

HOW TO REDUCE & ELIMINATE THE WHS RISK OF WORKER FATIGUE ON YOUR FARM

Exhausted Staff? Suffering Harvest Delays? This guide explores worker fatigue in agriculture, its impact, and solutions. Discover how to create a thriving farm environment.

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How to reduce and eliminate the WHS (also called OH&S) risk of worker fatigue.

Are you often getting frustrated because your workers seem to be slacking off and not being as productive as they could be? Or are you at your wits end because you just can't hold onto your workers?

If you're constantly losing workers that you value, there must be good reasons for it and surely there's something you can do to avoid this happening.

Maybe you're facing sleepless nights wondering why the tasks that you set are just not getting done. Or you're worried that your workers seem to lack motivation and there's an upcoming harvest looming. How can you be sure that you're going to get the harvest done on time?

While these thoughts and questions are swirling through your head and you can't seem to think of a solution, there might be a reason for the lacklustre attitude of your workers.

Under Work Health & Safety terminology, it's commonly referred to as worker fatigue and it's been a real problem in the agricultural and horticultural sectors right around the country for a very long time and there doesn't appear to be an end in sight.

So, what can you do about it?

Before you can do anything, you have to identify the problem, the possible causes and the ramifications this can have on the overall running of your farm.

What causes farm worker fatigue?

While there are plenty of examples that we could cite, here are just a few that spring to mind almost instantly:

- Many farm workers have to travel long distances before they can even start work because there's a lack

of suitable accommodation nearby. Then they have to travel the same distance again at the end of the day to get to their less-than-ideal accommodation.

- A great majority of farm workers are required to work long hours daily to get all the tasks done. This is primarily due to a lack of enough staff.
- Farm workers have to put in really long shifts, often working well into the night, especially around harvest time to make sure that the crop comes off.

All of these examples indicate that your workers are most probably suffering from fatigue, and that's why they're not always performing at their peak.

They're only human after all, and if they're not getting enough rest, it's no wonder that they're not feeling motivated while on the job.

How can you identify whether your workers are suffering from fatigue?

To identify whether your workers are suffering from fatigue, have a look at the above examples and use these to brainstorm other ways that you can identify if your workers are just overworked and simply not getting enough rest.

The examples we've given are only a small snapshot of what could be evidence of workers suffering from fatigue.

There's a really good resource that you might want to have a look at. It's a [fatigue self-assessment tool](#) available on the AgHealth University of Sydney website.

This is one way to determine if your workers are suffering from fatigue. Plus, the website also has numerous other good resources that you might want to explore.



What are the ramifications when you have farm workers who are suffering from fatigue?

You've probably already identified some of the ramifications but here's a quick snapshot of them and what they could mean for you and your farm:

- Tasks are taking longer to get completed so this means an increasing number of tasks that are left for much longer than they should be. Or, worse still, you'll have to end up finishing the tasks yourself.
- Your farm productivity is suffering, and lower productivity means lower profits and less stability for your farm into the future.
- Workers are making mistakes that could potentially be dangerous and lead to accidents that you really don't want to be responsible for. This could involve accidents with heavy machinery on your farm or even road accidents while your workers are heading to their accommodation after a long day's work.
- Staff leave because they're overworked so you either have to constantly find new staff, make your existing workers work even harder and longer, or do a lot more work yourself.
- Your harvest is in danger of not being completed on time which means that you're going to lose money. Worse still, you might have to end up ploughing in your crop because you couldn't harvest it on time. How are you going to feed your family if this happens?

Are there any solutions to this problem? In other words, what can you do to eliminate – or at least reduce – worker fatigue?

Ways to eliminate or reduce worker fatigue.

1. Have a fatigue management plan in place.

AgHealth suggests that all farms should have a fatigue management plan in place as part of their workplace health and safety plan. They have a resource you can have a look at to help you with this.

2. Invest in on-site accommodation modules for your workers.

Giving your workers their own accommodation on-site means that they won't have to travel long distances at both ends of the day.

This means that they can get up in the morning, after a great night's sleep, and get straight to work. You'd be amazed at how much driving long distances can actually wear you out and make you less inclined to work at your peak.

With on-site accommodation such as an [Aruva](#), you get rid of this fatigue factor and give your workers the best chance of putting in a good day's work.

3. Employ more workers.

If the current workload is too much for the workers you have, it might be a good idea to employ some more staff. But you could also structure this effectively by creating work rosters that give your staff some flexibility.

No one likes to work continuous shifts without a suitable break. Even the most dedicated worker is going to burn out if this goes on for too long.

So consider breaking up the number of shifts that each worker has to do in a row and make sure that all your workers get enough days off in between shifts so that they can rest and recharge.

4. Invest in better technology.

Another way to take pressure off your workers is to invest in better technology that makes certain tasks much easier to complete.

We're not necessarily talking about cutting-edge AI stuff, but even machinery that not only operates more efficiently but also helps to take care of some of the more monotonous and labour-intensive parts of the job through the use of automation will be a great help to your workers.

5. Vary the workday for your staff.

Anyone who has to do the same thing day in and day out is going to become fatigued more easily than someone who has a variety of different tasks. As they say, variety is the spice of life.

This is also true when it comes to keeping your workers motivated and eager to get the necessary jobs done. Giving them different tasks to do daily helps to break up the monotony and inspires more enthusiasm for the work.

Some other useful suggestions provided by [AgHealth](#) include having your workers work in pairs and making sure that they have adequate rest breaks during the day.

6. Hire seasonal workers for peak times.

You know when the peak times are on your farm. It could be when the harvest is ready, when it's time to sow a new crop or when your cows start calving.

For times like this, to take the pressure off your regular farm workers and to share the load, why not consider hiring some seasonal workers? You could even consider getting them in from overseas via the very successful [PALM scheme](#).


Looking after the welfare of your workers is the best way to keep them.

When you look after the welfare of your workers by implementing some of these time-tested suggestions, you'll have a much better chance of keeping them for the long run.

You'll also find that your farm productivity will increase, and this means better profits and more long-term security for your family. It's a win-win-win situation!

Now that's something that's definitely NOT going to keep you up at night!



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