible Farm Safety Ambassadors, leveraging the power of social media movements to create a community, as well as field days and industry forums to provide opportunities for face to face engagement with trusted voices. Invest in the development of a Farm Safety Culture program, through partnerships with established rural leadership programs, that grows adaptive leadership behaviours and practices and builds collaborative capacity through mentorships that can then be developed in others on farm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A national network of trusted messengers that can influence safety behavior and practices from within the community and provide two-way communication between government, industry and farmers and farm workers.
	MEDIUM-TERM 3–5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with individual peak bodies to collate WHS benchmarking data through industry best management practices (BMPs). Consolidate annual reporting on WHS metrics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industry engagement and leadership to drive behavioural and cultural change practices.
	LONG-TERM 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in nationally coordinated farm safety awareness and education campaigns led by Farmsafe Australia that engage with and enhance the voices of trusted local community partners. Foster community led, grass root initiatives or events that firmly establish a farm safety culture into the local landscape. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive shift in attitude towards engagement with safety practices on farm and in rural communities.

IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES

Investing in our Next Generation of Farmers

CHALLENGE

Farms are often family homes. It is impractical, unfeasible and ultimately detrimental to keep kids away from risk and not exposed to dangers on farm, and it became clear to us that there is strong agreement on this throughout our consultation. There is a genuine belief that exposure and education in a supervised, controlled manner is critical to the future well-being of our youngest farmers. There is a firm view that children need to be exposed to risk in a safe manner or else they will manage to find risk themselves in an unsafe way.

Universally, farm parents that were interviewed believed that they have taught their children effectively about risk and safety. All thought they had appropriate rules and approach to supervision. This is understandable too, since it is unlikely that a parent would admit to being lax with the safety of their children. Communications that tell parents 'how to parent' by taking a 'you should do this' type approach, will most likely be rejected. Therefore, the challenge is to develop ways of demonstrating to parents that their children may not be as safe as they believe and to do so in a way that doesn't challenge their approach to parenting. The reality is, 15% of on farm fatalities are still children under the age of 15.

“Parents are the best people to teach good practices from day one, they get passed on from generation to generation. But they can also teach (inadvertently) poor practices.”

HORT & LIVESTOCK FARMER QLD

INSIGHT

There is an opportunity to, and support for, improvement in education targeting children which could have the benefit of driving generational attitudinal and behavioural change. Giving children a voice and opportunity to speak about safety would also have an influence on parents and would likely be more effective than telling parents how they should behave.

Very few of those interviewed could identify educational programs or literature specifically aimed at children on farms. There were a few ad hoc, privately organised safety programs and possibly some exposure at school, but mostly, this was seen as an area lacking any coordinated or formal programs.

It was also mentioned that education at a young age was critical to ensuring learning correct and safe behaviours. Improved education also meant that kids would be more likely to notice dangerous behaviours undertaken by parents and potentially influence parents to behave in a safer manner through their 'pester power'.

Our interviewees believe that it is important to introduce farm safety to children through formal education at a young age. In addition, there is an opportunity to engage with young people, nearing completion of secondary school and close to moving back on farm, in courses designed to introduce some of the challenges associated with safety such as 'costs' (inconvenience, cost, discomfort etc) weighed against the benefits (peace of mind, reduced likelihood of accidents and loss of income etc).

There is also a strong desire to see agricultural qualifications that include farm safety as the foundation of each module delivered at high school levels, not just at agricultural colleges, but as part of the curriculum in rural areas to provide certification and/or accreditation for the operation of farm machinery and equipment. This not only increases the appetite for 'professionalising' farm work, but provides opportunities outside of the farm sector as many of the same qualifications are required in mining, construction, gas pipelining etc.



