

Farm Safety Week 2017

Day 4: Stay safe with livestock



Thursday's theme for **#FarmSafetyWeek** was 'Stay Safe with Livestock' and the usual range of 'localised' examples of 'survivors' stories, incidents and advice were promoted across UK and Ireland.

Deaths and injuries related to livestock farming range from animal attacks to those occurring during related activities, such as quad bike accidents. On the last day of the Royal Welsh Show, appropriately, **#FarmSafetyWeek** shone the spotlight on working with livestock.

Many farmers never stop to consider why animals behave as they do and, more importantly, what this behaviour could mean to their personal safety. Animal-handling practices are often learned from watching others and from personal experiences growing up on the farm. Too often, this results in unsafe livestock handling and restraint practices. Thankfully most animal incidents are not fatal but too many men, women and children are needlessly injured every year due to a lack of safety awareness. Broken bones, crushed and lost limbs, work absences and unnecessary medical expenses are some of the results of livestock-related incidents so, the **#FarmSafetyWeek** team is challenging farmers to think about improving livestock handling systems and making them safer and more efficient.

Thomas Price, the NFU's Farm Safety and Transport Advisor, and member/secretariat to the Farm Safety Partnership (FSP) England observed: "Over the past four days at the Royal Welsh Show we have been blessed with the most beautiful selection of livestock seen anywhere in the world. Over 7,500 livestock entries from across Wales, the UK and the rest of Europe competed to be crowned champion in their category but against the background of the last day of another successful show, we are looking at the realities and risks of working with livestock.

"Over the past decade, on average 1 person is killed every 9 days as a direct result of agricultural work activity and already, since the start of this year, 3 farm workers lost their lives as a result of livestock-related incidents."

"Handling cattle always involves risks, the risk of being hurt physically by an animal that is frightened or has been startled and the risk of being hurt due to the misuse of equipment or equipment that is poorly maintained. Over the course of this week, we



have worked with our partners to educate and inspire a drive to improve agriculture's poor safety record. Today it is all about animals. Livestock can be unpredictable, something that even the most experienced farmer can't completely plan for. Just ask Anglesey farmer Wyn Jones..."

43-year-old Wyn has worked part-time for his local cattle market for a decade, dealing with an estimated 12,000 cattle per year. He also keeps beef, sheep and suckler cows at his own farm. He has never been afraid of cattle, and still isn't. However, in January 2016 he says one minor 'lapse' of judgement left him with a broken back and an injured shoulder. Wyn knows it could have been much worse....

As Wyn explained: "The accident happened at 3am in the morning. A heifer was calving and I went to see to her. It was an awful night, wet and windy. I knew this particular cow could be a bit touchy, but we had a mutual respect and she'd always been OK with me."

That night, rather than go through the main door where he could be clearly seen, Wyn thought it would be easier to cut through the feed barrier. There was plenty of light, but his approach 'spooked' the cow and she knocked him to the floor. Wyn found himself in a corner with nowhere to go and the animal's head pressing down on his chest. He tried to fight back the best he could and managed to slide under a gate into an adjoining calving pen.

Incredibly, after staggering to his feet, he grabbed a pitchfork and went back in through the main door to deliver the calf. But he knew he'd been hurt and was aching from head to foot. A keen footballer and always physically fit, Wyn tried to carry on as normal the best he could for the next couple of days. He was heavily bruised on his chest and arms but it was his back that troubled him most. Eventually, he agreed to see his GP and, after a couple of consultations, the local hospital diagnosed a hairline fracture of the back. For the next two-and-a-half months Wyn was unable to work, which meant he also lost valuable income.

"In hindsight, I should never have gone through the feed barrier," concedes Wyn. "Usually, I go through the steel door, it's noisy and the animals can see who's there. I'm experienced, and I'd known this cow for seven or eight years – we understood each other. But I startled her."

Considering the worst-case scenario, Wyn comments: "I could've been lying there all night and the next day too if I'd been more badly hurt and unable to get myself out. What if it had been my daughter? Cows are like people, they do unpredictable things sometimes, but you cannot underestimate how strong and powerful they are."

Wyn's advice to others is: 'Know your handling place, have an escape route and don't cut corners'.

Thomas adds: "Farming is a highly rewarding industry and so vital to the UK economy, but it is still one of the riskiest.

"Working safety with livestock involves much more than being "careful" around recently calved cows or cantankerous bulls. In fact, many of livestock accidents are not directly related to the animals themselves but caused by improper use of equipment of poorly maintained or poorly built facilities.

Often farmers don't adjust or modify equipment to make it safer because they are in a hurry or because they think they can just 'make do' for economic reasons but farm



safety is a lifestyle, not a slogan and 'Because I'm in a hurry' is not a good enough reason for poor maintenance of equipment and facilities. Safe equipment is more of an investment than an expensive luxury."

In Scotland the same message was aimed at farmers and crofters by Jim McLaren, FSP Scotland member and NFU-Mutual board member: "A month ago we were celebrating the Royal Highland Show and showcasing the most beautiful selection of livestock seen anywhere in the world competing to be crowned champion in their category but against the background of the last day of another massive agricultural show – the Royal Welsh Show, we are looking at the realities and risks of working with livestock. The last thing any farmer needs at the busiest time of the year is an accident, but unfortunately it is all too common on Scotland's farms too - just ask Orkney farmer Michael Stevenson..."

