



MAKING OUR
FARM
FAMILIES
SAFER



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

Child Safety on Farms

A practical guide for
farming parents



Acknowledgements

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Foreword



Any death on a farm is an absolute tragedy.

But when it involves a child, the devastation is unbearable.

We need to do all we can as an industry to ensure no one has to endure the heartbreak, pain, loss and emptiness that losing a child to a preventable on farm accident results in.

Preventing incidents on farm has never been more important. The farming sector in Australia sadly represents the highest proportion of accidents causing death in any workplace, with children making up one quarter of this statistic.

The topic of child farm safety is not a new one. However, we know more needs to be done, so we have developed a child farm safety guide, the first of its kind.

It is up to us as farmers to do everything in our means to protect our littlest farmers. By all means no one intentionally goes out to be unsafe or create an unsafe environment, but the numbers of on-farm deaths speak for themselves that it's up to us to make a difference.

With nearly all existing Australian resources for child safety on farms aimed at educating and preventing injury to children aged under 10 years of age- we are forgetting about the safety of children aged between 10-15, who are visiting, living and working on farms.

Our working age children, when bestowed with the responsibility of undertaking farm duties that involve operating tractors, heavy machinery, motorbikes, working with livestock, and performing unsupervised tasks, are exposed to factors which unfortunately contribute to accidents on farm.

The enthusiasm that farming kids have when approaching farm work doesn't compensate for their lack of physical strength, that their brains aren't fully developed and their lack of experience. It is our duty to foster a culture of safety comes first, to ensure that working on a farm doesn't result in a family and community tragedy.

Safe farms mean safe families and children and I encourage you to download the guidebook on www.makingourfarmssafer.org.au

Emma Germano
President, Victorian Farmers Federation

Farming families of Victoria are standing up and making positive steps towards safer childhoods for children living on farms. This handbook represents an exciting, clear and positive statement from the Victorian Farmers Federation in recognition of a response to three challenging truths. First, farmers throughout Australia – adults and children alike – shoulder a disproportionate and significant burden of severe injury. Second, with few exceptions, severe injury on farms are preventable, not inevitable. Third, there are many positive actions, which when combined with willingness to pivot towards generational change, can truly make farms safer places to work, live and grow up. Please read, consider, discuss and live out the safety messages explored in this handbook.



Dr Warwick Teague
Associate Professor, Paediatric Surgeon,
Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne

Introduction

A guide to being a safe farming parent

In the six-year period from 1 January 2016 to 21 December 2021 seven Victorian children (all males) died using farm machinery¹. Three deaths related to the use of quad bikes, one on a ride-on-mower, one on a motorbike, one related to being caught under a farm attachment being lowered onto a pallet when it was disconnected from a tractor, and the seventh incident involving a child being run over by a tractor attachment after having made attempts to adjust the attachment whilst the vehicle was moving.

The combined incidents referenced above were cited in a report from the Victorian Coroner, and were the catalyst for a recommendation from the Coroner for WorkSafe Victoria and the Transport Accident Commission, in consultation with the Victorian Farmers Federation and KidSafe Victoria, to consider engaging farming families and/or conducting a public awareness campaign to highlight the risks of allowing children to operate farm machinery and/or to drive vehicles such as tractors, incorporating how to keep children safe on farms.

This guidance is designed to assist farming parents to ensure the safety of all children, but in particular children within the age range 10-15 years old, which is when they are more likely to be helping out on the farm.



Important Disclaimer: The Child Safety on Farms practical guide for farming parents has been created by the Victorian Farmers Federation Making Our Farms Safer Project for the purpose of supporting the Making Our Farm Families Safer awareness campaign.

The content of this handbook represents industry developed guidance and does not constitute legal advice or statutory guidance.

Under the OHS Act 2004 employers have a duty to employ or engage persons that are suitably qualified to provide advice concerning health and safety.

In addition to reading this handbook it is strongly recommended that employers should seek advice from suitably qualified professionals with respect to the OHS/WHs duties and also the duties that apply with respect to employment of children on their farms, having regard to their specific farm operations.

Health and safety duties and employment of children requirements may vary across States and Territories in Australia and therefore employers should ensure that they seek advice and comply with the relevant duties that apply in their jurisdiction.

Employers are also strongly encouraged to refer to WorkSafe Victoria (or other relevant OHS/WHs regulatory agencies) and the Wage Inspectorate Victoria (or equivalent) for guidance.

<https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au>

<https://www.vic.gov.au/wage-inspectorate-victoria>

¹Victorian Coroners Report death or MRE May 2021

The safety of your children starts (and ends) with you

The words “we, you and your” are used extensively in this publication. This guidance is aimed at you as a farming parent and it has been fashioned in a manner that talks directly to you about what you need to know and think about in terms of ensuring the safety of your working children.

The term “working children” has been chosen to characterise children in the age bracket (10- 15 years), with emphasis on the engagement of children performing farming work (i.e. not recreational activities). This focus is also consistent with the Coroner’s recommendations.

The safety of working children on the farm is always contingent upon the decisions that we make. This guidance has been designed to assist farmers and enable you to identify the hazards and to assess the risks to ensure you make informed decisions before you assign farming tasks to your children.

“There were a lot of things that we used to do when we were growing up on the farm that we just could not get away with these days!”

During the development of this guide the VFF Making Our Farms Safer Project engaged extensively with farmers through a number of town hall meetings and events to seek their input, and to gauge their responses to the recommendations that formed the basis for the content in this guide.

The expression above was cited by a number of farmers in clear recognition that community expectations have changed a lot over the years.

Times have changed – but they need to change more!



Balancing the benefits vs risk

Work can be good and rewarding for children, and farming offers many opportunities for children to develop work skills and benefit from farm life. Benefits often associated with growing up on farms include instilling a good work ethic, teaching responsibility, building character, learning about the life/death cycle, and instilling a passion, love and respect for the land.

However, farms also have the most dangerous and deadly worksites in Australia. The agricultural sector has had the highest rate of workplace accidents and fatalities for the last decade (2011-2021).² In 2020, the Agriculture sector recorded the highest fatality rate with 13.1 fatalities per 100,000 workers.

In Victoria the sector employs just over two percent of the working population yet accounts for nearly fourteen percent of all workplace fatalities.

Staggeringly, ³fourteen percent of the farm related fatalities recorded nationally between the years 2011 and 2021 have involved children under fifteen years of age. Many of these incidents involved children that died while performing farm work assigned by parents.

