



Farmsafe

AUSTRALIA

Media Release: Biosecurity & how it relates to safety on farm

Farm biosecurity measures are critically important in preventing many of the common, pervasive diseases affecting Australia's agricultural sector. Often, biosecurity is thought of in relation to diseases that may affect specific livestock or crops, but farm biosecurity measures are also put in place to protect farmers themselves.

The COVID-19 pandemic has catapulted farm biosecurity measures into day to day business conversation, so much so that industry had to work extremely quickly to ensure that farmers had access to the most up to date and relevant advice to ensure that they were doing everything possible to protect themselves, their employees and their businesses. The National Farmers' Federation released a Workplace Guide early on in the pandemic to help farmers navigate this new environment. It includes information on hygiene and social distancing, workforce planning and access, WHS obligations, and industrial relations.

NFF's General Manager for Workplace Relations & Legal Affairs, and Farmsafe Australia's Public Officer, Mr Ben Rogers recommends staying up to date with the ever-changing restrictions and how they may affect the business continuity of your farm. "The agriculture industry faces a complex and dynamic challenge as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to unfold across Australia. The impacts on farming workplaces, including relevant work health and safety and industrial relations considerations are far reaching but over the long term, will hopefully facilitate thinking and decision making about jobs and the health and safety of people on farm, including both workers and family members, and the ongoing business security and continuity of the farm itself."

To access the National Farmers' Federation COVID-19 Workplace Guide, visit the FarmHub website at www.farmhub.org.au.

However, Coronavirus is not the only disease that farmers are currently contending with. Q fever is another illness that is causing significant issues with regard to farmer health. Q fever is caused by the bacterium *Coxiella burnetii* and is spread to humans from infected animals through contact with placenta, urine, faeces, milk and blood. They can spread through the air, soil and dust. There is currently no vaccine available in Australia for animals.

Although a vaccine is available for humans, farmers report significant issues with affordability and accessibility. The Government did run a National Q fever Management Program however, it is the only government-funded vaccination program that has ever been defunded. Despite this, vaccination is highly recommended for any employees who work in high risk occupations such as meat workers, farmers, shearers, stockyard employees, animal transporters, veterinarians and related vet staff, and laboratory workers.

The disease brings with it serious health risks, with 2% of those who contract it facing life threatening failure of their heart valves which can lead to death. About 25% of those who become infected with Q fever have ongoing health issues such as chronic fatigue.

The NSW Farmers Association have set up a National Q Fever Taskforce to address this issue and advocate for improved access to the Q Fever vaccine. More information can be found at www.nswfarmers.org.au .