IMPACT OPPORTUNITY	TIMEFRAME	AREAS FOR INVESTMENT	IMPACT
Investing in our Next Generation of Farmers	SHORT-TERM 12–18 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with State Governments, Farmsafe Australia, the National Farmers' Federation and educational bodies such as PIEFA and Skills Impact to develop a national farm safety curriculum to be delivered in high schools across rural Australia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A pool of qualified, skilled, and professional labour with nationally consistent expectations of WHS standards.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with and leverage the established audiences of respected and well-known children's organisations, authors, or education advocates (such as PIEFA) to develop or enhance industry specific, curriculum friendly resources such as story book series, interactive teacher lesson plans, short quizzes etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources that are well-marketed and easily accessible and reduce the barriers for teachers and parents to deliver farm safety lessons in a fun and interactive way.
	MEDIUM-TERM 3–5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in the development or enhancement of Farm Safety activities that provide an authentic farming experience to include children in a safe and participatory manner and ingrain behaviours from a younger age. This may enhance existing programs, utilise virtual reality or provide investments into on-farm excursions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new generation of engaged and aware children that understand the inherent risks associated with food and fibre production and the ways in which those risks can be mitigated.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a National Strategy for Child Safety on Farm in collaboration with Farmsafe Australia, Kidsafe, and peak farm advocacy bodies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A coordinated whole of industry approach to education and awareness of farm safety targeted at children of both primary and secondary school age.
	LONG-TERM 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in a long-term child farm safety campaign platform to be delivered by Farmsafe Australia in conjunction with trusted community organisations with local voices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent messaging that drives positive generational change in farm safety attitudes and behavior and ingrains best practice safety into everyday rural life.

IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES

Investing in Physical and Psychological Well-being

CHALLENGE

Notwithstanding the growing acceptance of mental health issues and more open discussions among farming populations, most farmers or farming stakeholders that we consulted with had not considered the link between mental health, general well-being and farm risk. However, when discussed, it was universally agreed that both had a direct and obvious link to risk.

Interviewees thought that those suffering from depression may make poor decisions, be distracted and even behave more recklessly. In addition to this link, most also agreed that risk wasn't only increased by clinically diagnosed depression, but that minor mental health issues and general 'state of mind' also increased risk. For example, simply being distracted as a result of a family argument, or thoughts of incomplete tasks, or fatigue or financial worries could (and often did) interrupt concentration and increased risk.

Fatigue and burnout from overwork may also be a significant contributor to increased risk of accident on farms and plays a vital role in overall wellbeing.

Another significant issue that was discussed repeatedly was limited access to reliable mental health professionals and services that understood the farming community and the pressures that they faced.

“Two words – isolation and unpredictability. You don't know what kind of season you're going to have, and you feel like you're on your own.” HORT FARMER, WA

INSIGHT

When discussing mental health, it is widely accepted that farmers are more susceptible to mental health challenges and are suffering higher rates of depression and suicide than the broader Australian community. According to the National Rural Health Alliance, the rate of suicide in rural and regional areas is nearly 40% higher than in major cities, and this increases to nearly 50% in remote areas (Mental Health in Rural and Remote Australia Fact Sheet – December 2017).

This is linked to factors such as working in isolation, fatigue, risk associated with drought and weather events as well as the nature of farming work with little opportunity for downtime.

Farm safety was a challenging topic for many and could, in itself, be linked to negative mental health consequences. For example, almost all could cite examples of their own near misses or serious accidents that they knew of. These could be difficult topics, involving trauma. In addition, historically, much of the conversation around safety has been in the area of enforcement, compliance and punitive action or at the very least, cost and time. In other words, safety was not an easy or enjoyable topic to engage with, leading some to want to avoid it or put it in the 'too hard basket'.

SUGGESTIONS

- Better to frame the link between risk and mental health around general wellbeing and state of mind rather than around the term 'mental health', which had other connotations and was more narrowly defined and linked to depression.

“As a farmer, you're working on a project that's in your own mind and have a vision for how it will grow and prosper. When things happen, there's nobody else to blame, it's very much on your shoulders, even if it's outside of your control.” HORT & LIVESTOCK FARMER, QLD

“There is a huge connection between mental health and safety. Mental health is the ability to make good decisions when you are really stressed. Especially seasonal pressure periods such as sowing and harvest and knowing your limits.” SNR VFF MEMBER AND CROPPER, VIC

- Provide practical simple solutions, especially around stressful farming periods such as harvest. Re- framing the discussion in terms of questions to ask yourself such as: ‘when did I last get 8 hours sleep?’ Or ‘How much am I drinking or smoking at the moment?’ Or ‘when did I last eat a healthy meal at the right time of day?’ could make a massive difference. This leads to opportunities to build peer driven campaigns with trusted voices at risky periods such as sowing or harvest, lambing or shearing, etc.
- Provide educational tools to help understand fatigue and the impact on decision making when someone is fatigued which is not just attributed to lack of sleep but is also linked to working long hours continuously.
- Safety is perceived as a difficult or tedious topic to engage with. Safety conversations themselves can be triggering and add to stress. Messaging should come from peers with practical tips that are less focused on compliance and enforcement and more focused on holistic well-being.

