

**IFA Submission to the
Seanad Public Consultation Committee on
Farm Safety**

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SAVE LIVES
Think Safety – Farm Safety



1. Introduction

The Irish Farmers' Association is Ireland's largest farming organisation with nearly 90,000 members in 945 branches nationwide. It is a highly professional and well-structured farm representative body, with 20 National Commodity Committees and several specialised Project Teams. Elected representatives from each of the 29 County Executives are represented on all committees. The elected National Chairperson of each committee is represented on National Executive Council. The IFA branches, County Executives and National Executive Council meet regularly to ensure that members' interests are fully understood and addressed. The IFA National Farm Family & Social Affairs Committee is responsible for promoting and creating awareness of Farm Safety.

2. IFA Position on Farm Safety

IFA takes a very proactive position on farm safety, it is a top priority of the Association. The IFA Think Safety, Farm Safety campaign aims to encourage farm families to maintain the highest safety standards on their farms, by identifying the risks and putting in place practical measures to minimise the risks.

The following activities were undertaken in 2014:

- Calendar with monthly farm safety message was distributed to 95,000 farm families.
- Regular farm safety messages sent to 90,000 members.
- Farm safety updates by Farm Family & Social Affairs representative at each of the monthly County Executive meeting and by the National Chairwoman at National Executive Council.
- Organised inaugural National Farm Safety day on the 21st July 2014.
- Developed standalone Farm Safety section on IFA.ie.
- Re-printing and distribution of Think Safety, Farm Safety information booklet.
- Farm safety walks with representatives from HSA and Teagasc were held in a number of Counties.

2.1 SAVE LIVES Think Safety – Farm Safety Campaign

The IFA launched *SAVE LIVES Think Safety - Farm Safety* in December 2014. The 2015 farm safety campaign is part of the Association's ongoing effort to raise awareness of the dangers of working on the farm. The objective of the campaign is to encourage farmers to change their working practices, to be more responsive to the potential dangers and to take preventative action to reduce the risks. *SAVE LIVES* is an acronym of safety messages:

Stress distracts - stay focused on the job in hand

Apply the handbrake of the tractor whenever you leave the cab.

Ventilate & evacuate when agitating slurry - gases can kill.

Ensure roof can support your weight if you are working on it.

Loose or flapping clothes can get caught in machinery, be careful.

Icy roads and pathways can be dangerous, slow down.

Visitors on the farm, especially children, should be made aware of any dangers.

Escape routes should be planned when handling cattle.

Switch on the light - someone may have moved something and you could trip.

The *SAVE LIVES Think Safety - Farm Safety* campaign was officially launched in early December 2014 with the distribution of 95,000 farm safety calendars to farm families throughout the country. In addition, new 'SAVE LIVES' pens will be distributed through IFA meetings and events over the coming months in order to keep safety at the forefront of farmers minds.

IFA is seeking to involve over 60 co-ops and feed merchants inviting them to participate in the *SAVE LIVES Think Safety - Farm Safely* campaign. Acorn Independent Merchants, which represents eleven agri merchants around the country, are the first agri-business to sign up and agree to print the SAVE LIVES logo on all products produced by Acorn members together with displaying the logo on their transport fleet.

A number of other initiatives are planned in 2015 including sending regularly and appropriately timed farm safety text messages to members, a series of Farm Safety walks, as well as hosting a National Farm Safety Day on the 21st July to increase awareness of the campaign and encourage safer working practices.

IFA propose that the Seanad Public Consultation Committee support the SAVE LIVES Think Safety – Farm Safely campaign and encourage all agri-business to participate in the campaign.

