



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Commerce**

Agricultural Action Plan

2014-2016



Strategy to reduce the number of serious injuries and fatalities in the Western Australian agricultural sector

About WorkSafe

WorkSafe is a division of the Department of Commerce, the Western Australian State Government agency responsible for the administration of the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984*. The principal objective of the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* is to promote and secure the safety and health of people in the workplace.



“Serious injury and fatality rates in agricultural workplaces are amongst the highest in Western Australia and WorkSafe is working with the community to bring these numbers down. This new strategy will provide focus and progress the provision of resources and better accessibility to occupational health and safety information.”

Message from Lex McCulloch
Commissioner of WorkSafe Western Australia

Contact WorkSafe

- Customer Help Centre - 1300 307 877
- Licences for High Risk Work - 1300 424 091
- Report an incident - 1800 678 198
- Email: safety@commerce.wa.gov.au

This action plan has been developed by WorkSafe in partnership with the following stakeholders:

- WA Farmers Federation (WAFF)
- Farmsafe (WA) Alliance
- Country Women's Association
- Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA)
- WA Shearing Industry Association (WASIA)
- Department of Education WA
- Farm Machinery and Industry Association of WA (Inc)
- Food, Fibre and Timber Industries Training Council (WA) (FFTITC)
- Pastoralists and Graziers Association WA (PGA)

These organisations, along with WorkSafe, constitute a united front to address the safety of people working in the agricultural industry of Western Australia.

WorkSafe acknowledges the commitment shown by these stakeholder organisations in contributing to the development and implementation of this action plan.

Contents

About WorkSafe.....	1
• Contact WorkSafe	1
Contents	3
Occupational safety and health	4
• The WorkSafe mission	4
• Do the OSH laws apply to all types of farmers?.....	4
The agricultural sector.....	5
• What is defined as agricultural?.....	5
• What are the OSH risks in agriculture?.....	5
Agricultural factors and conditions	6
• What do farmers face on a day-to-day basis?	7
• What is a farmer these days?.....	7
• Working with the agricultural sector	7
Identifying priorities	8
• Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012– 2022	8
WorkSafe WA Strategy	8
• Planned actions.....	9
• How will WorkSafe apply this to target areas?.....	10
Working together to achieve results	11
• How will we know what to do?	11
• How do I find out more?	11

Occupational safety and health

The WorkSafe mission

WorkSafe's mission is to inspire employers and workers to ensure workplaces are safe through partnership, education and enforcement.

WorkSafe's collaborative approach with industry, employers and the workforce is focused on:

- influencing the commercial environment in Western Australia to ensure the achievement of best safety and health outcomes in the workplace
- empowering business and community partners to lead in the reduction of workplace hazards and associated risks to health
- developing a modern, world class regulatory environment
- enforcing the law
- strengthening organisational capacity to assist business operators and workers to manage OSH effectively.

Our approach to ensuring compliance by employers and businesses is tailored to workplace circumstances and presenting risk. Our model for compliance extends from education, capacity building and preventative measures through to enforcement.

Do the OSH laws apply to all types of farmers?

Farmers are often under the impression that OSH laws do not apply to them. This is often based on a number of misconceptions, such as:

- I am exempt as a primary producer
- I only employ family
- I only have seasonal workers
- I don't run my farm as a registered company
- I only pay in cash
- I offer food and accommodation in place of payment for work
- I thought backpackers weren't classed as workers

In Western Australia, ***occupational safety and health laws apply to all workplaces, including agricultural properties***. Under these laws, self-employed people, employers and employees, or a person or people in control of a workplace, have responsibilities to make the workplace safe. All employers, including self-employed people, have a legal responsibility called a 'duty of care' to provide a safe working environment. All employed workers - full time, part time, casual or contract - have the right to a safe and healthy working environment and to be protected from any hazard that may exist at the workplace.

The agricultural sector

What is defined as agricultural?

In the context of occupational safety and health, the term 'agriculture' generally includes all activities in the growing and cultivation of horticultural and other crops (excluding forestry), and the controlled breeding, raising or farming of animals. The distinction between agriculture and forestry is not always clear and well defined, however in this document; the term agriculture refers to all agricultural undertakings, irrespective of size, which are operated for gain or reward.