IMPACT OPPORTUNITY	TIMEFRAME	AREAS FOR INVESTMENT	IMPACT
Investing in Physical and Psychological Well-being	SHORT-TERM 12-18 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in campaigns led by trusted community voices that promote holistic well-being such as understanding and managing fatigue, eating well and staying hydrated as the foundation for strong mental well-being. These can be seasonal campaigns run during sowing or harvest etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sustainable workforce that understands the critical importance of their own wellbeing under all circumstances.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in localised programs that encourage ‘community-building’ (social media movements or community activities) and promote healthy choices as the foundation of a productive and safe farming environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A supportive and connected network that understands the needs of their community and provides simple, practical and effective tips to manage individual and community well-being.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in adaptive technology incentive programs that increase opportunities for farmers with disabilities or farmers returning to work post injury. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible, affordable solutions that ensure equal opportunity in the agricultural workforce
	MEDIUM-TERM 3-5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with organisations that are offering alternative mental health workforce training and expand initiatives such as peer worker programs or coaching services to counteract the void of trained mental health service providers in rural and remote Australia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A localised peer support network that engages with and understands the populations of rural, regional and remote Australians.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in the development of a National Mental Health Strategy for the Farming sector. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An evidence based, strategic roadmap for increasing physical and psychological wellbeing in rural and remote Australia.

IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES

Investing in Industry Endorsed Training and Continued Learning

CHALLENGE

One of the fundamental differences with the farming cohort compared with other sectors is the extent of informal, on-the-job training that occurs.

In short, a person with no experience on farm could, without any training or skill, legally operate dangerous equipment and undertake risky activities. Although the legal framework is changing (including laws around industrial manslaughter on farm), the fact remains that every day many farm workers perform high risk activities with little or no formal training, certification or a requirement for either.

Among older generations, there appears to be very little formal training at all. And even among those who may have gone to agricultural college, the extent of training related to safety among older farmers is minimal. Younger farmers who attended agricultural colleges appear more likely to have had some formal agricultural education or training and been exposed to farm risk and safety training.

The effect of this is that many farmers learned some or even all of their skills from watching others such as a parent—who themselves were unlikely to have had any formal training. This also meant that the way in which a farmer learned a new skill may not be the safest. Furthermore, as machinery evolved skills and training did not necessarily keep up with this and again was learned through 'trial and error'.

Agriculture also relies heavily on a seasonal workforce and farm safety issues are amplified with regard to migrant workers and working holiday makers who often arrive on farm with little to no knowledge of risks on farm. This challenge becomes even more significant if formal inductions are not provided or fail to be provided in an employee's native language.

INSIGHT

The slow and steady acceptance of registration and certification for certain aspects of rural life (firearms, chemical handling, etc) has softened attitudes towards minimum training levels around safety. Differing laws in each Australian state and territory has understandable challenges when considering a national standard however, uptake in adjacent sectors and requirements in the supply chain has further reinforced the appropriateness and highlighted that farming appears to be lagging in this area. Furthermore, there is near universal acceptance of the manifestly high-risk nature of the sector, including everything from chemical handling, to livestock, confined spaces, working at heights, etc.

There has been long held opinions that agriculture is a low or no skilled employment area with a low skilled workforce, despite industry, industry associations and Training Councils representing industry bodies saying that areas of agriculture require highly skilled workers, technicians and operators of machinery and equipment. In recent times, there is more recognition that workers require training to operate highly specialised equipment and as such skill sets with competencies aligned with national curriculum have been developed and some have even been subsidised in very recent times.