In April 2016, 63-year-old farmer and former Orkney NFU Scotland branch chairman Michael Stevenson was working with one of the 180 breeding cows on his 240-hectare farm in Evie when he experienced something that would change his, and his farm's practices around calving time forever. Michael explains: "Usually you know when a cow is aggressive. In this case she was a heifer, which tend to be less maternal than mature cows and did not appear wild. She called herself, but I thought her calf had not sucked so went into the pen to get him to his feet and find milk. I was bent beside her when she suddenly turned, battering me on the ground.

"I don't have much recollection of what happened before and after the accident, but I'd managed to get over the gate, and shouted for my wife, who thankfully was nearby, to come and help me as I could hardly move."

Michael was taken to hospital, and it was soon realised that he had dislocated his hip and suffered two broken ribs. Michael spent a few days in hospital following an operation to put it back together.

"It was one of our busiest periods and I was off work for around four weeks, but thankfully we have a very good man who has been here for 35 years and he kept things going with the help of neighbours, and a farm worker who had recently retired but came back to assist us." explains Michael.

Having experienced this accident, Michael admits that this has changed the way he views working with livestock. He concludes: "The accident has made me more cautious when dealing with the cattle. Ahead of this year's calving we made some simple improvements which will ensure safe working practices. This has included self-locking gates on all of our pens and ensuring all newly calved cows are secured if they, or their calves, require to be handled."

"Working safety with livestock has many levels and involves more than being 'careful' around recently calved cows or cantankerous bulls. In fact, many livestock accidents are not directly related to the animals themselves but caused by improper use of equipment of poorly maintained or poorly built facilities. Often farmers don't adjust or modify equipment to make it safer because they are in a hurry or because they think they can just 'make do' for economic reasons but farm safety is a lifestyle, not a slogan and 'because I'm in a hurry' is not a good enough reason for poor maintenance of equipment and facilities. Safe livestock handling equipment is more of an investment than an expensive luxury."

And don't forget cattle (and people) in fields and on footpaths! In May 2006, Margaret Butler took her two West Highland Terriers for an evening walk in the fields. At the time, Margaret's family were very much hobby farming, with 10 Angus cross cows and 30 commercial ewes.



Margaret explained what happened: "My two Westies decided they were coming with me, as they often did. A cow had just calved in the field. The previous year, her calf did not suckle very well, so with my 80-year-old dad, we milked her in the middle of the field to feed the calf. So, I didn't even consider that she would have had a change of personality. She came toward me, so I turned around to come away. Before I knew, she had sent me flying. She then came back for a second go at me whilst I was on the ground. Fortunately, her calf must have shouted, and she went back to it. The whole thing could have only taken a few seconds.

"I never expected the cow to turn on me and I certainly never considered that she could have been aggressive at all. She must have felt threatened by me. I hobbled the 300 yards back to the house to my husband, David, who called an ambulance. I was in severe pain and did not want to lie flat. After I had x-rays, the consultant told me that I had broken my back. I had to lie flat on my back for four weeks on an orthopaedic bed and was in hospital for another two weeks. I wore a back brace all summer. This was followed by extensive physiotherapy."

As with many dedicated farmers, Margaret did return to work quicker than most people would have. She continues: "With us being self-employed I was able to continue with the book-keeping in the evenings at our chartered surveyors and land agents firm, until we could gradually get back to normal.

Considering the worst-case scenario, Margaret comments: "I feel very lucky that I made a full recovery, because things could certainly have been a lot worse." She concluded: "Hindsight is a wonderful thing. We now don't take our dogs into the fields where there are livestock, and certainly give newly calved cows much more respect, even the quiet ones."

Again, there is plenty of guidance on the HSE, HSENI and HSA websites, including information sheets and films. For something different, have a look at the [short film](#) featuring international cattle handling expert Temple Grandin. Posted by EBLEX in July 2014, Temple talks about good cattle handling and how important it is to be aware of the animals' surroundings.

A World-renowned American Doctor of Animal Science, Temple Grandin is famous for her acute ability to understand the way that animals feel about their environment, and how farmers can use that understanding to improve the lives of their cattle. Temple visited Watton Farm in Devon, as part of an EBLEX event that gave farmers a chance to soak up some of the specialist knowledge that that Professor Grandin has accumulated over her life working with animals.

You may recall that IOSH Rural Industries Group also organised a Workshop on Cattle Handling in October 2014, on behalf of the Farm Safety Partnership. This was attended by RIG members from all 5 nations taking part in #FarmSafetyWeek. It included a presentation and practical demonstration of 'animal psychology' factors, by the leading British/International expert in this field, Miriam Parker. Networking Event with links to relevant guidance is available on the RIG Past Events page.

For more information on Farm Safety Week visit [Yellow Wellies](#) or follow @yellowwelliesUK on Twitter/Facebook using the hashtag **#FarmSafetyWeek**.

FARM SAFETY WEEK 2017

LIVESTOCK TOP TIPS

- Take the time to understand/know the behaviours of the livestock you are working with. Make sure they are handled by trained workers.
- Make sure your working area is safe and has safety measures in place. Eg gate, a well maintained crush, fences etc.
- Always have an escape route for emergency situations while working with animals
- Stop disease/infection passing from animals to humans by ensuring you have good personal hygiene and also make sure you are wearing the correct PPE when working with animals.
- Always be careful around cows and heifers with new-born calves and **NEVER** turn your back on a cow following calving

FARM SAFETY - IT'S A LIFESTYLE, NOT A SLOGAN