



Induction & Safety

go hand in hand

Liz knows about farming both through her work for the NSW Farmers' Association and through being born and raised in the Monaro region of NSW, where she is still strongly involved with the family's Snowy Mountain sheep and cattle farm.

Liz Young, a Regional Service Manager for NSW Farmers' Association, knows that every farm is unique, and every induction plan should also be unique. The good and bad behaviour of animals (and vehicles!), the lie of the land, the time of year and types of farm activities all create a unique range of induction and safety issues. Similarly, every farm worker also has a special set of experiences, skills and knowledge that will contribute to the safety, or otherwise, of a farm. Ensuring the safety of owners and managers, family members, workers and contractors requires careful planning, good communication and a fail-safe employee induction process.

"The best Farmers don't make assumptions about their new workers' knowledge" Liz says. "They (the farmers) point out the unique features of their farm. People need to be aware that when they enter a farm gate they're actually entering a workplace, and to treat it as such. Everyday they're dealing with machinery or stock and natural hazards that impact on workplace safety."

Liz notes that induction is the best time to get the safety message across.

"When a worker starts on a farm, that's the best time to have them understand the conditions and the dangers that exists. It doesn't matter if this is their first time on a farm or if they have been on farms all their life - they need to be told about the particular farm they are on now," said Liz.

Liz believes that hazards can be reduced if they are identified. A simple induction checklist that is discussed between the farmer and the new employee can ensure that all important information is covered. Experienced workers will know what to look out for and will ask questions but inexperienced workers are much more vulnerable. Using the checklist with every employee ensures that nothing is left to chance. Farmers need to cover both general safety issues and points that are

unique to their property, for example: where electrical equipment is kept; the idiosyncracies of each vehicle; or which stock is not regularly handled.

Creating the checklist is a good opportunity for farmers to talk about farm safety with existing employees and family members. Identifying hazards is vital, even if they seem obvious, like 'dangerous chemicals left lying around or the location of power cords'. Making it a whole team effort means you are more likely to notice hazards which have somehow become part of the scenery. Make sure workers know that you want to hear about safety issues and that you will take them seriously and act upon their suggestions. Once the checklist is made it is important to keep updating it to suit the changing conditions on the farm.

The checklist really forms the basis of a farm safety plan or policy, which every farm should have. Liz points out that:

"Responsibility for avoiding accidents and injury lies with both the worker and the employer. Revisit the plan – it will change in the event of incidents but it will also change with the seasons, with change in stock and with the purchase of new equipment."

Involving your workers in the process of developing a farm safety plan gives them ownership and responsibility, increases awareness and makes it more likely that people will do things right.

Farm safety extends beyond the employees to farm families, who may also be living on the property. Children run a particularly large risk on farms. One-off contractors, seasonal workers, volunteers, apprentices or trainees all need to be made aware of your specific farm safety issues.

Farmers are more safety conscious than ever because of farm safety legislation and increased publicity about farm accidents but Liz emphasises that farmers need

to continue to develop their knowledge and keep in touch with changes in legislation and procedures. Avoidable incidents such as loss of limbs in harvesting equipment, or injury/death due to other accidents, can be very costly.

“Compensation cases can put a huge financial burden on farmers. There is also the staff down time if their staff – or they themselves – are injured. Be proactive rather than reactive – deal with issues and hazards before you have to deal with injury or disaster.”

Farmers should not hesitate to implement safety plans, from day one. It’s a worthwhile investment

“Good farm safety practices can increase productivity and save money. I know that farmers sometimes get frustrated with legislation but the law’s not there to hinder them, it’s there to make the workplace safer. The need for legislation has come from too many injuries occurring on farms.”

A structured induction, a commitment to creating a safe workplace, good communication, and sharing the responsibility will all help to raise farm safety. As Liz points out:

“Every person is unique, just as every farm is unique.”

Consequently each farmer must consider the unique range of farm safety risks which his or her workers and family face each day.

Liz also stresses the importance of joining a farm organisation.

“It doesn’t matter where you are or who you are, you cannot be an expert on everything and that is why every farmer should be a member of an organisation that knows their particular needs and issues and knows how to deal with government policy and regulations.”

Liz’s key to a safe farm “Be safe from day one”

What to put on your induction checklist

- Introduction – explain to new employees about your business/industry, job roles and responsibilities of others
- Job introduction – demonstrate how to do the job safely, ie- handling machinery, managing stock, farm vehicles – motorbikes, ATVs and horses, use of chemicals, fatigue and stress, heat and sun exposure, natural hazards (eg: bushfire, wildlife), and the procedures for reporting hazards
- Employment conditions – rates of pay/ hours/leave etc.
- Other requirements – hygiene/quality procedures
- Health and Safety – safe work procedures, roles and responsibilities, hazards, how to report issues etc.

How to create a safety checklist

- Know the legislative requirements
- Communicate with existing staff and family to identify hazards
- Decide on processes and procedures to address hazards
- Communicate with existing staff about processes and procedures
- Write down on paper a checklist describing each farm hazard and how to deal with it
- Revisit the checklist, routinely, with your employees and family



◀ Liz Young and her father (Laurie Norton) discuss farm safety issues on their family farm near Bunyan NSW