Therefore, a basic level of formal safety training is a concept that now appears to have more acceptance and less negativity than ever before. However, its acceptance and adoption requires that it be well designed and relevant to farm activities, potentially tailored to different farm types and have specific audiences targeted, such as older farmers and migrant workers. It must avoid unnecessary paperwork and should be tailored for different farm types and ease of access be it online or face-to-face.

Courses need to be fit for audience and purpose. This means plain language, practical tips, concise, delivered by respected peers or knowledgeable experts. Shorter duration and basic informal 'toolbox tips' or talks related to seasonal farm activities is also sought. It needs to reduce the burden on farmers, not increase it.

Farmers readily embrace the latest generation of machines and yet may not be conversant with safe usage, having learned on machines decades ago. This suggests an opportunity to frame the issue of certification and courses around keeping up to date with technology and machinery. This is likely to be less contentious than a 'heavy handed' approach requiring minimum certified standards.

The general feeling is that this is an area that could protect farmers and their workers and needs to be seriously considered, provided such packages were not piecemeal, were fit-for-purpose, and were simple and practical, then there appears to be reasonable levels of support for the concept.

There are current training packages available, (TAFE, AgSkilled, WorkSafe etc.) and it would be critical to evaluate the impact of their programs and work with these organisations to enhance their current offerings. This would also be important with regard to basic accreditation cards, as there are already organisations working in this landscape that have shovel-ready packages available for implementation.

CAVEATS AND QUESTIONS

There are several barriers to acceptance and questions raised about standard levels. These included:

- Policing and enforcement. How would this work and who would be responsible for it?
- Tailored to activity or industry and of actual value.
- Who would be responsible to pay for training of short-term or seasonal workers?

“If you could do an induction process and general overview in under an hour, that would be brilliant. To get them from zero to base standard before they walk onto a farm. It would save me doing it manually. You could have one for livestock, cattle etc.”

AGRI SECTOR REP, VIC

“I have mixed feelings about this. Certification has to be achievable by your average farmer. Losing a day to do a course in Hobart isn't really going to be taken up. Online learning is probably better. NLIS has more online stuff now.” HORT FARMER, TAS

“If you go a job site in Sydney, you have to have red cards, green tickets and all this stuff and the right safety gear. You can walk onto a farm with thongs and a singlet and do anything. It is a professional work environment and you need to be professional about it. I'm all for it (certification).” AGRI SECTOR REP

BENEFITS

There were some obvious upsides that were identified:

- Ensures training by a qualified exterior WHS supplier.
- Demonstrates to workers that a farmer / business cares about their wellbeing and can drive retention and loyalty and is an investment in staff .
- Provides evidence that workers are serious about learning about WHS in the context of agriculture.
- Recognition that farming is a professional business.
- May protect against litigation.
- Important for more casualised workforce such as seasonal workers, who had lower levels of English proficiency and farm knowledge. (Would need to ensure translation into different languages)

IMPLEMENTATION

The following suggestions were made:

- Introduce certification as a pilot project with seasonal workforces and Working Holiday Makers.
- Introduce training into high-risk activities using data to identify those activities with the highest incidence of accidents.
- Introduce as voluntary.
- Consider a general farm safety certification that covers risks that are consistent across (all) farms including areas like machinery, chemicals, water etc.
- Training must be easy to complete whether online or face-to-face, including mobile options that are delivered into rural and regional towns or on farm.

“Maybe they need a white card, which is a high-risk card applicable for farming. There is probably a need for the basics such as stored energy, hydraulic, electrical, common farm risks, risks with machinery.” CORPORATE LIVESTOCK, VIC

“Inductions are really important. I’m a grain farmer, these are the major risk. (We need) a green ticket ag standard. Then I know you’re half competent versus starting from scratch.” AGRI SECTOR REP, VIC

“(Certification) Definitely. Yes. I think there should be courses suited to farm types and livestock. People don’t know where to stand when they are moving cattle and put themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. Some sort of training for new people in the industry and refresher courses on machinery updates for older people.” AGRI SECTOR REP STOCK AND STATION AGENT