What are the OSH risks in agriculture?

Each farm has its own set of occupational safety and health issues to address, and these issues may change or be static. Some risks are specific to one particular area of agriculture, or even to a particular workplace. Other risks are across a wide range of agricultural tasks. Machinery, animals and mobile plant are consistently causes of work-related injuries. Hazardous substances are also a constant and significant source of injuries in agriculture. The variability in working conditions; including weather, isolation, environment, economics, work history, age, experience, fitness and fatigue, is a feature shared by most agricultural tasks.

Agricultural work often requires repetitive, rapid movements, heavy lifting, and awkward positions that lead to body stressing. Agricultural work is often seasonal, with intensive labour needed for short periods. Animals and plants also expose agricultural workers to numerous hazards, such as zoonotic (animal borne) diseases and plant allergies.

Fatalities are highly represented in vehicle use; including light vehicles, quad bikes, tractors and aircraft. The total number of work-related fatalities of persons employed in the agricultural industries in Australia over the eight year period from 1 July 2003 to 30 June 2011 was 356. This represents 17% of all fatal accidents within all industries in Australia¹.

¹ *Work Related Injuries and Fatalities on Australian Farms – Safe Work Australia March 2013*

Agricultural factors and conditions

Conditions in agriculture which increase the risk of occupational injuries and fatalities can include some of the following:

- The worker's home is often on the farm, increasing the risk of farm-related accidents to children.
- Often, a wide range of work tasks must be performed by the same person requiring them to be multi-skilled.
- There is a large proportion of work undertaken outside, exposing workers to climatic conditions.
- Depending on the task, often activities performed are lengthy in time, and require completion within a particular defined timeframe.
- The work is largely seasonal, and because of this tasks are often urgent in nature, or have specific periods when activities must be performed and completed.
- Plant and machinery may vary from year to year, site to site and season to season.
- The work is often performed in isolation, and in some cases in remote areas with little or no contact or communication with others.
- Access to emergency medical care is often delayed in times of accident due to the remoteness of work locations.
- There are high proportions of young and older workers, with the average age of farmers now being 52 years.
- Exposure to bites and stings, kicks, allergies and other health problems due to contact with animals, insects and plants is common.
- There are often a multitude of chemical and biological products used in agriculture.



What do farmers face on a day-to-day basis?

Farms in Western Australia can vary from the large station properties that cover thousands of hectares to small farms that focus on the production of specialist and gourmet products. Within each farming venture occupational safety and health issues can change hourly, daily, seasonally and dynamics characterized by continuous change, activity, or progress.

What is a farmer these days?

On many farms the work is done by the farmer and his/her family, with family members often covering more than one generation. Some farms are made up of large multi-national companies. There are also share farms consisting of families and groups working together to best use assets and infrastructure.

The agricultural workforce in Western Australia has been growing more diverse, and this diversity has become more pronounced over the past several decades. This increasing diversity of agricultural workers is present across the wide range of agricultural pursuits, and reflects the changing dynamics of the industries that make up the Western Australian agricultural sector. Many farms employ seasonal workers, especially for station work, harvesting of fruit and vegetables, and agritourism. These seasonal workers are in many cases from overseas, and often have English as a second language. Many of them have limited or no hands-on agricultural experience. There are of course also farms with permanent staff and occasional seasonal workers.

Working with the agricultural sector

The good news is that there are many departments and agencies formed across government to identify and assist in reducing the numbers of serious injuries and loss of life. From national, to state, and local level these agencies take a long-range view to the collection and analysis of data; which will in turn be translated into meaningful action, legislation, education, policy and enforcement.

There is strong commitment from stakeholders across the country which includes farming organisations, machinery dealers, service organisations, educational institutions, industry bodies and occupational safety and health authorities. These stakeholders support government initiatives and support any changes which can be implemented, at any level to convert data to strategies, and strategies to actions.

Identifying priorities

Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022

The National Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012-2022 provides a national focus for all Australian governments and the peak bodies to improve work health safety outcomes by working cooperatively and collaboratively.

Targets to be achieved by 2022 include:

- a reduction in the number of worker fatalities due to injury of at least 20%
- a reduction in the incidence rate of claims resulting in one or more weeks off work of at least 30%, and
- a reduction in the incidence rate of claims for musculoskeletal disorders resulting in one or more weeks off work of at least 30%.