Child representation in farm-related injuries in Australia has been consistent over time⁴, and the key hazards causing these injuries have remained the same for over 20 years. The factors contributing to high rates of child fatalities include child development and exposure to dangerous environments, the risk-taking culture, multi-generational farming families, lack of supervision, child labour and lack of regulation, limited targeted farm safety programs, underuse of safe play areas, financial priorities and poor understanding and operationalisation of the hierarchy of control.

Working children on farms have been identified as vulnerable suffering premature death, disease and disability from injury. The blurred distinction between the farm as a home and a workplace means children are exposed to hazards typically not present in most homes. Additionally, most farming parents want to involve their children in the unique farming lifestyle, often giving them on-farm work responsibilities at a young age.

²Safe Work Australia statistical report key work health and safety statistics Australia 2021

³Agrifutures Non-intentional Farm Related report February 2022

⁴Adams, J., Kennedy, A., Cotton, J. and Brumby, S. 4 June 2021 Child Farm-Related Injury in Australia: A Review of the Literature International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health



The grey zone between farm workplace and home

“But this is our home!”

Many farmers struggle to recognise the difference between their farm being both a home and a workplace.

The Victorian Farmers Federation stresses to farmers the importance of providing a fence around the home (e.g. pool fencing, colour bond fencing) so as to ensure a safe area for younger children to play in.

When a farmer crosses the boundary between the fence line (real or hypothetical) that separates the home from the workplace they are actually walking into a ‘workplace’. When children are old enough to cross that boundary line with the intent of performing farming work they also are walking into your workplace. You must make sure that the workplace and the tasks that you are getting them to perform are safe.

If we ensure a safe workplace for our employees – it will be safer for our children

Many of the incidents that have involved children have involved the same causes as many of the incidents that have resulted in the injuries or deaths of adult farm workers.

There are a range of considerations that do make children more vulnerable to the risks of an incident.

These matters are discussed further in this guidance, but there are clear parallels between Occupational Health and Safety and the safety of our children.





Putting anyone on a quad bike that is not fitted with an Operator Protective Device (OPD) and a helmet is a dangerous activity at any time, but the risks of death or serious injury are increased significantly when the operator is a child.

For example a child may not have the physical size or capacity to engage in dynamic riding (i.e. shifting their weight) to be able to ride a quad bike safely.

If you provide a safe workplace for yourself and your employees, then there is an increased likelihood that the workplace will also be safe for your children.

Ensuring the safety of your working children involves more than just ensuring they are able to safely perform a task. Adults must also continually minimize hazards and mitigate risks in the workplace and employ protective strategies, such as ensuring high risk control measures are in place and effective and providing personal protective equipment, training and supervision.

A child may not have the same level of critical thinking as an adult when working around machinery. A child may also lack ability to think critically when receiving instruction from an adult - A child may feel that something is safe just because an adult has said to do it.

Every adult on the farm must lead by example. By adults setting the example and establishing a proactive safety culture your children will learn the behaviours and skills to complement a safe system of working life on farm and take those skills, awareness and attitudes into their lives on and off farm. Modelling appropriate behaviour is one of many tools that can make farms safer.

If the workplace is not safe for your employees - it is not going to be safe for your working children.

Growing our future farmers comes with its risks

Tourello farmers Steve and Ruth Kinnersly believe the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how lucky their children are to live on a property with so much space and freedom, but they are aware this luxury comes with associated risks.

Their two children Olivia, 14, and Ryan, 12, were brought up from a young age following their parents around the farm, where they run a mixed sheep and cropping operation.

While Mr and Mrs Kinnersly loved having their kids by their side, they were - and still are - overly conscious about their safety.

“We’ve never really set them off working on their own, but we often have them walking by our side and doing what we’re doing,” Mrs Kinnersly said.

“In the last few years, we have had them in the shearing shed, roustabouting for the shearers and penning up.

“They are also a great help preparing our prime lambs for the weekly sheep market.

Mr Kinnersly said they had made a conscious decision to not allow their children to ride motorbikes on the farm.

“We’ve never encouraged motorbike riding, as it’s probably one of the major sources of child farm injuries,” he said.

“Others around us, as well as some of our friends, have let their kids ride motorbikes, but we decided to steer away from that.”

“One thing we make sure of is that we never put them in a position where we’re asking them to do something they’re not capable of doing or have the right information to do so, like driving tractors.”

Steve Kinnersly





"We're always conscious that sheep can cause injuries, particularly with kids as they often don't think about being in the right spot."

Steve Kinnersly

He said they made sure their children knew the risks of working with livestock.

"When they're working with sheep, we try and put them in positions where they're on the outside of the lead up race pushing sheep forward but not moving with the sheep," he said.

He said at the end of the day, they understood that children didn't have the same developed thinking abilities as adults.

"We're mindful that our kids don't have the same ability to make a split-second decision, so we try to minimise the occasions that our kids would be in a situation where they would have to do this," he said.

"It does mean that in some instances where it would be easier and more efficient to send a kid down the paddock to finish that little job, we just don't feel comfortable doing that, because we wouldn't be there to supervise them.

"Ninety-nine times out of 100, nothing goes wrong, but we don't ever want to regret not being there that one time something does go wrong."

Mr Kinnersly said one big lesson he learnt from an on-farm audit they had with Victorian Farmers Federation Farm Safety Advisor John Darcy was the ramifications of not having safe procedures and environments on your farm.

"Of course you don't want your family - or anyone else on your farm - to get hurt, full stop, but the legal ramifications of having an accident on your farm are significant, too," he said.

Supervision

Working children should be actively supervised while performing farm work.

Under the Child Employment Act 2003 a parent or guardian must directly supervise a child in a family business, including on a farm.

You should also determine if the task is a good match for your child's abilities and maturity level.

“Just because they can doesn't mean they should”

Children growing up on farms are often eager to start helping out at an early age. While parents will often allocate tasks, or 'chores', children may at times be overly enthusiastic in their desire to help because they might perceive the tasks to be fun or exciting. Little kids like to play on tractors, or to go for a ride with mum or dad, and when they grow older they no longer want to just play, they want to drive the tractor on their own.

Enthusiasm, or willingness, to help should not be a determining factor in whether they should be permitted to undertake a task on the farm.

Just because they can drive a tractor does not mean that they should.



Why children are at a higher risk

A child's age and development characteristics can increase their risk of injury

When there are working children on farms, it's important to remember that they:

- ▶ Have less strength, co-ordination and understanding of situations than adults
- ▶ Can get distracted easily
- ▶ May want to explore, try new things or push boundaries
- ▶ May be impulsive and take risks beyond their capabilities
- ▶ May be overwhelmed and slow to respond in unexpected situations

You should consider a child's age, physical development and maturity when deciding what is appropriate work. You should also think about the workplace environment and where working children are undertaking work.



