

Cyber Security & the Agricultural Industry

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It's late Friday afternoon, well past his intended knock-off time, and Managing Director Anthony is having to make a phone call he'd rather not be making. Instead of going home to his family for the weekend, he's having to call a contact of his within the Cyber Security industry and explain that his farm's IT systems appear to have been hacked. Several hundred thousand dollars has been transferred to a variety of unknown bank accounts within a short space of time, and worse yet, it's the second time within 12 months something like this has happened.

The above is a true, and very real scenario. If it's not one your business has experienced yet, you are in the lucky minority. ABS statistics show agriculture as the fifth most likely industry to suffer a data breach in 2020, and despite this, ABS data also indicates that agricultural business were the fifth least likely of ANY industry to invest in cyber security updates.



The sad fact is, with the modernisation of the world, in particular agriculture, that while technology has raced ahead and we have adopted its benefits with enthusiasm, the security around that same technology has been an afterthought. As the agricultural industry continues to innovate and find new and exciting ways to leverage technology, it is now more crucial than ever to ensure systems remain online and functioning, and do not fall victim to cyber threats.

Unfortunately, as is consistent with the history of humanity, there are always those that wish to abuse and exploit others for their own personal gain.

If faceless foreign adversaries are willing to cripple hospitals around the world in order to make a few bucks, then the comparatively inconsequential agricultural industry is ripe for the picking (pun intended).

So, what exactly is cyber security?

At its core, cyber security is an organisation's ability to defend against and respond to malicious IT based threats. A common misconception around cyber security is that every IT employee or IT provider is capable of doing it and doing it well. In the same way that farming technology has advanced, and specialist knowledge is now required, it's no longer enough to just be good at computers in general.

Cyber security experts are experienced and highly trained, with a deep understanding of not only how to employ best practise security, but also what the current threat climate is, what the common attack trends are, how to respond to an active cyber security incident, and most importantly, how to get the most bang for buck when it comes to improving your security.

Cyber security threats can come in many forms

Industry experts classify threat actors into one of several categories, and typically this will indicate the level of sophistication they employ in their attacks.

Low sophistication attacks, whilst not always, are often typical of financially motivated criminal groups. These are commonly opportunistic and rely on large quantities of attacks with a small percentage of success. Examples include emails that attempt to steal usernames and passwords from the recipient or take control of the user's device, emails that contain malicious software that encrypts data and demands payment to release the data, or even randomised password guessing attacks that are capable of millions of guesses per hour.

Highly sophisticated attacks require a significant time and financial investment that is often associated with government sponsored hacking groups. These attackers are often not motivated by money, rather they are seeking information itself, often in the form of intellectual property or sensitive research data.

At Cleared Security, we understand that most business owners in the agricultural industry do not want to have to worry about the world of cyber security and the threats that it poses, they just want their IT to work.

We know that it's definitely not something you want to have to budget for, and most importantly, we have seen the effects of what happens when your IT providers aren't capable, or choose not to, provide you with the security necessary in today's day and age.

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