3. Farm Safety Facts and Figures

- 30 farm families lost a family member in 2014 in farm accidents, 30 farm families that now have to deal with devastating consequences of the death of a loved one.
- The fatality rate in agriculture is far higher than any other economic sector, accounting for 55% of all workplace fatalities in 2014.
- There are approximately 140,000 family farms in Ireland, with family members accounting for 94% of the regular workforce on the farm.
- 50% of farmers are over the age of 55 years old.
- Approximately 400,000 people are exposed to health and safety risks on Irish farms.
- In the last 10 years 46% of farm fatalities involved agricultural machinery, 14% livestock, 18% falls, collapses and 22% other causes.
- Nearly 60% of all fatalities involving agricultural machinery are by farmers being crushed by or under machinery.
- Between 2004 and 2013 38% of farm fatalities involved farmers over the age of 65 years old, 11% children and 51% other.
- Stress caused by financial worries, long working hours (fatigue), weather conditions, price uncertainty, high input costs, paper work from increased regulations as well as other factors can increase the risks of ill health and accidents on farms.
- Farmers' attachment to farms is often intense, particularly when the farm has been in family for generations; the economic downturn has been very hard for many farm families.
- Farming is very different to other economic sectors the farm, family and home are all linked.
- In 2011, the agricultural sector accounted for 12.5% of recorded suicides in Ireland, the highest sector after the construction sector. In response to the increased rate of suicide, particularly among rural men, IFA and Pieta House launched the Mind Our Farm Families phone line 1890 130 022 to support farm families concerned about suicide.

4. Suggested Changes to Public Policy

IFA is strongly opposed to the introduction in January 2015 by the Health and Safety Authority of the option to consider direct prosecution if a farmer (i) fails to have slurry pit fully covered, (ii) the PTO shaft covered or (iii) a child under seven year old is in the cab of the tractor. Increased regulation has been shown internationally not to reduce the number of farm accidents. Traditional policy tools, including legislation, sanctions and regulations have had limited impact at changing human behaviour.

The challenge for Government is to achieve sustained behavioural change. Research shows that the more effective way to change behaviour is to engage with farmers, and support them to enhance their level of personal responsibility through targeted information and education campaigns that are cognisant of the realities faced by farmers and their families.

It is IFA's position that the suggested linking of farm safety inspection to cross compliance under the Single Farm Payment scheme would not have the desired impact of reducing farm accidents but would increase the stress on farm families, which has been shown to increase the risk of ill health and accidents.

IFA would suggest the following changes:

4.1 Farm Safety Scheme

There has been a high level of interest among farmers in the Farm Safety Scheme, by the close of the first tranche of applications at the end of November 2014, approximately 3,000 farmers had applied for the scheme. The objective of the scheme is to improve the standard of safety on Irish farms by providing grant aid for a number of specified investment items.

It is vital that funding for the Farm Safety Scheme is available under the TAMS II under the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020 for the full duration of the programme. IFA proposes that the list eligible investments be expanded and the minimum spend of €2,000 per holding be reduced as this has acted as a disincentive to some farmers participating the scheme.

4.2 Knowledge Transfer and Discussion Groups

Farm safety should be a module in the Knowledge Transfer and Discussion Groups programme funded under the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020, to provide participants of the programme with the information and the skills necessary to reduce the risks of accident on their farms.

4.3 PTO (Power Take Off) Scrappage Scheme

Farm safety research has shown that a high percentage of Irish farm accidents are PTO-related. IFA proposes that the Government introduce a PTO scrappage scheme to support farmers to replace old PTO shafts with new safer models.

4.4 Occupational Health and Safety Exam Module in Universities & Agricultural Colleges

In 2011, 44% of Irish farmers had formal agricultural education. The benefits of formal education on the economic viability of farms can be clearly demonstrated in a recent study, *The Economic Returns to Formal Agricultural Education* undertaken by Teagasc. The study found that family farm income per hectare was about 50 per cent higher for farmers with agricultural education than for those who did not take further education after school. IFA proposes the inclusion of an Occupational Health and Safety exam module to support a change in cultural behaviour among farmers and potentially reduce the number of farm accidents in the long-term.