

Edited by Amy Quinn



Welcome to the July edition of our monthly newsletter. In this special edition we focus on the important topic of farm health and safety to mark Farm Safety Week 2021.

Over the past week on social media we have run a Farm Safety Campaign with the help of yourselves. This campaign highlights the advice and thoughts of fellow farmers in relation to farm safety. This has been an extremely successful campaign and there has been lots of positive feedback. Thank you to all the farmers who contributed, we hope it has gone some way in highlighting awareness around farm safety on pig farms. I have included some of the campaign images at the end of this newsletter.

Our latest Teagasc Pig Research Facility monthly update is now available (on the Teagasc YouTube channel and website). Tomás Ryan gives us an overview of farm performance year to date and an overview of some of the preventative measures they have in place for health and safety on the unit.

As you all know farming comes with great responsibilities in terms of farm safety and this requires constant thought and action. You are responsible for the safety of yourself, employees, casual/part-time workers, family members, contractors and anyone else who comes on site on your farm.

This newsletter contains a number of articles on farm safety, well worth a read for all producers and staff. The theme of Farm Safety Week 2021 is “Rethink Safety” and Louise’s articles below appeals to everyone to do just that. If everyone reading this newsletter takes action on this we may very well avoid some serious outcomes in the future. Time spent on health and safety is the most valuable time you can spend.

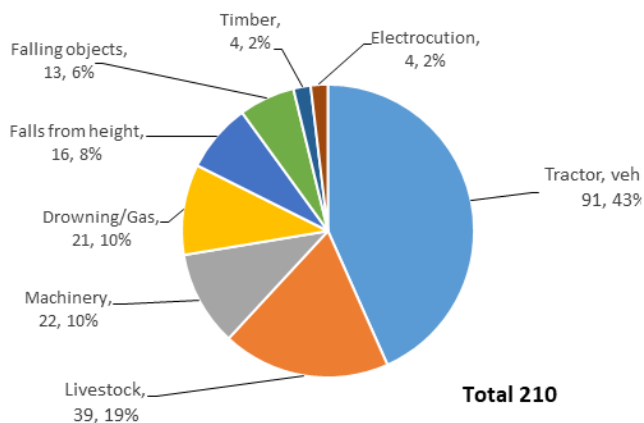
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## Rethink safety

Louise Clarke

This week marks farm safety week 2021. The theme of this year's campaign is to "Rethink Safety". Unfortunately, the fatality rate in agriculture is far higher than any other economic sector, even though a small proportion of the workforce is employed in farming. As a farmer you are responsible for the health, safety and welfare of yourself, employees and others that may be affected by what you do. This includes contractors, casual or part time workers, trainees, neighbours, and family members.



**Figure 1:** Main cause of farm deaths in Agriculture and Forestry in the last 10 years (2011-2020)(Source: Health and Safety Authorities)

### Risk assessment:

Last year, I highlighted the importance of having a risk assessment for your farm. In line with this year's theme to "rethink safety" one of the first areas a farmer should examine is their risk assessment. Remember, all farmers are legally obliged to complete a risk assessment on their unit and this document must be made available to all staff, contractors and visitors to the farm. The risk assessment must be reviewed regularly and updated as required for new SOP's, new equipment and new activities on the unit. Staff should be made aware of any changes and

encouraged to contribute to the risk assessment where appropriate.

### Tractors, vehicles and machinery:

As a follow on from that another area where farmers may need to rethink safety is the area of machinery, tractors and farm vehicles. While machinery primarily makes our lives easier it can also be responsible for a number of health and safety problems. In the last 10 years there has been a total of 210 deaths as a result of agriculture. Over this period, 43% of total deaths were as a result of tractors and farm vehicles with a further 10% of total death being contributed to farm machinery. Being crushed, struck, and pinned under or falling from vehicles are the main causes of deaths with farm vehicles. Being entangled in PTO's, crushed under a machine part, caught in a machine mechanism, crushed between vehicles and struck by a machine object are the main causes of deaths with farm machinery.

