

# LEADING HEALTH AND SAFETY ON YOUR FARM AND IN YOUR COMMUNITY

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## Introduction

The Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 is now a reality: Is compliance optional? No, it's compulsory.

In New Zealand, it seems the general view of health and safety in the workplace is one of jumped up petty bureaucrats rushing around forcing struggling business owners to comply with a jumbled nightmare of nanny-state rules. It is interesting to note that almost all the rhetoric around the introduction of the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 centred on the negative impact of the Act on a business or place of work and on the individuals responsible for these. It is unfortunate that the conversation did not concentrate on the incidence of death, injury or illness as a result of activity while at work.

It is also unfortunate that the impact on business and lifestyle has been so vastly overstated, especially by some in agriculture. One academic confidently stated that the proposed law would effectively ban children from farms. The reality is that the legislation won't interfere with the good things about being a farmer, and it doesn't involve a mountain of paperwork. In fact – it may end up saving the farm as well as saving lives.

## The context

On 19 November 2010, twenty nine miners lost their lives in the Pike River disaster. As more facts about the mine and its operation became evident, the government set up an independent taskforce to investigate the state of workplace health and safety in New Zealand.

The report is an indictment of work practices across the country. The summary report states, "*...the fact is that a lot of bad things happen to people at work in this country. Each year, around 1 in 10 workers are harmed, with about 200,000 claims being made by people to*

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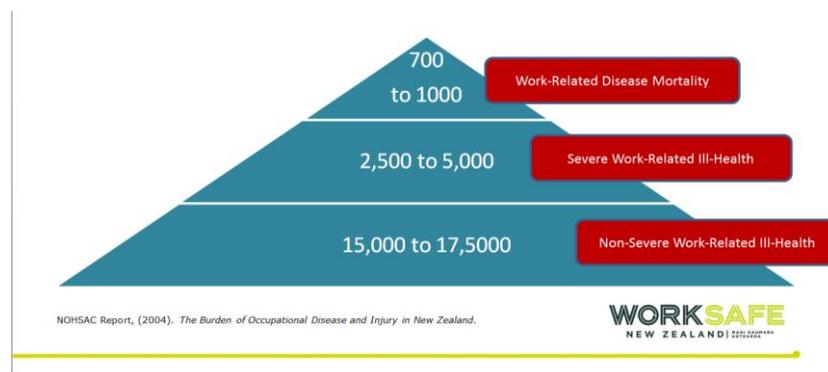
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ACC for costs associated with work-related injuries and illnesses”. (The Independent Taskforce on Workplace Health and Safety, Executive Report.)

The cost of this rate of injury is significant. “Workplace injuries and diseases inflict an enormous emotional toll on the people affected, and significant economic costs on New Zealand. In 2010, the costs were most reliably estimated at \$3.5 billion a year (almost two percent of GDP). (The Independent Taskforce on Workplace Health and Safety, Executive Report.)

Less well known, however, is the non-injury toll. “Occupational illnesses have significantly worse human and financial impacts than harm incidents. These illnesses arise from a broad range of poorly-managed hazards in the workplace, resulting in gradual impairment or chronic harm conditions such as cancers and musculoskeletal disorders, and acute harms related to hazardous substance exposures.” (The Independent Taskforce on Workplace Health and Safety, Executive Report.)

How great is this toll? Estimates are that between 700 and 1,000 people die each year from illness caused by workplace conditions, and another 17,000 to 22,000 are incapacitated in some way (see Chart 1). As an example, MBIE’s 2010 State of Play report estimated that airborne exposures to harmful substances cause 41% of work related hospitalisation and 59% of work related deaths in 2010 (MBIE, 2013).



**Chart 1.** Burden of work-related disease and ill-health

One model for estimating occupational disease outcomes estimates that in 2010 there were 97 deaths and 670 hospitalisations as a result of work-related exposures to airborne substances in the agricultural sector (Navigatus Consulting). Some will find this number hard to believe. If, however, we look at self-reported occupational exposure (see Table 1) it is clear that exposure to pesticides, dust and noise is common in the sector, and high incidents of associated illness or disease should not be surprising.