IMPACT OPPORTUNITY	TIMEFRAME	AREAS FOR INVESTMENT	IMPACT
Investing in Industry Endorsed Training and Continued Learning	SHORT-TERM 12–18 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in the development of seasonally targeted courses that reinforce healthy sowing or harvest practices (or target other busy periods such as shearing etc). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well-timed opportunities to reinforce safety messaging PRIOR to busy seasons that actively engage farmers and open up lines of communication.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the opportunity to pilot a basic nationally recognised farm safety accreditation for backpackers, migrant workers and the seasonal workforce. Similar to the ‘White Card’ in construction, but developed by the agricultural industry Could be promoted through consulates and embassies. Would require translation into different languages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to a pool of informed, risk-aware backpackers, migrant workers and seasonal staff that are ready for on-farm inductions, regardless of the industry sector.
	MEDIUM-TERM 3–5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand and enhance delivery of existing farm machinery operation training programs to make them more accessible to rural and remote regions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to a pool of skilled labour that has further opportunities for increased professional development
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate the opportunity to pilot a basic nationally recognised farm safety accreditation - similar to the ‘White Card’ in construction, but developed by the ag industry that is delivered online and recognizes prior learning for all those who live and work on Australian farms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A pool of qualified, and risk-aware labour, ready for on-farm inductions regardless of the industry sector.

IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES

Investing in Evidence and Incentivisation

CHALLENGE

Farmers tend to see themselves as rational, problem solvers who, if presented with economic arguments, will choose in their best financial interests. If safety can be framed as having a positive economic benefit and done so with tangible examples tailored to farm types, then they are more likely to respond to safety messaging and early adoption of improved safety practices.

Most are well aware of the cost implications of safety (installing guards, attending courses etc) but did not necessarily make the link with the return. This is because the return comes in the form of prevention of loss rather than a financial benefit. This is an important distinction since it is viewed like insurance or a necessary 'grudge' purchase. Notions of Return on Investment (ROI) were not as connected and only through discussion and consideration did our participants see how safety might be linked to things such as attracting staff and increasing productivity. Overall safety is currently being considered as loss avoidance rather than net gain and hence ROI as a concept is somewhat foreign in this context. This suggests that it might take some time and education before farm safety is seen in a more positive ROI context and we need to be particularly mindful that we raise awareness of this concept to ensure that safety economics does not only drive culture change from a financial perspective, but also from an increased employee well-being perspective.

The important takeaway is that framing safety in these terms does resonate. Ideas like risk calculators or simple arguments that spoke to finances piqued the interest of most of our interviewees. Of course, the other appealing aspect of safety economics was the ideas of Government incentives or rebates to drive behaviour.

INSIGHT

In principle, the idea of framing safety in terms of economic arguments seems to resonate. However, for this to work, farmers, agricultural representatives and external stakeholders want to see real statistics of relevance to their enterprise that highlight the average direct and indirect cost (both financial and in terms of time off work and burden on others) of certain types of injuries and fatalities, as compared to the cost of the preventative measure. If this could be explained in plain language, it would be persuasive.

For example, 'the average cost to replace a PTO guard is less than \$500. The average cost of a PTO injury on a family broadacre property is \$85,000, permanent disability and lifelong burden on others.'

We need to leverage this rationality and frame safety as having a financial upside. This needs to be backed by incentive programs that either provide rebates for additional safety equipment and training or reductions in insurance premiums similar to recent sustainability driven risk management programs put in place by the major banks.

There is also a strong appetite for a more professional reporting framework. Critical data that is required for WH&S reporting is not accessible in the farm sector due to a lack of reporting requirements. Corporate farms usually deliver WHS reports internally, however, this has not become standard practice on the average Australian family owned farms. Additionally, even the corporate farms operate off different reporting frameworks, making the collation of the data that is available much more time consuming.

It is extremely challenging to quantify the extent of specific WH&S issues on farm without access to consistent, reliable data. It then follows that having any accurate understanding of which issues require an increase in safety awareness is made even more difficult.

