

It's Not Enough to Think About Farm Safety, You Must Act on It

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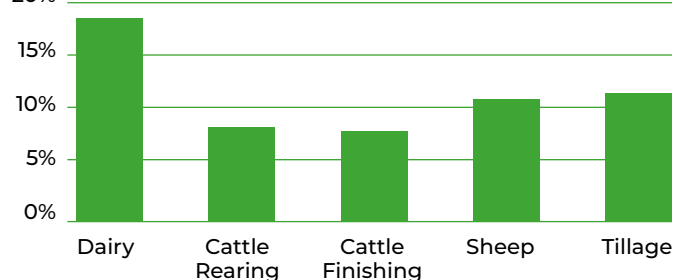


At the time of writing, it is getting busy on sheep farms now as we are in the middle of the breeding season. Rams are out with ewes and the time has come to get ready for winter. Preparing the groundwork for the upcoming lambing season will start soon. It reminds me of that not too distant Christmas past when himself put his back out (poor manual handling – now addressed) just as the lambing commenced. Not ideal for the then three youngsters and myself.

Ireland is the largest net exporter of sheep meat in the EU and while our farming population ages (as we all do) it is ever more crucial to be vigilant of hazards and risks around our farms in these dark mornings and evenings. There is much debilitation involved from the simplest knock from a sheep in the back of the knees.

Figure 3 below indicates that the percentage of accident occurrence within the sheep farming sector is considerably high.

Many find the use of a quad on hilly ground quite



Source: Teagasc National Farm Survey

essential. However, the underlying causes of quad accidents are usually one or more of the following:

- lack of training,
- excessive speed,
- poor quad maintenance, particularly tyres and steering,
- poor physical mobility,
- carrying a passenger, or

- tipping on a bank, ditch, rut or bump.

It is possible to eliminating the risk or substitute for safer means of transport by considering a side-by-side unit or a tractor instead of a quad. Where the quad bike remains the preferred option, then other controls need to be implemented to manage the risk. A primary control measure of serious injury is to get professional formal training. Under both the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007, there is a general legal duty to provide adequate training for persons at work for all vehicles and equipment that they use. Under the 2005 Act, an employer must provide such instruction, training and supervision necessary to ensure the health and safety of those working on the farm.

Safety is a choice you make, but just thinking about it is not enough, it must be acted upon in a proactive way. How we prioritise and carry out our daily chores affects our general wellbeing and ultimate contentment. Priority on a farm must be personal safety for all involved by making the time to plan in advance, minimise risks, get operator training, manage and control machinery and animal movements. In addition, ensuring that you carry out maintenance before it becomes a risk. Planning by knowing the forecast for the upcoming days or weeks is essential particularly for sheep farming.

Lone working on farms is a risk for many. Farmers are advised to take steps to reduce these risks by telling someone where he/she is going before starting a job, carrying a fully-charged mobile phone, recognising that some tasks are too dangerous to be undertaken unaccompanied. Make arrangements for assistance and backup. And remember YOU are not replaceable. Talk to someone, share the load.