**Table 1.** Self-reported occupational exposure

	Dust	Smoke/Fumes	Oils/Solvents	Pesticides	Irregular Hours	Lifting	Loud Noise
<b>Admin and Managers</b>	25.2%	19.2%	15.6%	5.0%	12.1%	27.4%	21.8%
<b>Professionals</b>	17.3%	15.1%	12.0%	3.7%	13.8%	25.5%	19.7%
<b>Technicians</b>	19.3%	13.6%	15.6%	5.9%	12.4%	31.1%	18.1%
<b>Clerks</b>	18.3%	13.5%	7.3%	2.8%	7.9%	24.2%	15.8%
<b>Service and Sales Workers</b>	20.1%	23.6%	21.8%	2.9%	24.1%	53.6%	24.4%
<b>Agricultural and Fishery Workers</b>	55.8%	28.2%	35.9%	63.0%	27.9%	70.0%	48.9%
<b>Trades Workers</b>	75.4%	42.6%	58.8%	16.7%	13.8%	68.8%	71.6%
<b>Plant/Machine Operators</b>	55.3%	43.0%	33.0%	10.6%	33.0%	56.4%	67.6%
<b>Elementary Workers</b>	37.2%	25.7%	31.9%	16.8%	23.0%	64.6%	52.2%

Eng, A., et al (2010). *The New Zealand Workforce Study I: Self-Reported Occupational Exposures*

Note: Lifting and loud noise figures reflect those reporting exposure >25% of working time; irregular hours reflects regularly working outside of 8am to 5pm

The taskforce points out that five industries – manufacturing, construction, agriculture, forestry and fishing – account for more than half of all workplace injury entitlement claims and have the highest entitlement claim rates (as high as 32 per 1,000 full-time-equivalent employees in the agriculture, forestry and fishing industries).

## Agriculture

In this paper, Agricultural statistics, unless otherwise stated, are deemed to consist of land based primary industries excluding forestry. The dataset includes farmers and growers and direct employees, but does not include processing, transportation or contractors. Depending on season, this mix of horticulture and pastoral farming consists of over 50,000 separate businesses and employs up to 120,000 people. Over the last six years, an average of 17 people have died each year in this sector, and around 20,000 ACC claims have been accepted each year.

## How can we fix this?

Note that this section is not titled ‘Can we fix this?’

The question is; what do we change? Rob Jager, Chair of the Independent Taskforce, stated in his introduction to the Taskforce Report: *“It will require strong top-down and bottom-up leadership. It will also require a fundamental change to the prevailing ‘she’ll be right’*

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*culture in New Zealand. She most clearly is not all right. Businesses, workers, unions, industry organisations and the Government all have vital and shared roles to play...*” (The Independent Taskforce on Workplace Health and Safety.)

Workplace culture change happens all the time, and there is no reason to believe a change can't happen in agriculture. In fact, changing culture in a small workplace is far easier than in one with multiple departments on multiple sites. Herein lies the first indication of how change must occur – we can't set out to change the sector as a whole – we must change every business within the sector.

This may seem like a tall demand given the 50,000 individual businesses across the agricultural sector. Given that WorkSafe has around 100 staff on the ground to cover all 250,000+ businesses in our economy, many would say it is simply impossible.

To understand the solution, we need to revisit the beginning of this paper, where those who indulged in negative rhetoric about the impending HSWA took a ‘woe is our business’ approach. They were right on one important point – this is their business. Do not expect WorkSafe to drive change across agriculture, it is up to businesses and the sector as a whole to do that.

What WorkSafe brings to the table is a willingness to help support this change by engaging with and helping to educate the sector, and a legislated stick to use where unsafe practice continues. The sector needs to bring a mind-set that people getting hurt or ill because of workplace activity is unacceptable and effort needs to be put into changing the systems, knowledge, attitude and behaviours that contribute to the current rate. The ultimate outcome is where the majority of people in the sector find unsafe behaviour morally unacceptable.