What to remember when working with children on the farm

When working with and supervising working children, it's important to remember they:

- ▶ Do not possess experience, knowledge or judgment about workplace hazards and safe work practices
- ▶ Are unlikely to know if they are being exposed to health and safety risks and may find it hard to speak up even if they do
- ▶ May be energetic and enthusiastic but unsure about asking questions or making demands of adults
- ▶ Are often keen to please so they might try to imitate what they see adults doing
- ▶ Can be inquisitive and adventurous and their natural curiosity may lead them into dangerous situations in workplaces
- ▶ Do not have the experience and maturity to respond appropriately in unexpected, dangerous or stressful situations
- ▶ May be vulnerable to bullying and harassment from other farm workers

Keeping working children safe on family farms

Working children must always be provided with adequate supervision by a parent or guardian.

For parents whose children are working on farms, it's important to encourage children to be responsible and cautious. Some ways to do this include:

- ▶ Teaching safety rules that apply to the different areas of the farm
- ▶ Making sure your child understands that certain areas are out of bounds for them, for example silos, grain loading areas, hay stacks, chemical store, farm machinery and animal pens
- ▶ Reinforcing expectations constantly by explaining the hazards and consequences of ignoring safety rules

The importance of identifying and controlling the risks

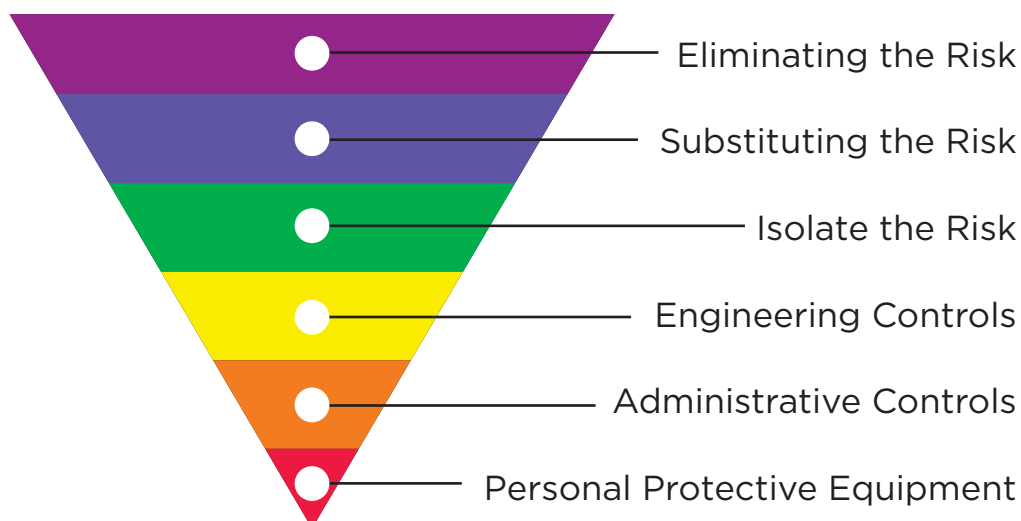
Many farmers would be unaware that occupational health and safety (OHS) laws also extend to ensuring that the workplace is safer for their families and visiting children. A detailed explanation of how the laws apply is covered on page 29.

The legal expectation for employers to provide a safe workplace entails that they must eliminate the risks in their workplace so far as is reasonably practicable, and if not able to eliminate the risks, that they reduce the risks so far as is reasonably practicable.

In meeting these expectations employers are expected to have regard for the 'hierarchy of control' when determining control measures.

So how should you think about the hierarchy when it comes to the safety of your working children?

Whilst the hierarchy is typically considered in the context of physical hazards such as plant, manual handling and chemicals farmers should think about the hierarchy specifically in the context of their working children. The first question that should be asked is "can we eliminate the risks to our working children by not allowing them to perform that work"?



Tractors

Tractors are often one of the first pieces of powered mobile farming equipment that farmers teach their children to operate. However, tractors have accounted for 20 per cent of farm incidents involving working children.

More than half of the incidents had no active supervision by an adult at the time of the incident.

Children should only ever operate equipment that is age appropriate, and based on the vehicle manufacturer's advice.

Working children must be able to do/have all of the following to drive a tractor safely:

- ▶ Reach and operate controls while wearing a seatbelt
- ▶ Strength to repeatedly operate controls
- ▶ Tall enough for good field of vision when seated on tractor
- ▶ Recognize a hazard, problem solve, and respond appropriately
- ▶ React quickly to hazards
- ▶ Mature enough to consistently do what is expected
- ▶ Think through actions and consequences before acting
- ▶ Avoid loose clothing, clothes with strings, tie up long hair
- ▶ Safely demonstrate the job multiple times
- ▶ Maintain a two-way communication link at all times

Eliminate the risk

Identify if there is an adult available to perform the task without the need for a working child.

Engineering controls

Ensure tractor is mechanically sound and safety features are in place, including Rollover Protective Devices (ROPS) and seatbelts.



Administrative controls

- ▶ Thoroughly demonstrate how to safely drive tractor
- ▶ Provide appropriate training – do not allow your working child to work alone until you are confident that they are competent and capable of doing so
- ▶ Educate working children to mount and dismount the tractor using 3 points of contact – supervise them closely multiple times
- ▶ Advise your working children about the risk of jumping off farm machinery
- ▶ Ensure that your working children know how to stop the vehicle and to make sure that handbrakes are properly applied, and that the vehicle is properly parked.
- ▶ Ensure that your working children know that they should never get on or off a moving tractor.
- ▶ Ensure the work area is free from as many hazards as possible
- ▶ Ensure that your children are aware that they cannot drive on public roads – must be over 18 and licenced*
- ▶ Ensure that your working child does not operate the tractor after dark or in bad weather
- ▶ Train your working children to call an adult if equipment malfunctions rather than take it upon themselves to fix it

***Note** – a person cannot drive a tractor on a public road unless they hold a motor vehicle drivers licence, probationary licence or learner's certificate.

Quad Bikes

Quad bikes are a major cause of death and serious injury of Australian children and adults.

Across Australia, between 2001 and 2017, 42 children were killed in quad bike incidents. Additionally, every year Victorian emergency departments treat an average of 85 children suffering from quad bike-related injuries. The majority of these children are aged 5 to 14 years old.⁵

Many of these incidents involved working children undertaking in farm work.