“Incentives like rebates on rollover protection are really successful. There needs to be a benefit in it for them.” AGRI SECTOR REP, TAS

“I hear insurance companies offering incentives. Maybe it is that for general insurance or liability if you don’t have a farm safety plan you won’t be covered for the full amount. The industry needs to get behind this and start off voluntary and possibly make it compulsory. Maybe a \$500 voucher to buy guards to help the doing. Put water in the trough if you are trying to take a horse to water.” AGRI SECTOR REP, VIC

“A safe farm is a more productive farm. You need stats that prove this. If you had those examples and compared farm A with Farm B and show farmers in a real sense. Compare the repair time with injury time. A stitch in time saves nine.” AGRI SECTOR REP

IMPACT OPPORTUNITY	TIMEFRAME	AREAS FOR INVESTMENT	IMPACT
Investing in Evidence and Incentivisation	SHORT-TERM 12-18 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in a National Incentive Program for on-farm safety improvements covering all farm machinery and equipment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased early adoption of safer farm equipment and machinery.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in the recommendations of the Rural Safety & Health Alliance’s Collaborative WHS Data Scoping Project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistent and reliable data sets with which to measure our progress.
	MEDIUM-TERM 3-5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate risk management incentive programs through partnerships with external stakeholders such as insurance agencies, banking institutions or registered training organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased adoption of risk management practices and documentation of on-farm WHS risks and mitigation techniques.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in the development of a national reporting framework that allows farmers to report anonymously to increase farm safety issue awareness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater understanding of WHS issues on farm that will underpin future awareness campaigns.

Farmsafe Australia is committed to keeping you safer on Australian farms.

Our mission is to improve the wellbeing and productivity of Australian agriculture through enhanced health and safety awareness and practices. Agriculture consistently ranks among the most dangerous industries to work in. We work in the elements. We work with large animals. We work with chemicals. We work with heavy machinery. We work at heights and in confined spaces. We work with heavy loads. We work alone and in remote locations.

Farming has a very high-risk profile and when you couple that with the fact that farming is a lifestyle, not just a job, and that there is a myriad of cultural behaviours that go along with that, you begin to understand why it is so hard to make farms safer.

Farmsafe Australia is here to provide the awareness and resources that will help farmers to be proactive with their safe work practices and inform them on how to make better decisions on a day-to-day basis.

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. In recent years, Farmsafe Australia's ability to maintain a significant presence in the farm safety landscape declined due to lack of funding that severely restricted operational abilities.

However, the National Farmers' Federation advocated for a funding injection and the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment stepped in to provide substantial support, through the National Farm Safety Education Fund, to modernise Farmsafe Australia, revitalise the organization and ensure that the critical knowledge and information that Farmsafe provided was not lost.

Today, Farmsafe Australia is the national entity connecting state farming organisations, peak commodity bodies, influential advocacy bodies and other groups that share a common interest in agricultural health and safety.

We are 100% not-for-profit.