The publication *Work-Related Injuries and Fatalities on Australian Farms February 2013* was prepared by Safe Work Australia. This report draws together a profile of Australian farmers and documents important trends in fatalities and injuries that occur on Australian farms. At the end of this report are potential avenues for improving the work safety and health of Australian farmers and farm workers in the context of the Australian Work Health and Safety Strategy 2012–2022.

An analysis of the Western Australia statistics indicates that focus needs to be placed on:

- Workers over 60 years of age
- Rollover/run over vehicle incidents

WorkSafe WA Strategy

WorkSafe understands the deep personal connections that many communities have with the land, and that over many generations Western Australian agricultural families have held on through the tough times of economic uncertainty, drought, flood, climate change and isolation from the markets to which they provide.

WorkSafe also witnesses the worst of times, when there has been serious injury or loss of life during these people's daily tasks. It is these incidents that remind us all that changes can and should be made to assist in making WA workplaces safer into the future.

Planned actions

WorkSafe has worked with the Agricultural Safety Industry Group to develop effective working relationships with the farming communities of WA. It has been identified that there is a willingness from agricultural families to engage in safer practices; however there are some gaps between what they do and what they are required to do. WorkSafe is committed to assisting close these gaps through the provision of education, information and systems.

WorkSafe has identified a number of strategies which will be developed and implemented throughout the Agricultural Action Plan 2014-2016.

These strategies are based on the following processes:

ACTION	OUTCOME
Liaison with stakeholders	Development of a picture of what needs to be done
Building partnerships with stakeholders	What resources can WorkSafe share to achieve this goal?
Stakeholders endorsing and promoting strategies	Actively assisting in promotion, cost sharing, and support
Education based on regulation	Development of a clearer understanding of what compliance with OSH legislation looks like
Learning, leading to compliance	WorkSafe provides information on how the business/individual can comply with legislation
Industry demanding compliance	Raising community expectation for safer workplaces
Education, followed by enforcement	When information has been provided businesses need to show that they are complying

How will WorkSafe apply this to target areas?

WorkSafe has identified a number of areas where the risks of serious injury are high. The following methods will be applied to reduce those risks:

Workers over 60 years of age

- Liaison with stakeholders
- Provision of information to assist mature farmers and workers in planning for safe work practices

Rollover/Run over vehicle incidents

- Traffic management plans
- Maintenance of vehicles
- Safe systems of work

Broad acre farming

- Provision of information
- Working with stakeholders
- Inspection of workplaces

Emerging workers

- Working with WA Agricultural Colleges to include:
 - Supply of OSH information packages
 - Deliver OSH information sessions to students
 - Ongoing support for new workers

Stakeholder liaison

- Engaging with members of Agricultural Safety Industry Groups including:
 - Attending meetings and discussion groups
 - Providing advice and support
 - Sharing of information
 - Provision of OSH tools
 - Undertaking compliance campaigns

Access to OHS information for farmers

- Upgrade of the Agricultural safety Checklist and Handbook

Working together to achieve results

How will we know what to do?

WorkSafe encourages all farmers, farming families, agriculturalists and agricultural workers, students and other stakeholders to become involved on a personal level to assist in the reduction of serious and fatal incidents in WA farming pursuits.

WorkSafe recognises that collaboration, information and education go a long way to assisting the spread of better and safer work practices. As a public service agency, WorkSafe endeavours to be inclusive and informative; and provides a wealth of information to assist all persons to have, and to provide, safer workplaces in accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act and Regulations.

WorkSafe requests the support, encouragement and engagement of all members of the Western Australian agricultural and farming workforce. This will lead to planned action by employers, employees, designers, manufacturers, contractors and others to:

ENDORSE personal commitment to participate in safe work systems

ENGAGE share, inform, teach and educate safe work practices

ENCOURAGE actively assist in continuous safety improvements and practices

How do I find out more?

WorkSafe's website – <http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe> - provides a range of information available to you to assist in creating a safer workplace.

If you have a question which can't be answered by information on our website then staff at our Customer Help Centre may be able to assist on 1300 307 877.

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