Because quad bikes are heavy and hard to control, children are especially at risk of being hurt or killed, even when riding smaller-sized quad bikes marketed specifically for children or youth.

Children under 16 have limited ability to judge speed and distance, and they often cannot make lifesaving decisions. They often collide with objects and other riders, causing injury to themselves and others.

- ▶ There is a clear state of knowledge in the farming industry that children under the age of sixteen years of age should not ride adult sized quad bikes

⁵Royal Children's Hospital Quad Bike Safety Fact Sheet https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Safety_Quad_bikes
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- ▶ The major manufacturers' specifications for quad bikes almost uniformly specify that no person under the age of sixteen should ride an adult sized quad bike
- ▶ Children under the age of sixteen are unlikely to have the physical size and dexterity to be able to apply dynamic riding skills to safely operate an adult sized quad bike
- ▶ All quad bikes must be fitted with an operator protective device and all riders should wear a helmet

Eliminate the risk

Do not let your children ride adult sized quad bikes if they are not at least 16 years of age.

Substitute

Provide your working children with safer vehicles for them to operate

Note – To use a quad bike on the road, riders must be at least 18 years old and hold a current motor vehicle licence (a learner's permit is not sufficient). Quad bikes used on-road must also be registered, and an approved motorcycle helmet must be worn while riding. Visit the VicRoads website for more information.



Side by Side Vehicles (SSVs)

Side by Side Vehicles have become increasingly prominent in farming incidents across Australia.

SSVs are unquestionably a safer mode of transport than a quad bike, but there is a prominent reason why farmers, and farm workers, are being seriously injured or killed when operating these vehicles – the failure to wear seatbelts. Seatbelts are an engineering control.

There have been numerous incidents on farms involving SSVs which have resulted in operators and passengers being catapulted out of the vehicle or into the windscreens.

Farmers that fail to wear a seatbelt in an SSV also bypass a secondary safety device (engineering control) that is built into the vehicle – the speed limiter.

- ▶ The manufacturers specifications for most makes of SSVs specify that a child should not ride in an SSV, either as a passenger or a driver, unless their feet can reach the floor and at the same time are able to hold the overhead rails
- ▶ Many SSV manufacturers specifications indicate the need to wear a helmet when operating an SSV

Eliminate the risk

Do not allow your working children to operate, or ride as a passenger, if they cannot fully brace themselves in the vehicle by supporting their feet firmly on the floor of the vehicle and reach the grab rails at the same time.

Engineering controls

Make sure that working children **always** use seat belts and side nets.

Administrative controls

Train and supervise your working children to safely operate SSVs and to drive to the conditions on the farm.

Ensure that all other farm personnel (this also means you) lead by example and always use seat belts and side nets.

Provide signage to indicate maximum vehicle speeds around the farm.

Personal protective equipment

Always ensure that working children are provided with, and wear, appropriate helmets when operating SSVs.

Note – a person cannot drive an SSV on a public road unless they hold a motor vehicle drivers licence, probationary licence or learner's certificate (and they are accompanied by a licenced passenger as they would be in a passenger vehicle).



Working with livestock in yards

Farm animals represent one of the 'inherent' risks that all farm workers are exposed to. This can be largely attributed to their unpredictable behaviour. People who are improperly trained, impatient or complacent when working with livestock are at an increased risk of injury.

Livestock are unpredictable, especially during the joining (mating) season where they can be protective of their mates and their young. Often reverting to a fight or flight response when they perceive a threat, livestock always need to be treated with caution.

Working children should be supervised at all times when working with animals.

Make sure yards, sheds and equipment are in good repair. The smooth flow of the animals through the yards is important. Self-latching gates are more preferable than chains so as to maintain visual contact with the animals. Children should be taught to not stand behind gates and to understand escape routes.

Workers need to be appropriately trained so as to be familiar with the temperament of the animals on your farm.

Working children should only be exposed to small farm animals (calves, lambs) until they can demonstrate competency and confidence in moving and handling animals.

Engineering controls

Yards, crushes, cradles and sheds should be suitable in size and strength for the animals being handled.

Avoid blind corners and sharp turns in the design of your yard.

Keep the walkways and laneways dry and non-slip wherever possible.

Make sure your gates, footholds and access ways are well positioned.

Keep all equipment in good repair: gates moving and hung, latches work, hinges greased.

Administrative controls

Supervise working children at all times.

Only allow working children to work with smaller farm animals until such time as they are competent and experienced in moving and handling animals.



Parents of four ‘forever vigilant’ on Larpent dairy farm

When Thomas Billing was a baby, his dairy farmer parents Mark and Sam set up a playpen in the calf shed so they could work while their baby was nearby but safely out the way.

Fast-forward sixteen years and Thomas, along with his three younger siblings, now help out on his parents’ farm as a way to “earn his keep”.

But there’s one thing that hasn’t changed, and that’s the family’s priority of on-farm safety.

Mr Billing, who is the fourth generation to run and live on the dairy farm, said Thomas and his siblings Bridget, 14, Isabella, 12, and Henry, 10, all enjoy living and working on the farm.

“About 12 months ago, Thomas started helping out with milking, and now he’s the back-up milker, helping out on weekends and inbetween his school studies,” he said.

“Bridget helps with calf rearing on the weekends and looks after the working dogs, feeding them, that’s her job.

“And the younger two help with getting up the cows and calves and other odd jobs here and there.”

Mark and Sam instilled in their children from a young age strict rules and boundaries for when they were out and about on the farm.

“Calves are generally okay but they can still do dumb things, whereas cows are a little bigger, so my kids know where to be and where not to be when cattle are moving around.

“We have a rotary dairy, and the kids aren’t allowed in the dairy space while milking’s going on, we have exclusion areas for them.”

He said the kids knew they had to wear helmets when riding their push bikes or motorbikes around the farm.



“We want the kids to be involved in the farm but they’ve learned from an early age the importance of their safety, not only around machinery, but stock too.”

Mark Billing

They were also aware of the danger of vehicles or machinery traveling around the farm.

“From a young age they’ve learned that if someone’s in a tractor, they need to have eye contact with them, and to not be around any equipment that’s moving around,” he said.

He said working for the local CFA reminded him constantly of the importance of farm safety, particularly when it came to his kids.

“Last year a friend of mine was killed working on his farm with a baler,” he said.

“That really brought it home for me, losing someone we knew, who had kids the same age as ours.

