



## GET FARM FINANCIALLY FIT

# Act now to make your farm safety fit

Farmers can reduce safety hazards on their farms by learning risk reduction lessons from other workplaces

**Anne Kinsella**

anne.kinsella@teagasc.ie



**T**HERE are many risks on farms, including market risk, production risk and financial and legal risk. However one of the most important risks of all is often not given the same focus or sometimes overlooked – that is human risk.

A large proportion of accidents occur in the workplace, the farm being the most dangerous workplace of all. In other businesses precautions are taken, youngsters are not allowed on site, and if they are allowed a site visit then mandatory hard hats are worn.

'No entry signs' are the norm in many business places but on the farm it is often a 'free for all'.

This is one change that is needed – farms need to become more like other business places.

Providing a costing for the consequences of these farm accidents is complex.

The cost of treatment, additional farm costs in the form of labour and other costs arising need all to be factored in. This is in addition to the farm income loss following the accident and future income loss.

So what are farmers own attitudes to risk and how do they rank personal risk?

The most recent results available on this are based on combined data from the 2011 Teagasc National Farm Survey

and an additional survey carried out in autumn 2011.

In this year the highest proportion of farm accidents were reported on dairy farms so we will focus on this system for purpose of this exercise.

Among many other questions, the autumn survey asked farmers to rank five sources of risk on their farm from one to five according to their relative importance. The most important factor was given a value of one and the least important a value of five.

The table below shows the ranking for each risk factor.

It is evident from the graphic that market risk was considered to be the most important risk factor. In terms of the other risk factors, it was found that personal risk, such as health, accidents and successor, was given an average ranking of 3.08. Farmers therefore considered this factor to be of roughly

average importance relative to other factors.

Yet almost one in 10 of these farms reported a farm accident, ranging from minor trips and falls to more serious accidents, occurring from 2007 to 2011.

### Farm economics and statistics

Farm economics in general is the art of providing for all the wants of the farm family and seeking to secure a certain level of subsistence for all the household inhabitants by maximising farm productivity, creating wealth, and maintaining financial stability.

But sometimes you need to look beyond the statistics – to tell the human story. When a statistic relates to an individual and other people, it is not merely a statistic no more.

Recent research undertaken, representing 88,000 farms nationally, using supplementary survey data collected as part of the Teagasc National Farm Survey (NFS) shows 8pc of farms reported the occurrence of a farm accident in the period 2007 to Autumn 2011.

It indicates that approximately 2,500 accidents occur on farms annually with the vast majority of these requiring medical treatment, while almost half required hospital



### Farmers rated the safety risk factor to be of average importance

#### Farmers Attitudes to Risk

Average Ranking Position	Risk Factor	Average Ranking
1	Market Risk	1.75
2	Production Risk	2.43
3	Personal Risk	3.08
4	Institutional Risk	3.40
5	Financial Risk	4.35

Source: Teagasc National Farm Survey (Autumn Survey 2011)



**MESSAGE:** IFA President Eddie Downey has urged every farm family to take a few hours to talk through a safety statement during today's National Farm Safety Awareness Day. Mr Downey is pictured with his son Patrick last weekend on the family farm near Slane, Co Meath.

inpatient treatment.

A large proportion of all fatal workplace accidents occur in agriculture.

There were 30 fatal farm accidents last year, the highest number of fatalities recorded as a result of farm accidents in over 20 years.

Is it now time to survey the younger members of farm families and by doing so increase the awareness of the younger folk of the risks that lurk on their farm? We all must endeavour in all ways possible to prevent a repeat of those harrowing statistics for 2015. By each taking a small step we can work together to make a change.

Don't become another statistic this summer. Behind each statistic is an individual, a family.

Don't let one misjudgement or oversight be the one that you live to regret. Act now and make your farm safety fit.

## 'Getting the family involved will make farms safer for everyone'

FARM families are being urged to sit down today to mark National Farm Safety Awareness Day by reviewing their risk assessment documents.

IFA president Eddie Downey urged all farmers to take time out from the busy working day to analyse the risks and potential hazards on their farm and yard.

"Summer is a very busy time on farms so it is important that the young people are aware of the potential risks. By getting the whole family involved I believe we will bring about real change in behaviour to safety and make farming safer," said IFA farm family chair Maura Canning.

She pointed out that the day organised as part of their ongoing 'Save Lives – Think Safety, Farm Safely' campaign was about getting the entire family involved in reviewing safety on the farm. The campaign was launched to help encourage farmers to change their work practices to potentially save lives.

Mr Downey said attitudes to farm safety are changing.

"The response to the Farm Safety Scheme shows that if farmers are supported, they will invest in safety. IFA will continue to work with and support farm families through initiatives like the Farm Safety Risk Assessment planner to improve safety on farms".

# Making the farm a safe place for children

DURING THE summer months there are many extra small helping hands on farms, as children relish their freedom.

Any of us who grew up on a farm well remember how the freedom of the school holidays felt, flinging that schoolbag away into the darkest of corners, now free to roam and explore.

But as the number of farm family members based on the farm increase over the summer, so too can the dangers.

Lazy year, five children died in farm accidents.

School might be out for summer, but the farm has so many hidden dangers, some of the rules of school need to be modified and adopted.

Some zones should be highlighted as 'no go' areas so that children are aware of the boundaries within which they can safely play.

Be a safety mentor to the little ones. Sit down with them and get them to list all the danger zones as they see them.

By laying out a map of the farmyard children can mark off the 'out of reach' zones with an X.

Nothing beats hands-on learning and visual aids.

After the map/paper exercise, walk children around the farmyard and point out dangers as already marked with an X and also mark these dangers on the ground.

Act as referee as your children become the linesmen, marking off danger areas as you go with child appropriate paints/chalks and get them to make danger signs.

By explaining they are more likely to listen and learn. It will also make the farmer more aware of the dangers from the perspective of the child.

### Beware of hazards

Hay, silage and turf saving and taking home are the summer jobs when youngsters are most active.

All these jobs can be fun but adults need to point the dangers out and not leave youngsters unsupervised.

On the farm there are natural and manmade hazards – the aim should be to be aware of the hazards and reduce the risk of each

- Children need to be made aware of the unpredictability of livestock. The importance of staying clear especially when animals have young. Children need to learn that they protect their young like farmers do theirs.

- Bale making, bale transporting and bale stacking, are jobs that the young love to be involved in. But make them aware of the risks. Bales can easily become unstable.

- Keep keys to all vehicles locked safely away

- Farm machinery is there for a purpose. Quad bikes are also for the purpose of farm work – they are not 'toys for boys'.

- Make wearing protective gear/helmets the norm. Always wear a helmet when on a quad. The difference could be your life. A child's body is even more fragile and less well developed. All it takes is for one small mishap, a simple trip or fall to ruin a youngster's life.

Never leave youngsters unsupervised – after all they are always supervised in school.

Never take a risk with you or your children that you live to regret.

## NEXT WEEK: How to take control of your farm budget

