

Getting farm safety culture right

Dr John McNamara
Teagasc Health and Safety Specialist.



From January to mid-August, 16 farm workplace deaths have taken place on Irish farms. This compares with an annual average of about 20 per year over the last decade. Farm workplace injuries are particularly associated with tractors and machinery, livestock, falls from heights and objects falling. Everyone in the sector must aim to prevent the dreadful toll of death, pain and suffering associated with farm injuries.

Safety research strongly indicates that farmer actions are crucial to preventing injuries. Behaviour has been identified as a frequent factor involved in over 90% of injuries.

Farmers in Ireland are predominantly self-employed and accordingly, behaviour and management practices drive farm safety culture.

A simple definition of culture is 'how things are done in practice around here'. Changing the culture related to farm safety is proposed internationally as one of the main solutions to preventing farm injuries.

Safety Culture and Risk Management

Currently, a four-year EU COST Action on Safety Culture and Risk Management in Agriculture (acronym: SACURIMA) is ongoing. Information on this project is available at www.sacurima.eu/.*

COST stands for 'Co-operation in Science and Technology'. It has a network of members from 36 countries. The main aim is to explore the reasons why agriculture is one of the most dangerous occupations in Europe and to propose solutions.

Farm safety survey in Ireland

As part of the work of the SACURIMA EU COST Action, a survey on Safety Culture and Behaviour is in progress with 14 countries taking part and about 1,000 surveys completed. In Ireland, 228 surveys were completed online (due to COVID-19 restrictions) and this farmer participation is gratefully acknowledged.

Key Irish survey findings.

Just 38% (Figure 1) agreed that farm-

Figure 1: Farmer safety opinions.

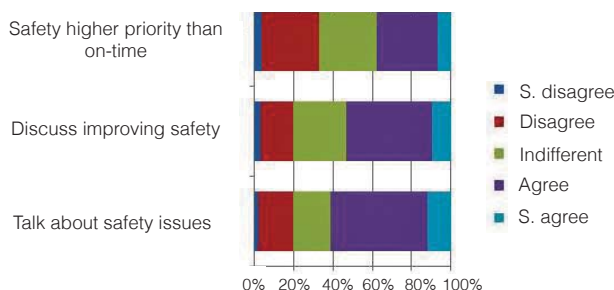
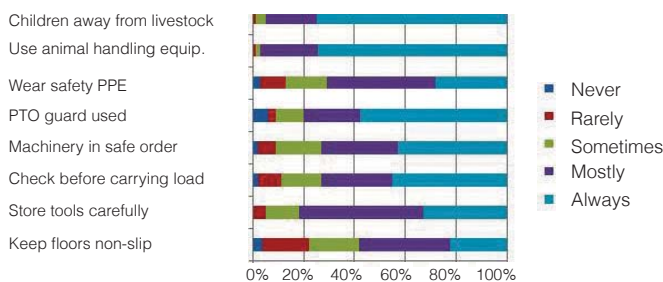


Figure 2: Farmer safety behaviours.



ers give safety higher priority than on-time completion of work. This is a worrying finding. But it indicates that work organisation has a considerable role to play in improving safety, by implementing labour-saving buildings and equipment and also practice adoption to cut workload and reduce 'hurry'.

Survey participants' views on the prominence of safety in their farming community are interesting. Just 61% agreed that farmers talk with fellow farmers about farm safety and only 54% discuss ways to improve safety. This shows that there is considerable potential to improve communication with, and between, farmers about practical safety adoption.

Regarding implementation of safety-related behaviours (Figure 2) this was estimated at 65% or higher for all tasks (as measured by responses of 'mostly or always'). High implementation was measured for 'use of animal handling equipment' (94%) and 'keeping children away from livestock' (95%).

In contrast, lower behaviour implementation levels were reported for 'keeping floors non-slip (65%)', 'using personal protective equipment (PPE) (71%)', 'keeping machinery in safe order (73%)', 'checking pathway

before carrying a heavy load (73%)', and 'using PTO guarding (80%)'.

Risk Assessment Document

The Farm Safety Risk Assessment Document provides a comprehensive list of behaviours and physical controls to consider for implementation of all hazardous tasks on farms. Complete or review your Risk Assessment document on a regular basis. It is a legal requirement to complete a Risk Assessment Document (three workers or fewer) or a Safety Statement (four or more employees).

TAMSII grant aid

The DAFM TAMSII grant scheme is due to close this year, with two tranches expected by December. A wide range of farm health and safety measures can be included in your application. These include electrical installations, slat replacement and livestock handling facilities. Once approval is granted, the completion time allowed depends on the work involved. Further information is available on the DAFM website or by consulting your advisor.

*The completed SACURIMA report on Safety Culture and Behaviours in Agriculture will be available later in 2020.