“It really refocused us around machinery and we sat down with the kids and said ‘this can happen, and happen very quickly, and if we don’t want to deal with the trauma of this, the best way to avoid it is stay in your spaces, and if you’re not sure about something, don’t do it.’”

Mr Billing said at the end of the day, he knew it was Sam and his own responsibility to watch their children.

“When our kids are out on the farm, we supervise them, we don’t expect our staff to,” he said.

“We know we have to be forever vigilant, and never switch off, particularly when there’s kids around.”



***“If you’re not sure about something,
don’t do it”***

Mark Billing



Forklifts and Telehandlers

Forklifts and telehandlers are high-risk machinery that children should have no involvement with until they are at least 18 years of age.

In Victoria, to be able to operate a forklift (applies nationally) or a telehandler employers are required to ensure that operators hold a High Risk Work (HRW) Licence.

HRW Licences are photo ID licences which are valid for five years. The licences are issued by WorkSafe Victoria after a person completes training with a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and then submits an application to WorkSafe to be issued a licence.

Forklifts and telehandlers are high risk load shifting pieces of equipment and often operate in areas where other workers are present.

Competencies and skills are necessary to ensure that these items of plant are operated in a safe manner.

Note: A person cannot obtain a HRW licence in Victoria until they are at least 18 years of age.

Eliminate the risk

Do not let working children operate a forklift or a telehandler on your farm.

Always ensure children are trained to keep out of the way if and when these machines are in operation.



Two-wheel motorcycles

Many children on farms learn to ride two wheel motorcycles recreationally before they progress towards riding motorcycles to perform farm work.

Teaching children to ride motorbikes recreationally is strongly recommended before allowing them to ride bikes on the farm.

Substitute the risk

Choose the safest vehicle for your working child to operate – a utility vehicle or SSV may be safer to use on your farm than a two-wheel motorcycle.

Make sure children only ride motorcycles that are appropriate for their age and size, their feet can touch the ground when they are astride a two wheeled bike, and they can lift the two wheeled bike up when it is lying on the ground.

Engineering controls

Adjust the throttle of a child's motorcycle to limit maximum speed.

Construct controlled riding areas / tracks for working children to learn to ride motorcycles and to be able to get safely across the farm.

Administrative controls

Make sure children who ride motorbikes are appropriately trained and supervised – go riding with (or follow) your working children a number of times before allowing them to work on their own.

Ensure that appropriate emergency procedures and means of contact are available – two way radios/mobile phones.

Personal protective equipment

Working children should always, without exception wear a motorcycle helmet and boots when riding a motorcycle.

Note: Children cannot operate motorcycles or drive motor vehicles on public roads. Only licenced operators are permitted to drive these vehicles on roads.



CASE STUDY

Giving kids responsibilities with boundaries to make them passionate about industry

Lee-Ann Thompson admits she often sounds like a “broken record” when it comes to her kids’ safety on their Manangatang farm, but it’s something she says she’s not willing to be complacent about.

“Yes we live here, but it is a workplace as well, so we want our kids to have that top of mind whenever they step out the front door of the house,” she said.

Ms Thompson grows wheat and barley with her husband Peter, who is the third generation to take on the responsibilities of the former sheep farm, and at the same time they are raising the farm’s fourth generation - Luke, 12, Elise, 10, and Daniel, 8.

She said ever since her kids could “sit up”, they have been out and about on the farm with their dad and sweeping up in the shearing shed.

But from a young age they have always been aware of their boundaries.

“The way to get kids to understand how farming works and to help them build a passion for the industry, is to get them exposed to it.”

Lee-Ann Thompson



“As soon as they were able to, the kids have ridden motorbikes on the farm, both to help out and recreationally, but we’ve got rules about traffic management, they’re only allowed to ride one way around the farm, so everyone knows which way everyone will be heading,” she said.

“They are also aware of tractor and traffic movements around the farm; they have been taught to always keep a look out and make eye contact with the operator.

“If they hear a tractor or machinery we have taught the kids to stand to the closest wall of the shed or a tree, and not to follow the tractor.”

She said the key to keeping her children - and everyone else - safe on the farm was communication.

“Peter and I will always make sure we communicate as to what tasks are being done on the farm that day and in what paddocks, so if the kids say they are going motorbike riding, I can tell them to not go to a certain paddock because they are working there,” she said.

“UHF radios and practiced hand signals are used routinely on our farm to be able to communicate effectively when background noise is an issue.”

Ms Thompson said while she knew of some farmers who didn’t even let their kids out on the farm, they had always had the mentality that their children needed to be out and about experiencing and learning.

“We’ve taken a measured approach, yes, we are helping them understand what the dangers possibly could be and how to mitigate some of those, but we want them to gain confidence in their abilities, while also understanding their limitations.”

She wants her children to understand and appreciate the industry and what their farm contributes to it.

“We want them to understand that food doesn’t come from a supermarket, how much the industry contributes to the economy, the trials and tribulations of farming, how to take care of your animals and your land, and that the money we earn from the farm is how we’re able to have other nice things in our lives,” she said.

“We’ve also taught the kids to be wary of stock movement, particularly in the sheep yards or in the shearing shed, there are places they’ve been told they can and can’t stand.”

Lee-Ann Thompson



Riding horses on farms

Falls from horses have featured significantly in farming incidents involving working children over the last two decades.

Working children have sustained serious head injuries, broken bones and lacerations as a result of falls.

Many incidents have happened when handling horses during saddling and unsaddling.

Farmers need to ensure that they invest time and effort when sourcing a suitable horse for their children. Appropriate temperament, behavior, health condition, age, and life experiences of the animal will directly contribute to the riding experience your children will encounter.

This further extends into investing time and effort into ensuring children are competent riders before allowing them to engage in work activities such as droving livestock.

Sending children to riding lessons at a riding school is strongly encouraged. Enrol farm kids in local Pony Clubs and Gymkhanas – where they are trained to safely ride ponies/ horses in a controlled environment but are exposed to different challenges to expand their skills, abilities and confidence.

<https://www.ponyclubvic.org.au>

Farming parents should improve their working children's riding capability and skills prior to allowing them to undertake duties on horseback such as droving sheep and cattle on the farm, also taking into account the terrain and conditions on the farm.

An effective control is ensuring that horses are properly matched to riders. It's important to train the rider, but it is equally important to have a well-trained horse that is used to young riders and well known to parents/handlers. Some horses are suitable to herding livestock – they may be a brilliant kids pony but if they aren't trained around cattle/sheep, they could become a very different horse under those situations – especially with inexperienced or young riders.

Substitute the risk

Choose the safest mode of transport. It may be safer to drive a suitable vehicle (e.g. an SSV).

