

How are you creating a safety culture on your farm? Safer Farms, Safer Farmers

Charles Armstrong, Chairman, Farmsafe Australia

A farm's most valuable asset is its people.
On average, 60 people lose their lives on farms in Australia each year, while many more suffer life-altering injuries.

Farmsafe Australia is committed to making Australian farms safer places to live and work. Our mission is to lead and coordinate national efforts to create positive Workplace Health & Safety (WH&S) messaging and enhance the well-being and productivity on Australian farms. The National Farmers Federation's 2030 Roadmap has set a bold vision for agriculture and has set an ambitious target of zero fatalities on farm by 2030. Farmsafe Australia is working hard to provide growers with the tools needed so that we can achieve that goal.

Unfortunately, agriculture consistently ranks among the most dangerous industries to work in. We employ 2.6% of the Australian workforce and yet agriculture accounts for 21% of workplace fatalities (Safework Australia, 2016). Farming has a very high-risk profile which is further complicated by the fact that farming is not just a job, it's a lifestyle – with little to no separation between home and work.

Why is it so hard to make farms safer?

Generally, the most dangerous elements on farm are well known to those who work there. The main issue that we come across is that often, farmers or those who are working on farm, are rushing to get many jobs done before the sun goes down, before the rain starts, before harvest begins, etc. Time to think about the risks involved in a job prior to it being undertaken is often not prioritised. Habit, stress, fatigue, and even the absence of regular adverse consequences also conspires to cause farmers and farm workers to become complacent even when risk is clear.

The first step is to stop and assess

The awareness and assessment of the risks that are inherent on farm is vital to the lives of every member of the family and every employee, contractor and visitor on farm. Farmsafe Australia has developed a risk assessment template that can be used to outline the nature of the hazard or risk that exists, how severe consequences of an accident may be, how likely, and steps to mitigate the hazard or risk. Step-by-step instructions are provided, and the resource can be downloaded from the Farmsafe website multiple times to cover a broad range of risk assessments. Find out more at bit.ly/Farmsafe-risk

Snapshot

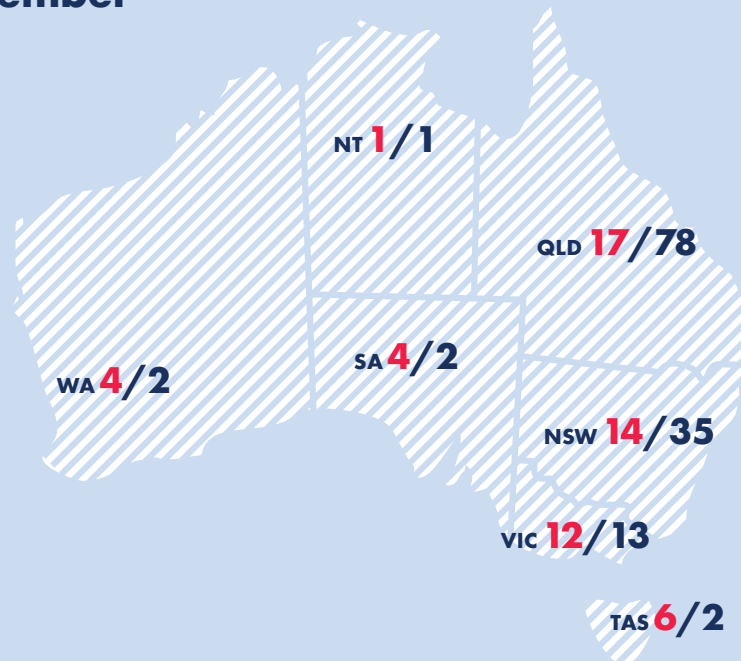
The following data has been collated from information provided by AgHealth Australia and their Australian Farm Deaths and Injuries Media Monitors Snapshot.