Specifically, the Safer Farms Programme seeks to:

- deliver improved health and safety awareness, knowledge and practices on New Zealand farms
- make it easy for duty-holders to understand what they need to do and make it easy to take action
- normalise safe practices as a key part of the jobs farmers do every day by making good health and safety practice part of business as usual
- ensure farmers consider safety as part of their business, understand the key risks they face and take action to reduce/mitigate those risks.

A successful programme will need to raise the profile and farmers' understanding of health and safety issues on farms, to provoke discussion, to change attitudes towards health and safety from ‘something that doesn't affect me’ to ‘something that I need to consider as part of my business.’ It will also need to shift perception that health and safety is something that is purely the government's responsibility to being the responsibility of all those working in or with the sector.

Key insights into how positive change may be achieved are contained in New Zealand research into *Effective Occupational Health Intervention in Agriculture* (Lovelock and Cryer, 2009) and a UK study into *Understanding and influencing farmers' attitudes* (Understanding and Influencing Farmers' Attitudes, 2004) This research points to the need to take a long-term strategic approach to changing farmers' attitudes and behaviours and the research recommends a multifaceted intervention approach is taken.

In their paper providing an overview of the findings of the national study of effective occupational health interventions in agriculture conducted between January 2007 and January 2009, Lovelock and Cryer identified effective interventions and the barriers to successful implementation of those interventions. In essence:

- The evidence from this and previous reviews indicates that multi-faceted interventions are a promising interventional approach to improve farm safety behaviours, attitudes and knowledge
- There is a need to reach beyond educational interventions and consider other engineering/design, organizational and legislative/enforcement solutions
- There are a number of barriers to implementing any intervention, including cultural stereotype adoption, economic and work demand barriers
- Some systemic barriers included the absence of a clear strategy and the delivery of a large number of initiatives lacked co-ordination and were adopted on an ad hoc basis. There is need for an agreed upon strategy that is evidence based.

What does a change programme look like? It's a number of different interventions that fit together into a coherent whole. Each part of the programme is designed carefully, based on evidence and/or strong theoretical underpinnings, to gain an effect towards the end goal.

The Safer Farms Programme aims to

- address the wide range of health and safety knowledge, leadership, infrastructure and capability shortcomings that have been identified
- build on the value being generated by the business as usual expenditure
- form a close partnership with the sector to leverage the value of existing channels to market, relationships, resources and credibility to support a wider programme

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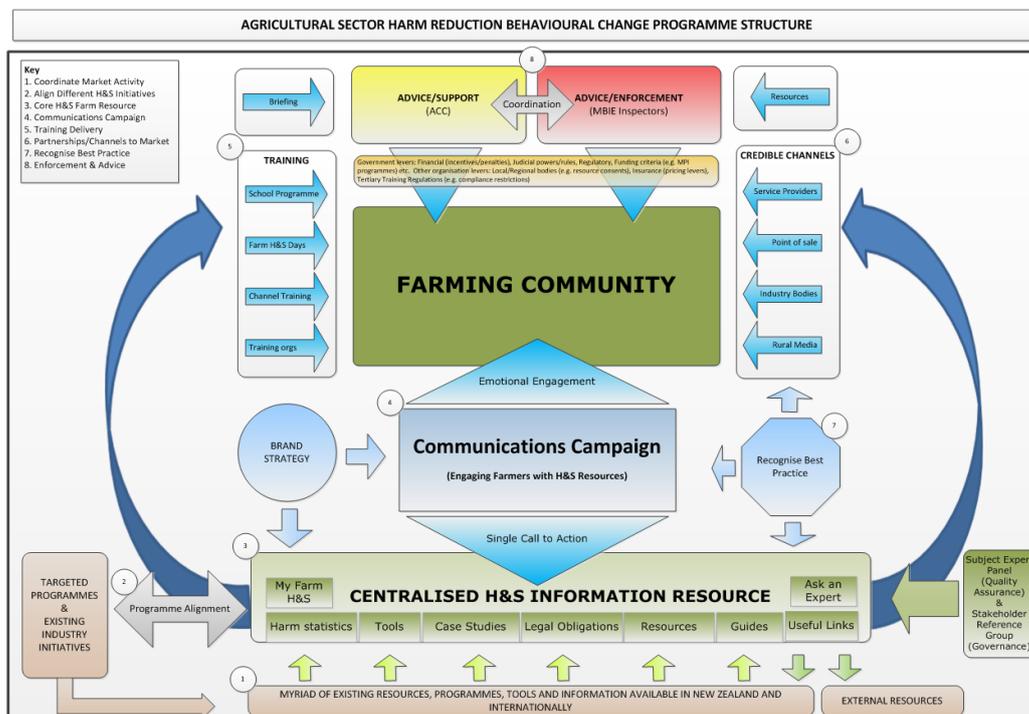
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- ensure responsibility for changing the culture towards health and safety is shared between WorkSafe NZ, ACC and the wider agriculture sector
- be fully aligned to the Government Blueprint for Working Safer in response to the recommendations of the Independent Taskforce report released at the end of April 2013 regarding:
  - the use of a targeted public health and safety awareness programme to change behaviours, norms, culture and tolerance of poor practice
  - the enhanced role of WorkSafe NZ – to give the same priority and attention to occupational health activities as occupational safety activities
  - ensuring programmes are linked to a compliance strategy and specific compliance activity.