Ensure that working children only ride horses that are suited to their size and capabilities.

Inexperienced riders should not be partnered with aggressive or nervous horses.

Administrative controls

Provide horse riding training for working children with external training providers (e.g. riding schools, pony clubs, gymkhanas) to ensure they have adequate skills to ride horses safely.

Ensure that someone else is with them when saddling and unsaddling horses, to raise the alarm if something goes wrong.

Personal Protective Equipment

Ensure that everyone involved in work that involves the use of horses wears an appropriate riding helmet. Also ensure that appropriate boots and chest guards are worn.



Chemical safety

Unfortunately, many farmers manage the risks of chemical safety on their farms intuitively without understanding the hazardous nature of the substances they use, or the risks associated with the storage and handling of these materials.

Parallel to ensuring the safety of your employees, to ensure the safety of your working children, you need to ensure that you have obtained, read and thoroughly understand the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) of the substances that you are going to allow your working children to use.

Read the SDS to fully understand the hazardous nature of the substance (the risks of inhalation, ingestion or skin absorption) and then ensure that the manufacturer's specifications for the same use of the relevant product are being properly followed before allowing your working children to use these substances.

Apart from ensuring that the working environment is suitable for the task (ventilation, access to first aid facilities) your working children will also need to be provided with appropriately sized personal protective equipment. An adult sized pair of gloves, or a respirator that does not fit properly, will not be appropriate for your working children to use. You will need to ensure that they are provided with the right PPE and that it is accessible and appropriate for the task they are going to perform.

Eliminate the risk

Do not allow working children to be exposed to hazardous substances.

Administrative controls

Train your working children so that they understand the risks of hazardous substances and the appropriate procedures for handling and storage of dangerous goods.



Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Make sure that PPE you provide for your working children is suitable for the task, fits them properly and is immediately accessible.

For further guidance, access the VFF Hazardous Chemical Handling and Storage Guide, available for free download on our website www.makingourfarmssafer.org.au

<https://www.makingourfarmssafer.org.au/media/yovp1yez/30300-vff-chemical-guide-v6-1.pdf>

Administering Veterinary Chemicals

Some of the substances that are injected into livestock can be extremely hazardous and can create serious health and safety risks. Farm workers, including working children, are at risk of needle stick injuries when administering single or multi-dose vaccinations. Some of these substances can also cause severe neurological health effects and serious ulcerations of the skin.

The range of health effects can vary significantly dependent upon the type of chemical that is being injected.

Administering vaccinations also requires a strong level of experience and confidence in animal handling techniques.

Younger working children should not be permitted to engage in administering vaccinations until they are older – minimum 16 years of age.

Eliminate the risk – some veterinary products are particularly hazardous and should only be handled by experienced workers

Engineering controls – ensure that animals are properly restrained if allowing working children to perform injections.

Administrative Controls – ensure that you have read and fully understand the SDS for the relevant substances.

Ensure that appropriate first aid facilities are readily available.

https://www.vff.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Factsheet_Livestock_General-Sheep-Vaccines.pdf

Agriculture Chemical User Permits

An agricultural chemical user permit (ACUP) is a permit issued to a person that gives authority to:

- ▶ Purchase specified 'restricted supply' chemicals in Victoria
- ▶ Use specified 'restricted use' chemicals in Victoria

Persons undertaking work involving the use of these restricted chemicals must undertake relevant training before they can apply for and hold an ACUP.

A person is required to hold an ACUP to use any of the agricultural chemical products that are Schedule 7 poisons (Dangerous Poisons) or that contain any of the following chemicals:

- ▶ Atrazine, metham sodium, or ester formulations of MCPA, 2,4-D, 2,4-DB or triclopyr
- ▶ 1080 (sodium fluoroacetate) or PAPP (4-aminopropiophenone)
- ▶ Pindone concentrate (2.5% or greater) for the preparation of baits
- ▶ Gaseous methyl bromide
- ▶ Phosphine formulated as liquefied gas

A person cannot obtain an ACUP licence until they are 18 years of age or over.

Eliminate the risk – Do not allow working children to perform work with 'restricted' chemicals.

Engineering controls – Restricted chemicals are required to be stored in areas where they are secured (e.g. a locked shed or cage).

<https://agriculture.vic.gov.au/farm-management/chemicals>



Farm safety – lead by example

Working children learn by imitation. A child is more likely to be safety conscious if you are. Make sure your child sees you (and your employees) performing tasks safely. Explain the potential for danger and how injury can be avoided.

Lead by example:

- ▶ Don't let your child, or any other person, ride on farm machinery that isn't designed for passengers.
- ▶ Always wear a seat-belt when driving or a passenger in a vehicle.
- ▶ Ensure that you, and your employees, always use safety equipment such as helmets, goggles and gloves, where necessary. You must set a good example for your working children.
- ▶ Walk around operating machinery instead of stepping over it.
- ▶ Switch off equipment before altering the settings.
- ▶ Educate your working children to recognise warning labels and to follow directions.
- ▶ Make sure your working children let others know where they are going, what they'll be doing and when they expect to return.
- ▶ Talk frequently to your working children about the safety rules of the farm.
- ▶ Involve working children in the toolbox meetings that you have with your employees.
- ▶ Remove the keys from all farm vehicles when not in use.
- ▶ Keep chemical stores locked when not in use.
- ▶ Make sure silo ladders have guards in place or are secured.
- ▶ Draw up a farm emergency plan.



Planning for emergencies

An emergency plan for the whole family is vital. Some suggestions include:

- ▶ Ensure easy access to a suitable and well-stocked first aid kit.
- ▶ Make sure at least one person on the farm is trained in first aid.
- ▶ Keep emergency numbers and correct addresses next to the telephone.
- ▶ Plan routes to the nearest hospital with an emergency department.
- ▶ Regularly talk through your emergency plan with your family and other workers.
- ▶ Make sure your children understand what to do in an emergency.

Farm first aid

Make sure your first aid kit is well stocked and easy to access. Emergency medical treatment for young children isn't always the same as for adults. Ideally, all parents should take a first aid course.

Never hesitate to call an ambulance if your child is injured. Throughout Australia, the standard emergency number to dial is triple zero (000).



Do you know farmers have a duty to everyone on the farm under health and safety laws, not just employees?

Many farmers would be unaware that their duties under Victoria's OHS laws extend not only to their direct employees and subcontractors, but also to any other person affected by their operations, including family members.