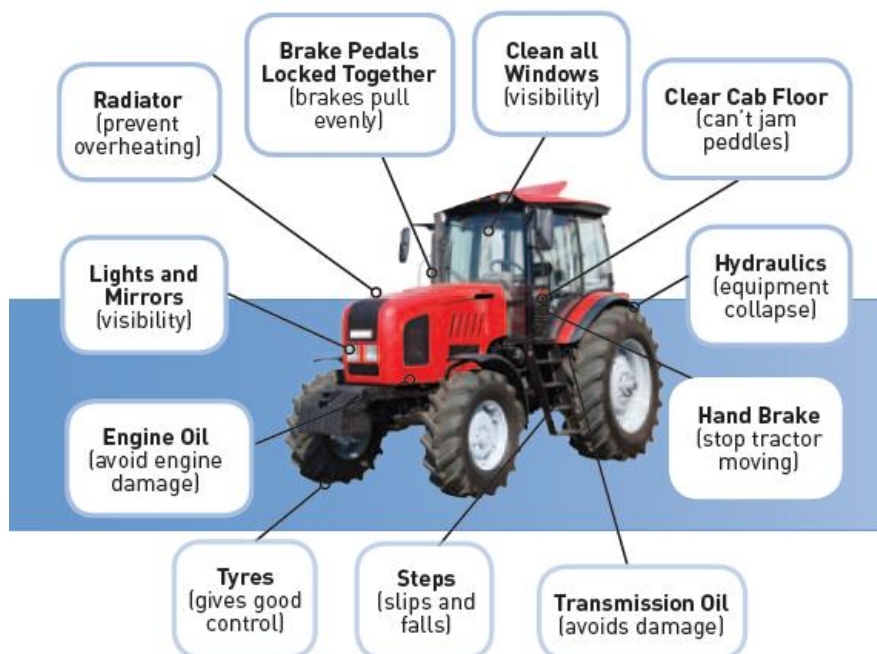
Pig husbandry involves frequent use of tractors, handlers and other machinery. Jobs like spreading slurry, moving feed or grain, moving animals and many more will require the use of tractors, farm vehicles and machinery. The importance of good practice when using machinery cannot be overstated. Regardless of the scale of the unit, there is a tractor on almost every unit in the country and many farms are not operating with the most modern machinery. Before you start working with tractors farmers should take 5 minutes to do a check on the tractor or vehicles. While this practice might seem tedious to some, skipping on a few minutes might result in a lifetime of consequence.

- Tractors or any farm vehicles should only be operated by drivers who are **trained and competent**
- Traffic risks should be assessed and controlled
- Drivers should ensure to go at a speed appropriate for ground or road conditions
- Don't overload trailer or machines
- Never use a mobile phone while operating tractors or machinery
- Passengers should only travel on a tractor cab where appropriate seat and seatbelt is provided
- Provide parking on your farm away from traffic routes
- Good visibility around farm roads and the farm yard is essential

A pig farm is a busy place where several tasks are being completed each day and health and safety should not be an afterthought to any of these tasks. Understanding the risks on and around a farm operation makes it easier to avoid dangers, and makes accidents less likely. All too often, farmers do not recognise the risks on their farms, which makes it difficult to manage the problem and therefore this year's campaign to "Rethink Safety" is very timely. Time and money spent on health and safety should be seen as an investment and should not be considered wasted. Health and Safety is relevant to all farming businesses including the pig sector and is always an area that warrants our attention.

## Five Minute Check

Before you start work always check these items:



Only now should you start work – but slow down and work safely

Figure 2. Tractor/Vehicle 5 minute check (Source: Health and Safety Authorities)

## The forgotten part of 'Health & Safety'

Michael McKeon

When people think of 'health & safety' the focus is often on the safety part and the health element is forgotten about. When we think about it, we always bring our car in for a service a few times a year as we instinctively know it's bad for the engine if not serviced. However it may often be years between our doctor's visits and often we only go when there's an actual 'breakage'!

So how is the health of people in farming? Unfortunately not good, in fact it's poor. A large scale study of Irish farmers by Breda Smyth has shown that farmers experience 5 times higher cardiovascular, 3 times higher cancer and 7 times higher mortality in the working age range than 'white collar' workers. One would suspect that those involved in pig farming may be more active than the average farmer as tractor work isn't a big element. Anecdotal evidence suggests that pig producers can often exceed 15,000 daily steps which sounds excellent for their health. However, unfortunately the majority of this movement is done at a gradual walking pace e.g. when moving sows, piglets etc., which doesn't give an elevated heart rate. In addition, the high level of daily walking is often done in wellingtons or worn work-boots which, due to their poor foot support, can put extra strain/wear on knee and hip joints.

Another significant health risk in pig farming is stress. Due to its cyclical financial nature the sector often experiences periods of low/no profitability over a number of months. This obviously puts a great deal of pressure on the pig

unit owner and staff. Often a temporary solution during these periods is to work harder and longer hours to try and achieve/maintain some level of profitability. Unfortunately this reduces the time available to 'switch-off' from work in the evening / weekends which further contributes to the levels of stress. Not wanting to bring the problem into the 'kitchen-table' can lead to reduced communication and further pent-up stress. The human body can operate perfectly well with short bouts of stress but like any engine longer sustained periods have been shown to cause ill-health, either mentally or physically.