The programme is designed to deliver:

- interventions targeting specific harms (e.g. agrichemical impact on health)
- support for a sector health and safety oversight / governance group that oversees the programme of work
- priority-review of the guidelines and information available to the sector and the development of suitable new guidance
- promotion of better health and safety via a high-profile, sector-specific communications campaign
- close engagement with sector stakeholders to align compatible programmes, coordinate sector activity under a single programme, build locally based rural leadership and to deliver targeted health and safety information/messages to address the main barriers
- a single, authoritative information platform (for example, a website) to house health and safety information from the Regulator and participating sector organisations
- a sustained sector-specific programme of communications to engage farmers and farm-influencers with the issues, resources and key health and safety messages
- delivery of health and safety training and resources to a range of sector audiences including farmers, through rural schools and influencing organisations such as rural services providers and rural suppliers, in conjunction with existing sector programmes (such as Rural Women New Zealand's existing education campaign)
- utilisation of WorkSafe inspectors to provide guidance and advice to farmers, conducting a coordinated programme of workplace inspections and taking appropriate enforcement action where required.

The inter-relationship between these elements is outlined in diagram 1.



**Diagram 1.** Agricultural sector farm reduction behavioural change programme structure.

## Beyond compliance

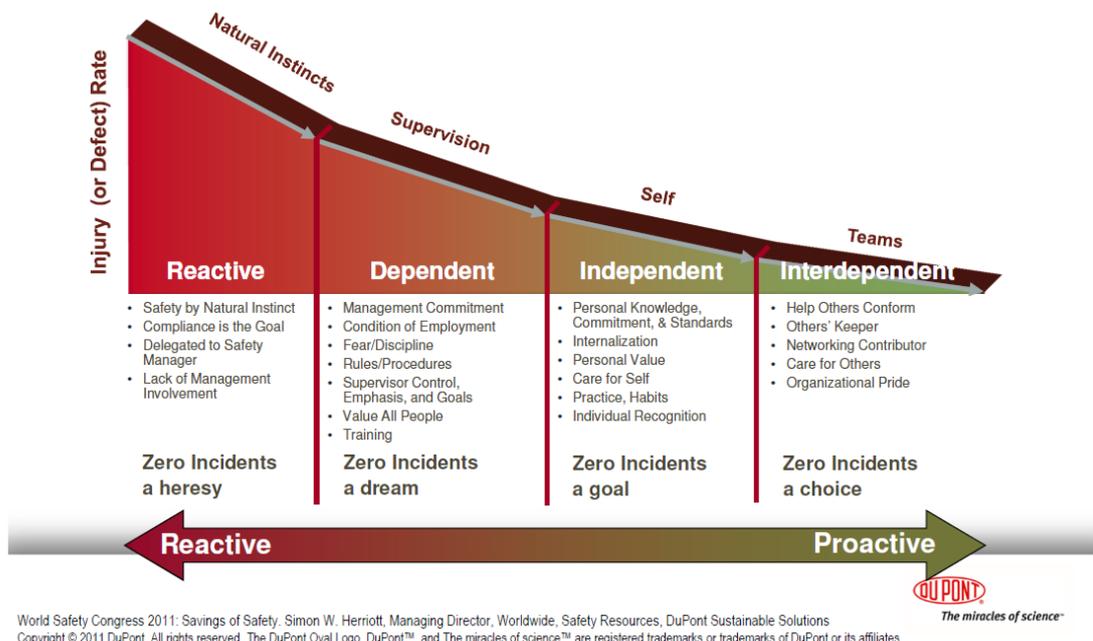