2019 January – December

12 MONTHS

 **FATALITIES**
TOTAL 58

 **NON - FATAL INJURIES**
TOTAL 133

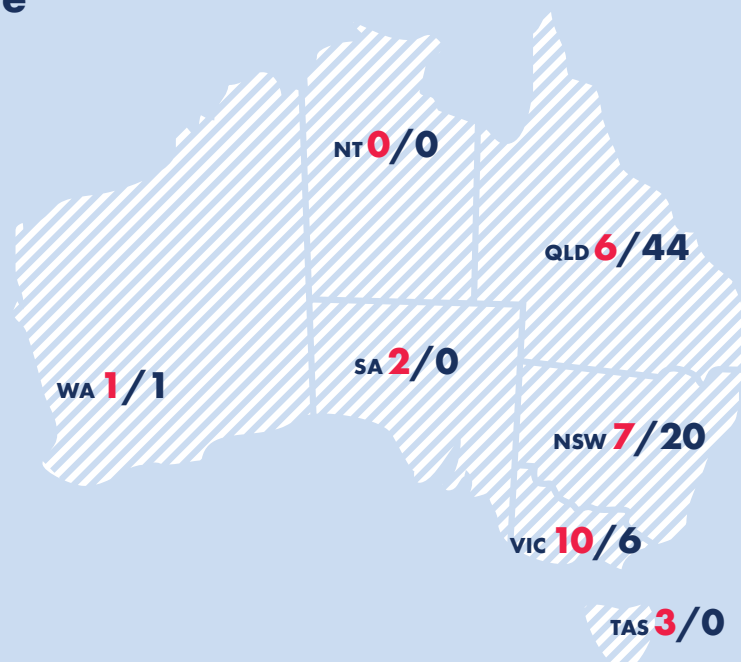


2020 January – June

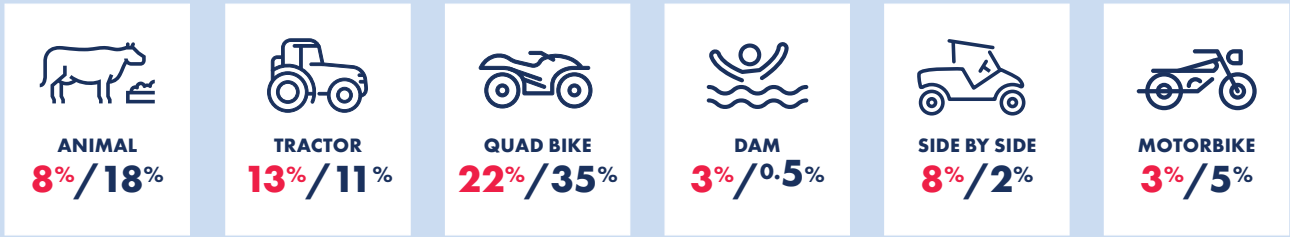
6 MONTHS

 **FATALITIES**
TOTAL 33

 **NON - FATAL INJURIES**
TOTAL 71



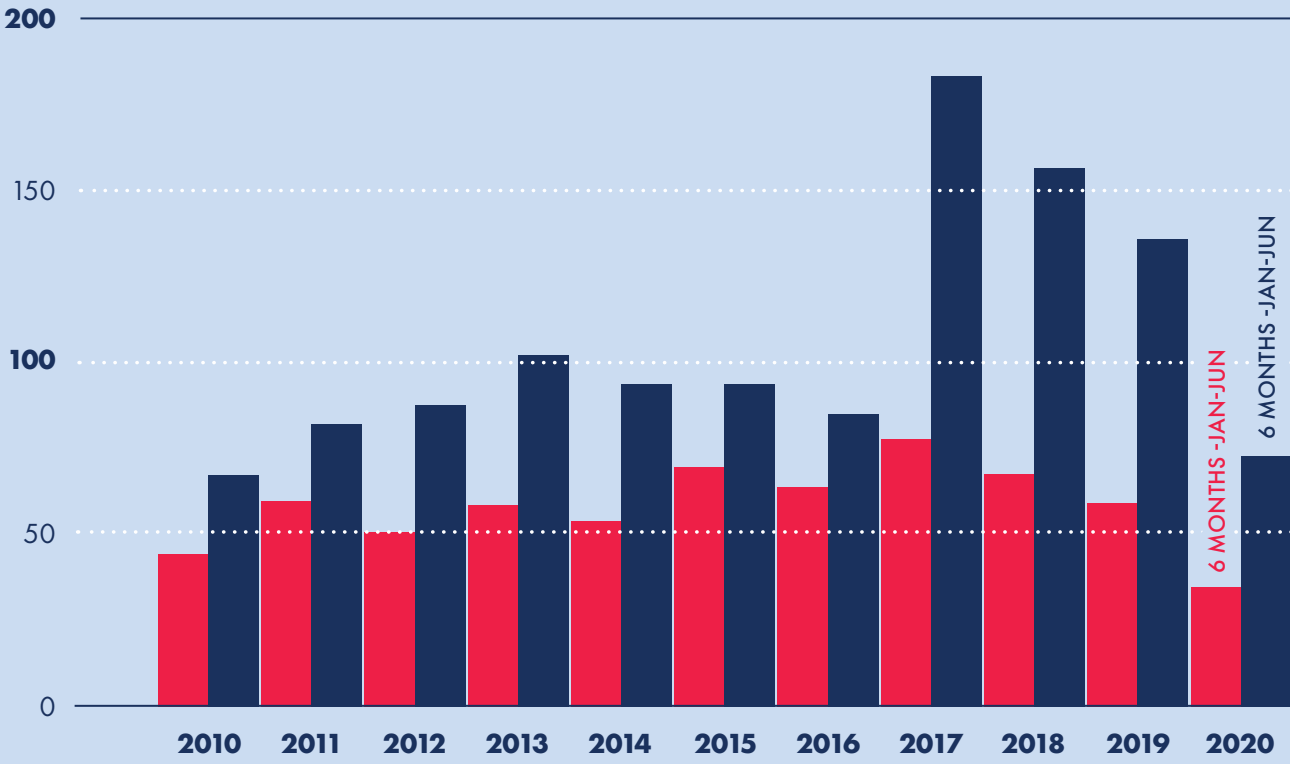
Common Agents of Fatality or Injury



OVER THE LAST 18 MONTHS

10 Year Comparison

FATALITIES NON - FATAL INJURIES



Gender and Age
89.3% FATALITIES ARE MALE

WITH OVER **50%** ABOVE **50** YEARS OF AGE

IN THE LAST 10 YEARS **15%** OF FATALITIES ARE CHILDREN UNDER 15 YEARS OF AGE

Assessment of risk is just one part of the process. Driving continued engagement with the behaviours associated with farm safety is critical. Lack of engagement, coupled with complacency, is a greater challenge than awareness of risk. Farm safety requires an ongoing 'topping up' of messages, reminders and strategies to drive behaviour change and avoid relapses into short cuts and poor decision making.

Are inductions really that useful?

Inductions are a necessary process to ensure that all workers, contractors or visitors on farm are aware of a broad range of generalised risks. Pre-inductions, like the web application offered by Farmsafe, can be done prior to stepping foot on farm however, it is important that site specific inductions are done on the first day to ensure that everyone is aware of the specific risks on your farm – **no two farms are the same.**

This is critically important in the horticultural sector, where temporary or short-term workforces are more common. We need to be especially mindful with this workforce of language barriers contributing to safety issues and ensuring that we have considered this in our risk mitigation plans.

Inductions are not the only responsibility we have to our workers. We need to remember that 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.

Creating a safety culture drives engagement

Investing in the creation of a safety culture on farm is the key. Ensuring that your employees are comfortable speaking up about their concerns and are being empowered to take appropriate control of their own, and their co-workers, health and safety actions is important in the prevention of day-to-day accidents and injuries. And this includes committing to a zero-tolerance policy on bullying and harassment. Mentally healthy workplaces are as important as physically healthy workplaces.