Carlow Institute of Technology have studied health and in particular men's health for the last number of years and have good publications on their website including one on 'Fitness for Farming' (<https://www.itcarlow.ie/research/research-centres/healthcore.htm>). Similarly Teagasc currently has 2 Walsh-fellow students studying the 'risk of cardiovascular disease' and a 'farmer fitness' program. Hopefully the outcome of this research will be available next year.

So from reading this short article what will you hopefully be motivated to do?

1. The big thing is to 'book the body in' for a check-up with your GP. Your engine is much more valuable than any cars! Blood pressure and cholesterol are very accurate early warning indicators.

2. Ensure that all staffs have proper footwear and this is replaced frequently – every 6 – 12 months depending on level of activity.
3. When the industry profitability dips again ensure that you recognise your stress levels, actively building-in down time and continue to communicate – a problem shared...

## A face mask isn't just for COVID

**Michael McKeon**

The face mask has become a symbol of COVID precautions over the last 18 months, however pig producers were using them long before the current epidemic. A pig unit may be a dusty environment depending on the feed system (wet or dry) and the ventilation system (natural or mechanical). If the environment is dusty then masks should be provided and used by all. We are familiar with the larger particles of dust on our hands or when blowing our nose. This type is a nuisance and uncomfortable but our throat and nasal passages catch the majority of this particle size. It is the microscopic particles that we can't see that are the most important and most dangerous to our health. These very small dust particles are inhaled deep into our lungs, get trapped at the bottom and over time can negatively affect our lung function.

What many people don't realise is that the face mask rating can make a big difference in how effective the mask is at catching the smaller particles. As per any equipment you should only use face masks with a CE rating as these have been

manufactured to a certain standard, rather than in someone's garden shed! The other important factor is the rating called FFP (Full Face Protection) and it comes in three grades 1, 2 or 3. Like a hotel, the higher the grade the better the rating based on the amount of dust they can extract as you inhale.

- FFP 1 – reduces dust by a factor of 4
- FFP2 – reduces dust by a factor of 10
- FFP 3 – reduces dust by a factor of 20

It is the rating, not the shape, colour or inbuilt filter that will dictate how effective it will be. In general the price differential between FFP1 and FFP3 is quite small but FFP3 give 5 times the protection of FFP1.

Hopefully over the coming months COVID and the requirements to wear a mask will disappear but for pig producers the necessity for one will remain. So if you're going to wear a mask, wear a proper one!



## Dietary habits of Irish Farmers

A study on the dietary habits of male Irish farmers to prevent mortality and morbidity was published this month. It revealed that a large proportion of the farmers studied were overweight or obese. The poor dietary habits highlighted were low fruit, vegetable and dairy intake and a high meat, fried/processed foods, salt and sugary/salty snacks intake. It didn't find any relationship between age, lifestyle behaviours, and dietary habits. This study highlights the need for improved dietary choices and the promotion of health initiatives for farmers.

## Teagasc PDD Farm Safety Week Campaign 2021

**Farm Safety Week 2021**  
Pig Development Department

*"Farm safety starts with you. Think safe to protect not just yourself but those around you too"*

Jonathan Marry, Pig Producer, Meath

**Farm Safety Week 2021**  
Pig Development Department

*"Farming can be a dangerous occupation, so as farmers we need to make sure we do all we can to get back safe to our family at night"*

Jimmy Mooney, Pig Producer, Donegal

**Farm Safety Week 2021**  
Pig Development Department

*"Health and safety is a crucial part of pig farming. It can't be a tick box, it has to be part of our every working day"*

Rose Fryday, Pig Producer, Offaly

**Farm Safety Week 2021**  
Pig Development Department

*"Before you do any job, big or small, engage the brain with what you are about to do, 30 seconds of planning time could save your life or a lifetime of disability"*

Roy Gallie, Pig Producer, Kildare & IFA Pigs Committee Chair

**Farm Safety Week 2021**  
Pig Development Department

*"There is always deadlines to work to with slurry spreading. This can put pressure on farmers & contractors. At these times it's so important to not take risks, we need to stop, think & plan the entire job, with safety being the priority"*

Louise Clarke, Specialised Pig Advisor, Teagasc Ballyhaise

**Farm Safety Week 2021**  
Pig Development Department

*"The best reason for farm safety is waiting for me when I arrive home, my family"*

Tom Sherman, Pig Producer, Cork



**For more information:**

Please visit our webpage at:  
<https://www.teagasc.ie/animals/pigs/>

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