There appears to be a lack of understanding of the basics of good health and safety practice and how the mechanisms which promote this are the same mechanisms that contribute to overall good business outcomes. Simply seeking to comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 is not really an option if you want your farm to be a safe, healthy and productive place to work. An attitude of ‘doing it because I have to’ is far removed from having in place the leadership and communication that encourages continuous improvement, innovation, and a positive contribution by all staff.

Simon Herriott of DuPont challenges compliance thinking with his presentation “The Savings of Safety: Leveraging Safety Excellence for Business Excellence” (The Savings of Safety: Leveraging safety excellence for Business Excellence). In essence, he argues that the

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processes that give good safety (effective management of safety) not only save the direct and indirect costs of the incident and injuries or ill-health, but are the same as those processes that mean you have effective management of the enterprise as a whole—giving business excellence.

The DuPont Bradley Curve shows one way of interpreting safety culture by showing four stages. This is shown in Chart 2.



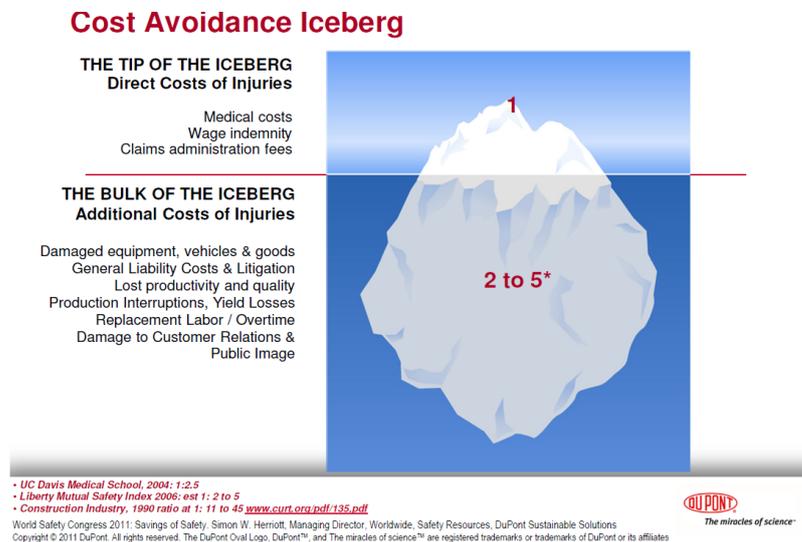
**Chart 2.** DuPont Bradley Curve

The Bradley Curve was developed from analysis of incidents across many organisations. The curve shows clearly that ‘Safety by Natural Instinct’ more often known in New Zealand as ‘common sense’ is not a solution, even when businesses have compliance as a goal. These organisations have the highest rate of injury from workplace incidents.

Note the vertical scale reads “Injury (or Defect) Rate”. The research in this area shows clearly that the stages here apply as much to other organisational outcomes as they do to injury or illness.