Toolbox talks are a great way to involve workers in WH&S conversations and to keep them engaged in risk awareness practices, but it is also often the best method to identify safety issues on farm. Encouraging discussion about issues and seeking feedback will create new ways of thinking, offer new and potentially safer practices, and ensure your workplace is safety conscious, productive and actively responsible for the health and wellbeing of all on farm. Some farms have regular meetings of all staff, others select a health and safety representative(s) to represent their concerns to owners/managers.

Farmsafe has released its first series of 'Toolbox Talk' resources that provide guidance on topic-specific conversations that can take place over the toolbox or in the workshop, whatever works best on the day. The risk management tool, lone worker, safe chemical handling, hazardous substance and chemical use, and tractor operation resources are especially useful for the horticultural sector. We are also developing modern machinery guiding, repetitive strain injury, manual handling and telehandler guides, amongst many others. Find out more at bit.ly/Farmsafe-toolbox

Mental health

There is a significant lack of mental health support in rural and regional Australia. However, we can be actively engaged in the mental wellbeing of our staff by promoting healthy lifestyles and making sure our staff know that health and well-being is a priority. This can be as simple as asking your worker if they have taken a break or just checking in to make sure they are getting enough sleep if they seem tired or out of sorts.

Most importantly, we need to reinforce safety messaging prior to busy seasons. There are always jobs that need to get done on farm, and harvest timeframes often push our farmers well past their physical and mental limits. There needs to be a balance established between getting the job done and ensuring it is done safely.

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

Farmsafe has recently undertaken a significant revitalisation with substantial support provided by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, under the National Farm Safety Education Fund.

