

SafeWork SA




# Farmers' Guidebook

to work health and safety



Government of South Australia

SafeWork SA



In 2016, SafeWork SA and Primary Producers SA forged an important partnership with a shared purpose – to keep our farmers and rural workers safe at work.

The *Farmers' Guidebook* is a revision of the previous 2011 guide produced by the South Australian Farmers Federation and the South Australian Dairyfarmers' Association.

This collaboration would not have been possible without great support from the PPSA commodity groups, who have offered their advice, time and expertise – Grain Producers SA, Livestock SA, South

Australian Dairyfarmers' Association, Horticulture Coalition of South Australia, and the Wine Grape Council of South Australia.

Special thanks also goes to Karen Baines, Eyre Peninsula board member of the Agricultural Bureau of South Australia, and to Chas Cini of Mediation and Employment Relations Services.

**Disclaimer** The information contained in this booklet is intended as a guide only. This guide includes information on how to identify and assess farm risks and provides examples of practical control measures. This guide has been prepared and provided based on the relevant information and legislation available at the time of printing.

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# Introduction



There's no question that farms are unique workplaces, and the combination of hazards makes primary industries one of the most dangerous sectors in which to work. In South Australia 4.5% of the total workforce work in agriculture, however almost 19% of workplace deaths occur on farms.

This means South Australian farmers are being fatally injured at a rate of almost five times beyond their share of the workforce. On top of the high fatality rate, every week nine South Australian primary producers are injured seriously enough to access workers compensation. Frustratingly, the vast majority of fatalities and serious injuries are preventable.

This guide has been developed to help farmers understand their legal responsibilities as well as provide practical solutions to health and safety issues to help prevent serious or fatal injury on their properties.

In South Australia, the *Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA)* or 'the Act' protects all workers, including employees, contractors, subcontractors, outworkers, apprentices and trainees, work experience students, volunteers and employers who perform work.

For most of you, your farm is both your workplace and your home, and sometimes the lines can blur. Your farm is a workplace when your neighbour volunteers at your farm, or you call in a casual contractor, or the local stock agent drops in – you are responsible for their health and safety while they are on your property.



It's important to note that the laws provide everyone with the highest level of health and safety protection from hazards arising from work, so far as is reasonably practicable. The term 'reasonably practicable' refers to what could be reasonably done at a particular time and involves considering the likelihood of exposure to a hazard, degree of harm, worker knowledge of hazards, and ways of eliminating or minimising risk.

We know farmers are a resourceful, resilient and independent group, and seldom seek advice from SafeWork SA or other experts. We also appreciate there's been a perception that a SafeWork SA visit to your farm will result in money and time – two things which farmers can't afford to waste.

We understand that many farmers are sole proprietors and that you may feel you neither have the time nor the resources to commit to improving work health and safety. But you can't afford not to invest – a serious injury or death on your property is likely to have a much bigger impact on you, your family and the community.

### **A common question:**

If I engage a family member or friend to assist with on-farm duties, are they still covered by work health and safety laws?

The short answer is YES – a person is considered a worker under the Act if they carry out work in any capacity for a person conducting a business or undertaking. For example, if you are the owner/operator of a farm and bring your neighbour on site to help with harvest, regardless of whether they are compensated in some way, they are considered a worker and you have duties and obligations to them.

From 1 July 2016, SafeWork SA has two clear operational units – an educator and a regulator. The educator will provide a mobile work health and safety advisory team to visit your workplace and help you understand your work health and safety responsibilities. We can provide you with practical support which, together with your industry knowledge, can help make your workplaces safe. Most importantly, this team will have a strong industry background and will not be inspectors. We want you to feel comfortable to invite us into your workplace.

**As an experienced farmer, you may think you have safety covered – but it's experienced farmers who are most likely to die on-farm.**

According to Safe Work Australia, workers aged 65 years and over accounted for 30% of on-farm fatalities for 2003-2011. This is nearly three times the proportion this age group represents across all worker fatalities

## Statistics

Safe Work Australia statistics for the agriculture industry in 2010-11 show that workers in the oldest age group (65+) are almost exclusively self-employed, whilst workers under the age of 25 years are predominantly employees. Young on-farm workers can be vulnerable due to a lack of experience, maturity and awareness. As an experienced farmer, you should be mindful that young workers may be reluctant to speak up, or may be over-confident in their abilities.

According to 2014-15 ABS statistics, South Australia has a total of 11,147 owner/operator farms, and an average age on-farm of 55 years. Our state's farmers are also seasoned professionals, with an average of 33 years' farm experience.

In 2015 there were 14 fatalities across all industries in South Australia, two of them in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector, which equates to over 14% of all fatalities.

Drawing upon ReturnToWorkSA statistics, we get a picture of the commodity groups most at risk of a significant claim due to a workplace injury.

Farmers who are most at risk of serious injury are those working with sheep, beef cattle and grain production (58.7%), followed by fruit and tree nut growing (19.45%) and vegetable growing (15.25%).

For the period 2012-16, the most common farm injuries across the agriculture sector have been caused by muscular stress while manual handling (103 claims), falls on the same level (98 claims), muscular stress while lifting (85 claims), vehicle accidents (85 claims), and being hit by an animal (65 claims).

For the same period, the occupations in the agriculture sector at highest risk of a significant claim due to a workplace injury are livestock farm workers, dairy cattle farm worker, mixed livestock farm worker, vineyard worker, beef cattle farm worker and shearer.

## Taking action

You may have done a task a thousand times before so you're confident and it's all but second nature. Often it's when performing these daily tasks that experienced farmers are most at risk. In this Guidebook we are asking you to step back and take a moment to reconsider the safest way to do the job.

We would like farming families to stop and think about work health and safety. When you go about your daily duties, look in this Guidebook for tips and assistance, chat with other farmers in your area, engage the services of one of our mobile advisors, and take action to keep the conversation, yourselves and your workers alive.



### Did you know

It's possible that you may have more than one duty on a farm. For example, both a property owner and a contractor share the duty of ensuring the health and safety of workers while on the property.