Those organisations with the lowest injury rates are organisations with great communication and involvement from everyone in the organisation. These organisations have a proactive approach where problems of any sort are ‘sorted’ before they become problems, because people understand where the organisation is going, and share a vision about how to get there. While this sounds like ‘management consultant speak’ and something for large companies, in reality it is most applicable and much easier to achieve in the very small organisations that characterise farming in New Zealand.

Herriott shows the impact of the avoiding incidents on savings in two separate diagrams. In the first, seen here as diagram 2, he shows that the actual direct cost of an incident causes up to five times the cost in indirect costs. Note that this is for a corporate model, but the ‘customer / public relations’ category may be more relevant than most farmers believe as we move into the world of ethical consumerism.



**Diagram 2.** Cost avoidance iceberg.

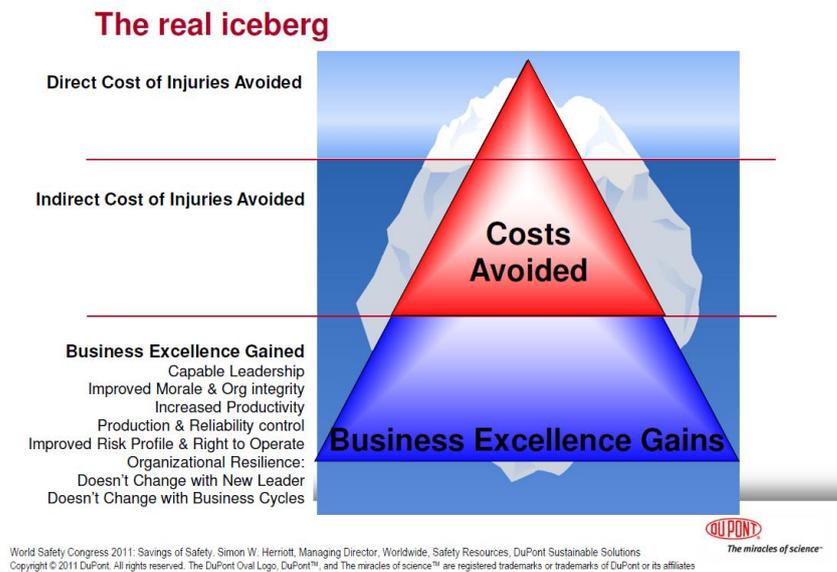
Herriott cites clients who have undertaken ‘safety transformations’ to show that there are gains beyond simple cost saving. The quotes include;

- “ The safety transformation journey has been the most effective organizational & business transformation this company has ever undertaken.”
- “ The safety training that my leaders have undertaken has taught them how to communicate with and understand the shop floor.”
- “ The discipline of taking action on unsafe acts has shown us how to work on unproductive acts.”
- “ The central safety managing process has brought together our senior leaders and crossed functional lines so effectively that we have expanded it to cover manufacturing as a whole.”

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Herriott pictures this in diagram 3.



**Diagram 3.** The real iceberg.

We have seen similar results in New Zealand by working the other way. Good business practice equates to good health and safety outcomes. DairyNZ worked with Synlait Farms and with farms in Southland to trial ‘Lean’ management practices. Among the results, lower turnover rates, lower number of hours worked, less cluttered work environments, better communication, and better maintenance – all precursors to lower incident rates (and, as it turns out, higher production rates) (Inside Dairy, 2016).

Making changes doesn’t have to be complex - a cluster of Dairy farms in Northland implemented a change which has had a remarkable impact. Mark Johnston, from LandCorp, explains (Worksafe Case Study).