The OHS Act 2004 provides duties for employers to provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risks to health for employees; but employers also have duties to persons who aren't employees to ensure they are not exposed to risks to their health or safety arising from the conduct of the employer's undertaking.

Duties of employers to other persons

An employer must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons other than employees of the employer are not exposed to risks to their health or safety arising from the conduct of the undertaking of the employer.

This section of the Act also applies to the safety of working children.

Duties of persons who manage or control workplaces

A person who (whether as an owner or otherwise) has, to any extent, the management or control of a workplace must ensure so far as is reasonably practicable that the workplace and the means of entering and leaving it are safe and without risks to health.

Both of these sections of the Act could be applied in the event of a farming incident involving a child family member, or a visiting child.



Additional laws that apply to working children on farms

The Child Employment Act 2003 regulates employment of children under 15 years in Victoria.

Employers need a permit from the Wage Inspectorate Victoria to employ children under 15 years. Employers must also comply with the minimum age, working with children clearance, hours of work and rest break requirements.

These requirements do not apply however when children are employed in a family business, including farms.

A family business is a business, trade or occupation carried on by a parent or guardian of the child.

What work can a child be employed to do on a farm?

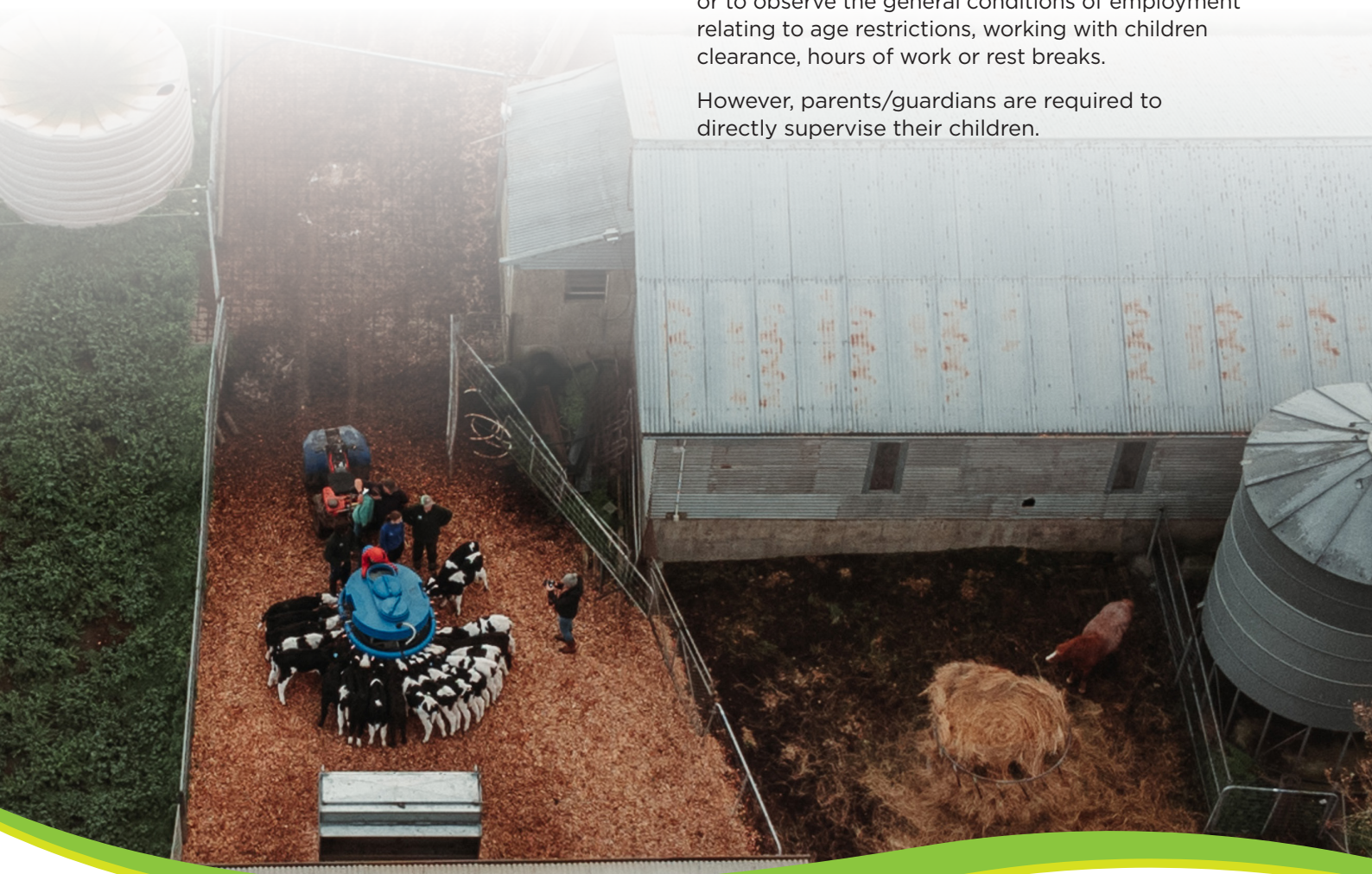
Under the Child Employment Act children working on farms can only complete light work. Light work includes work that:

- ▶ is not likely to be harmful to a child's health, safety and welfare
- ▶ does not prejudice a child's ability to attend school

You should consider a child's age, sex, physical and emotional development and maturity when deciding what is light work. You should also think about the nature and management of the work activity and the workplace environment and where children are completing work.

Parents/guardians employing their children on a farm in a family business are not required to seek a child employment permit to employ their own child, or to observe the general conditions of employment relating to age restrictions, working with children clearance, hours of work or rest breaks.

However, parents/guardians are required to directly supervise their children.



Farm incidents impact many

WorkSafe Victoria personnel, and other first responders such as Victoria Police, the Country Fire Authority and Ambulance Victoria are frequently involved in responding to farming incidents involving farmers, or members of their families. Farming incidents involving children are extremely traumatic for many - the family, first responders and all individuals involved - and they are preventable.

WorkSafe Victoria, working in conjunction with Victoria Police, are often required to prepare reports for the Coroner following farming incidents, including those involving children.

Any decision from WorkSafe to conduct an investigation into a farming incident involving a child that is injured or killed on a farm would be made in accordance with WorkSafe's occupational health and safety compliance and enforcement policy.

<https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/worksafe-occupational-health-and-safety-compliance-and-enforcement-policy>

The impact of childhood injury on farms

For every severely injured child, their family and their community, there is a story to be told.

