

A Fatigue Risk Management System (FARM)

It sounds fancy, but it really isn't. Fatigue at Risk Management (FARM) is as simple as finding out what makes us over tired and coming up with ways to get more rest to be our best selves. We don't have to wear sleep deprivation as a badge of honour anymore when working on the farm.

Fatigue is as much or even more of a hazard like chemicals, farm machinery, silos, grain bins, manure pits, power tools, animal handling, etc. . . . Fatigue can result in slower reaction time, lack of good judgement, being more easily distracted, not being able to concentrate on tasks, and the work may not be of the same quality as usual.

Fatigue, according to the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) Guide, is the body's response to sleep loss or prolonged physical and/or mental exertion. Fatigue can be caused by irregular work shifts, working during normal sleeping hours, and working prolonged hours over a significant period of time. Does this sound like your daily farm routine?

Evaluate your farm to determine the potential and actual causes of fatigue. Determine the risk fatigue may have on your operations which could lead to incident and injury. Once the causes are determined, and priorities are set, implement a FARM. Start with drafting a policy to address fatigue on the farm and outline a procedure on how to handle fatigue. Is it possible to do the demanding farm work differently? Determine what hazard controls can be implemented to mitigate the risk of fatigue such as spreading out the workload, adjust scheduling, train on the signs and symptoms of fatigue and sleep disorders that may cause fatigue, change the work environment or rotate workers through various environments to reduce exposure to noise and vibration, and create a monitoring program to check workers for levels of fatigue. Is it possible to hire two part-time workers rather than over extend one full-time worker? Check in with other farmers to see how they are operating and share ideas? Can you help each other out? Don't be afraid to ask for help? Not asking for help is another badge of honor you can give up for your mental and physical health on the farm. You may prefer to use resources like the Farm Family Support Center (1-844-880-9142) where what is discussed is confidential and they can provide you guidance on what you need the help with the most.

As part of FARM, have a process in place where workers are encouraged to bring forward how they are feeling to help determine if they are fit for work.

Include an incident report which speaks to fatigue as being a possible cause of an incident or injury. The incident report form can highlight the role fatigue played in the incident, what led up to the worker being fatigued, and how and if FARM could have mitigated the situation.

Once your FARM is developed, the key to its success is communication. Train workers on FARM and encourage them to use it. Training could include hazard identification, prioritization and control, methods on being well rested for work and ways to keep alert during the work day, recognizing signs and symptoms of fatigue, address sleep disorders that may cause fatigue, good sleep habits, and the importance of good diet and exercise.

Reference:

"Fatigue Risk Management in the Workplace," ACOEM Presidential Task Force on Fatigue Risk Management, JOEM, Vol. 54, No. 2, Feb. 2012