*In 2014, Landcorp launched a broader push across its 140 farms to show that the key reason for caring about H&S isn’t compliance, it’s about looking out for your mates. That made us look again at what we could do better,” said Mark. “We still felt people saw me as the ‘overseer’ imposing H&S compliance.*

*“So we called a ‘no blame’ meeting. I talked about the responsibility of everyone on the farms to call people out if they see them doing things that are risky. I asked them outright to call out work mates there and then.*

*“No-one said a word. I said I had seen a few things I had up my sleeve but wanted to give them a chance first. Silence again.*

*“So, I stopped the note-taking and said “This is a free for all’. I want you to tell your mates if they did something and you are calling them out on it because you care about their safety. Finally one guy stood up and described some unsafe behaviour he had seen.*

*“I said ‘Good that someone has the guts to make a difference’. Then everyone else began standing up. It went round the whole room, I think everyone had something to say.*

*“That was the start of change. We agreed we were going to start calling people out and take the approach that doing so was not being a nark. We all live and work closely together on the farms and we want everyone to go home safely and in good health, at the end of each working day.”*

*“Good H&S practice doesn’t cost you more money or involve a lot of your time,” said Mark. “It doesn’t take long to assess a situation and what could go wrong, before you jump on a tractor.*

*Near misses are shared across all the farms, and regular toolbox meetings get the entire team talking openly about potential hazards and any safety or health concerns.*

*“We try to share and learn as much across the farms as possible,” said Mark. “So if something happens at one, we can prevent it happening at the others. Nothing is missed, it’s a good system and it’s working.*

*“For us, the health and mental wellbeing goes side-by-side with safety. It all starts with the body and mind. People here feel better and fewer mistakes are being made.*

*No one walks past anything risky without reporting it. Together, that’s just how we roll now.”*

Here’s the quote most applicable to this paper and Herriott’s work:

*“Productivity has improved, so have team dynamics and culture, because people are showing they respect one another and care about others’ welfare – and that is all out in the open.*

The establishment of interdependence doesn’t have to lie solely on the farm. Many people interact with farms on a regular basis, and become trusted advisors – farm consultants, fertiliser reps, bank reps, vets, and rural retailers are a few that have featured in the research WorkSafe has conducted. Safety on farms is reliant on those people ‘calling out’ unsafe practice as well.

As the LandCorp experience has shown, no implementation of safe practices needs to be complex, nor does it need to stifle the lifestyle that attracts people to farming.

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And that was the biggest fear expressed prior to the Act, the ruination of the lifestyle that comes with farming. Gordon MacDonald, the WorkSafe New Zealand Chief Executive, recently went to a primary school, in the wake of claims by some principals that kids could no longer be kids. As Gordon puts it: "... we need to stop the safety madness and focus on the important risks."

*"[at the school]... the kids are allowed to be kids. They climb trees, play in the adventure playground – they have fun and enjoy themselves. At the same time, they learn about the risks involved in their activities.*

*When I was talking to these children, I was impressed how aware they were of the difference between trivial risks and serious risks, and how they should manage them. The school was also involving the children in the design of their new playground, which included a discussion on where the risks might be and how everyone – children and school staff – would manage them.*

*Talking to this school, and two other businesses we [visited], has reinforced for me that regardless of the headlines, this law hasn't spelled the end of New Zealand business. For all those who have scared themselves to a standstill, there are people who understand the intent of the law and are making it work. They're making sensible, informed decisions about the risks in their workplace and they're taking all reasonably practicable steps to manage them."*

Kids can be kids, and farmers can still be farmers.

## Summary

New Zealand businesses, of all sizes, are generally poor at determining and controlling health and safety risks associated with their business. The overall impact of this is high work-related illness, injury and mortality rates. Agriculture is one of the worst sectors.

The underlying culture in the agriculture sector seems to be one of acceptance of injury and illness as an unavoidable consequence of doing business. There is a huge reliance on 'common sense' to deal with risk.

There is good evidence that a structured programme of interventions can change culture, but that change has to be driven from within the sector, not from Worksafe or any other external body. One very powerful reason for this change is that adoption of the systems and processes that underlie good health and safety practices creates a stronger business, because those systems and processes are the same as those that lead to business excellence.

Is compliance with the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 an option? No, it's compulsory. And it won't interfere with the good things about being a farmer, and it doesn't involve a mountain of paperwork.

Is compliance enough? No, because once the basic systems and processes set out in the Act are unlocked, no business will want to stay at compliance. The rewards of going beyond compliance are too great.

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