

Farmers and Agricultural Workers Face High Injury and Fatality Rates: EU Urged to Establish the 'European Farm Safety and Farmer Health Week'

11 September 2024, Brussels - Farmers and farm workers in the EU are exposed to some of the highest rates of work-related injuries and fatalities compared to other sectors. In addition to the dangers faced by those directly employed on farms, family members- especially young children and the elderly - are frequently victims of serious or life-altering injuries. Recent studies show that fatal accidents on farms are at least 1.6 times higher than official Eurostat estimates, while non-fatal incidents exceed reported figures by 1.7 times.

In light of these alarming findings, the **SafeHabitus** project consortium is calling on the EU Commission to establish an annual **European Farm Safety and Farmer Health Week**, as a shared initiative with committed stakeholders. This would strengthen the EU's ability to exchange knowledge and best practices among policy makers, citizens, and industry stakeholders, and disseminate lifesaving and health protecting information and good practices critical to farmers, farm workers and farm families. This initiative would support the recent call for "Fair working conditions" in the [EU's Strategic Dialogue on the future of agriculture](#), improving the well-being of farmers, workers, and their families, enhancing the social sustainability of agriculture, and boosting the sector's attractiveness.

Dr. David Meredith (TEAGASC, the Irish Agriculture and Food Development Authority), leader of the SafeHabitus project, highlighted the need for coordinated action and the willingness of the SafeHabitus partners to contribute and support such an initiative: "Across the EU, working conditions, including occupational health and safety for many farmers, are well below those of other sectors. Improving their quality of life requires a cohesive strategy across several policy areas, including agriculture, employment, and health. Establishing an annual European Farm Safety Week can spotlight this critical issue, raise awareness of the challenges faced by the farming community, and help the EU develop and implement unified policies that improve working conditions and reduce injuries."

Several EU member states and countries worldwide^[1] already organise annual farm safety weeks, bringing together farmers, workers, families, policy makers, occupational health and safety experts, and researchers. These events have demonstrated that collective action can lead to significant improvements in farm safety.

^[1] A number of countries worldwide have prioritised awareness on farm safety by establishing a Farm Safety Week. Australia, Ireland, UK and USA have all acknowledged the importance of awareness on this issue. In the USA, the President of the United States marks the annual farm safety week with a formal statement: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/09/15/a-proclamation-on-national-farm-safety-and-health-week-2023/>.

Dr. John McNamara, Senior Farm Health and Safety Specialist Advisor at Teagasc, and co-author of the recent [EU-OSHA EU farm safety report](#), emphasised the success of this approach in Ireland: "For many years, Ireland organised a Farm Safety Week that unites stakeholders such as policy makers, industry representatives, regulators, and researchers. This collaborative approach raises awareness, showcases new research, shares best practices, and sets policy priorities that have supported the gradual improvements in farm safety and farmer's health that we have seen."

Alun Jones(CIHEAM Zaragoza), policy lead for the SafeHabitus project and co-author of the EU-OSHA farm safety report, noted that responsibility for farm safety in the EU is currently fragmented across multiple institutions and directorates. He added: "Through the high level of interest and participation in our recent webinars and other project events, it is clear that there is an unmet need for continuous education, awareness, and action on farm safety and health. Establishing a European Farm Safety Week will provide a dedicated platform for bringing together all stakeholders committed to improving the health and safety of farmers and their families, while also enhancing the overall quality of life and attractiveness of the sector."

The SafeHabitus project calls for swift action in addressing the significant gaps in farm safety and urges the EU to demonstrate its commitment to protecting farmers, farm workers, and their families through the creation of an annual European Farm Safety and Farmer Health Week.

Ends.

Contact Information:

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Notes to Editors:

The SafeHabitus project is funded through the EU Horizon Europe programme that started in January 2023. The project is the largest health and safety research initiative ever funded by the EU (4.75 million) and brings together 20 partners from 12 European countries to undertake research leading to increased awareness of the challenges faced by farmers and to develop/share good practices that improve health and safety. www.safehabit.us.eu

Occupational Health and Safety Statistics:

Data available through Eurostat indicates that an average of 315 ± 36 fatal and $126,817 \pm 16,390$ non-fatal accidents were reported annually between 2012 and 2021. When reporting these figures, many member states exclude (or do not collect data) related to self-employed or family workers, i.e. the two main groups that make up the EU's farming workforce. Research completed by the SafeHabitus project estimates that the average number of fatal accidents is, at least, 545, and the estimated number of non-fatal accidents is 206,194.

SafeHabitus Webinars:

The consortium has undertaken research with farmers and other key stakeholders to identify key health or safety needs. This research identified over 220 separate issues. This knowledge has been used to identify common challenges and develop a programme of webinars that showcases research and provides an opportunity for stakeholders to exchange knowledge.

Three key issues were the focus of recent seminars, including inadequate data and statistics to support evidence informed policy, mental health and wellbeing of farmers and farm workers, and children's safety on farms. See here for recordings of the seminars: [SafeHabitus Webinars - YouTube](#)