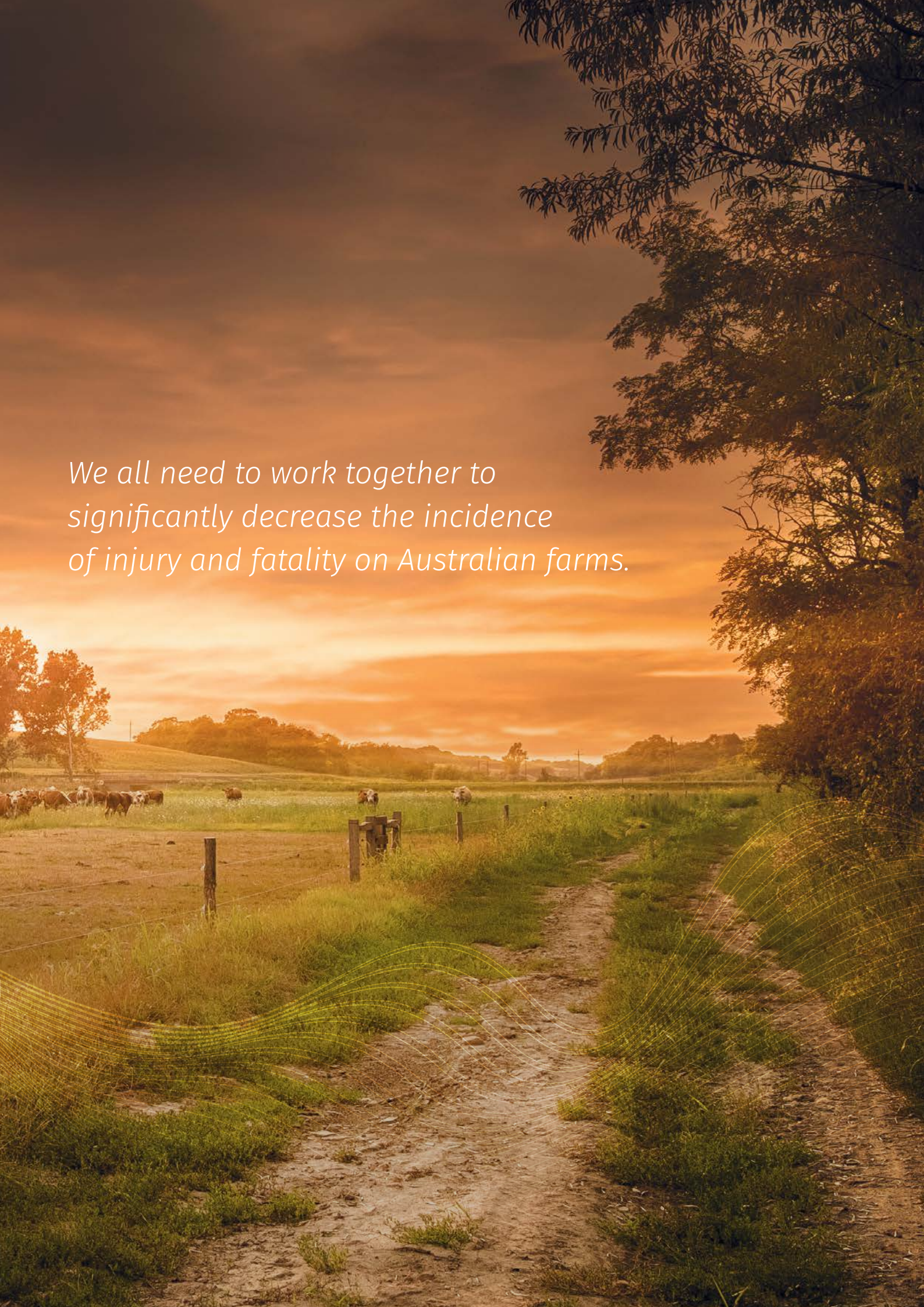
Over the next three years, Farmsafe Australia will be working hard to enhance our available resources and capabilities to promote and support activities relating to on-farm safety and continue in our efforts to reduce on-farm fatalities and injuries.

We will dedicate significant time and effort to raising awareness of key health and safety issues on Australian farms through media campaigns, advocacy and engagement with communities and stakeholders. As an industry, we need to communicate directly with our farmers about safety and we need to be consistent about the messaging that we are putting forward. As the national body for farm safety education, we need to be focusing the national conversation around emerging trends in the agricultural WH&S landscape and what we, as an industry, can do to turn those trends around.

Our programs and activities are based upon the philosophy that the primary responsibility for farm safety rests with individual farmers, farm workers, and their families. By improving the availability of information on hazards, risk factors and practical safety solutions, farming communities can come together to significantly reduce the risk of injury and illness associated with agricultural production.

We believe that Government and other stakeholders have important roles to play in supporting Australian farmers' health and safety. This includes setting up mechanisms to support farmers' individual efforts to improve safety outcomes (for example, by offering rebates for quad bike training and rollover protection – as in NSW and Victoria) and by actively working to identify practices and products that pose an unacceptable risk to health and safety.

The wider rural community can assist in facilitating farm safety action through the development of a 'safety culture' within those communities. Local networks of farming families, friends, businesses, and community organisations can all play a part in helping to alleviate some of the pressures of farming life.

A rural landscape at sunset. A dirt road leads through a field with a fence. In the background, there are rolling hills and a herd of cows. The sky is filled with warm, orange and yellow light from the setting sun. A large tree is visible on the right side of the frame.

We all need to work together to significantly decrease the incidence of injury and fatality on Australian farms.



Committed to keeping you safer on Australian farms



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