For some, this story will ultimately be one of triumph, but sadly for others it is one of loss: loss of life, loss of ability, loss of prospect, loss of the joys of growing up, including the unique joys of growing up on a farm. For some the story of injury will be scarred by pain and fear, for others soothed by relief and reassurance, and for many a gritty mix of all these in the lived reality that is severe childhood injury and its consequences.

And what might these consequences be for children and families living in country Victoria? Some consequences are felt immediately and terribly with preventable loss of a child's life, and all the pain, upheaval, and grief this inflicts on a family and a community. Indeed, Australian farming families face the harsh inequity, that their children are at greater risk of dying from injury than children living in the city. For others, the legacy of severe injury is life-changing and life-long. Most Victorian children surviving major trauma live with at least moderate level disability. For the family, there can be a costly dislocation from their farming community, as days turn to weeks or months supporting their child in hospital and in recovery. Sadly for some, the emotional, social and financial tolls can make life on the land unsustainable.

Victoria is fortunate to have well-organised trauma systems, but even with this expert and compassionate care, some scars do not heal well, are more than skin deep... leaving their mark on the child, their family and communities.

Whilst each story of childhood injury is its own, defined by its own faces and places, their narratives inescapably share common threads. These are deeply personal stories, with an injured and loved child at their centre. These are profoundly important stories, now and always. And, these stories represent painful but real opportunities to respond and to learn.

And learn we must, because alongside each story of severe childhood injury on farms we must lay the true and challenging counter-narrative: **severe injury is preventable, not inevitable**. For children and families on farms there are positive lessons to be learned and positive actions to be taken, to prevent injuries today and in the future... *stories that need never be told, lives never lost, pains never felt, futures never disrupted*... leaving many more Australian children to thrive and experience the joy of growing up safely on a farm.

Dr Warwick Teague

Associate Professor, Paediatric Surgeon,
Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne

Working children and fires

Working children will often assist in the preparation of bonfires, scrub burns and post-harvest paddock burns.

Excessive use of accelerants (petrol, kerosene) to light fires creates a serious risk which can result in life long disfiguring injuries.

Children have also been seriously injured by flying debris and explosions caused by placement of inappropriate materials (e.g. aerosol cans/household items) into bonfires.

Administrative controls

Always ensure that working children are supervised when preparing farm burns.

Never allow working children to light fires without direct adult supervision.

Ensure that household/workshop items such as chemical drums and aerosol sprays are not dropped into materials to be burnt.

Ensure that appropriate first aid facilities, including a burns kit, is always available for all farm burns.

Ensure that fire extinguishers are immediately



Driving farm utes and four wheel drives

Working children often learn to drive farm utes or four wheel drive (4WD) vehicles before advancing to tractors and other farm machinery.

Regional children often become competent in driving motor vehicles, well before children growing up in urban areas, because of the opportunities that are afforded to drive vehicles on the farm.

Utes and 4WD's clearly provide a safer alternative mode of transport than quad bikes or SSV's due to the built-in safety features including seat belts, airbags, greater vehicle stability and enclosed cabins. It is important to ensure that the vehicles that are driven by working children are safe and suitable for farm use – old 'paddock bombs' are probably not suitable for any employees to use.

With adequate farm tracks, and adequate supervision, working children are often involved in activities such as feeding and moving stock and supplies around the farm.

Note – a person cannot drive a motor vehicle on a public road unless they hold a motor vehicle drivers licence, probationary licence or learner's certificate (and they are accompanied by a licenced passenger as they would be in a passenger vehicle).

Engineering controls

Ensure that farm utes/4WD vehicles are fit for purpose, properly serviced and maintained and safe to use.

Ensure that seatbelts are always worn

Ensure that farm tracks are properly maintained to enable safe transportation.

Administrative controls

Drive with your working children as a passenger to supervise and ensure that they are competent in driving.

Monitor their driving activities regularly.

Never allow working children or visiting children to ride in the tailgate of farm utes or SSV's.

Ensure that no more than one passenger is carried in a vehicle operated by a working child.



The final word

By John Darcy, Senior Farm Safety Advisor - VFF Making Our Farms Safer project

This guide is unique for one reason – it is the first of its type in Australia aimed specifically at farming parents, grandparents and guardians with the ambition of protecting our future farmers.

It has been designed following extensive, and very positive, engagement with farmers over a period of six months through townhall meetings and events.

I am extremely grateful for the input and support that we have received from the committee that assisted in the development of this guidance and also for the support that the Making Our Farms Safer team were provided by VFF's most senior leadership, Emma Germano and Danyel Cucinotta.

I am also immensely proud of the work undertaken by the Making Our Farms Safer team in pulling this project together.

One of the key expectations for the Making Our Farms Safer Project is to improve the safety culture of the industry – common synonyms for the word culture include terms such as heritage and tradition.

Raising future farmers is a proud tradition handed down through generations of farming families, in Victoria and all other parts of Australia.

The most powerful statement, used as part of a similar child safety campaign in the US, is "It is easier to bury a tradition than it is a child".

The Making Our Farms Safer Project is taking the industry on a journey to improve safety on Victorian farms – part of that journey includes ensuring a safer industry for our future farmers – we urge you to please join us on this very important journey.

Thank you to VFF Child Safety on Farm Steering Committee, Natasha Lobban, Jessie Adams, Katherine Myers, Cate Lancashire, Lee-Ann Thompson, Patricia Sweeney, Kat McKee, Ric Oldham.

Lastly we extend our heartfelt thanks to the Victorian Farming families who generously gave their time for filming, shared their stories and offered small insight into the wonderful lives they lead on farm with their children – we could not have created this guide book and associated campaign without their support and deep rooted belief in farm safety. To the Billing Family, The Thompson Family and The Kinnersly Family - We thank you.



Additional reading

A Parents' Guide to KidSafe Farms 2019

<https://www.kidsafevic.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/201906-Kidsafe-ParentsGuidetoFarmsWeb.pdf>

Child Safety on Farms – A practical guide 2009 – University of Sydney AgHealth and FarmSafe Australia

https://aghealth.sydney.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/child_safety_on_farms_2009.pdf

University of Sydney – AgHealth Australia

<https://aghealth.sydney.edu.au/resources/resources-for-farmers/>

Royal Children's Hospital Fact Sheet on Quad Bikes and Children

https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Safety_Quad_bikes/

<https://business.vic.gov.au/business-information/staff-and-hr/employing-children/child-employment-laws-and-requirements>

<https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/children-working-family-farms>

Victorian Farmers Federation
Making Our Farms Safer Project
L3/24 Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
Ph: 1300 882 833
Email: mofs@vff.org.au



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