

**HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION AND EXECUTIVE
AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

An ageing agricultural industry

Summary

1 Although the number of reported accidents to older workers is less than might be expected, the accidents tend to result in disproportionately higher levels of fatal and serious injury. The data in this paper is not exhaustive and further debate and discussion on the issues raised is required.

2 The paper invites AIAC members for suggestions and direction as to how accident incidence rates for older workers can be reduced.

Background

3 The focus on recent increases in the population as a result of the expansion of the European Union and subsequent migration from the Accession 8 and Accession 2 States in June 2004 and January 2007 respectively has tended to mask the longer term trend towards an ageing workforce in Great Britain; not least in agriculture. This change in the longer term demographics of the industry is the result in part of a post-war reduction in the birth-rate, of advances in medicine and medical technology (in Britain as in other industrialised nations) and of fundamental changes both in the wider economy and in the land based sectors. One of the results has been an increase in the number of elderly people (no standard definition available or commonly adopted) as a proportion of the population.

4 By way of example, the percentage of the UK population over 60 has risen from 13.6% in 1951 to 21.2% in mid-2005 [Source: Office of National Statistics (ONS)]. The proportions of those over 50 and 55 have risen correspondingly. ONS data for the UK population between 1951 and 2006 and projections to 2021 are attached in Annex 1 at Tables 1 and 2.

5 Certain populations are more likely to experience increased risks of injury and disease in the workplace as a result of biological, social or economic factors; one of which is age. Particular concern as to the impact of an ageing workforce can be levelled at the agriculture and allied industries by virtue of their hazard profiles and structure.

6 Employment data based on Defra agricultural and horticultural census and surveys consistently suggest high levels of self-employment in these industries when compared with other industries; particularly in the arable and livestock sectors. The ONS' Labour Force Survey 2005/06 suggests that ~41% of the workforce in the agricultural industry [defined by Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 1992] is aged over 50: see Table 3 in Annex 1.

7 More recent research by EUROSTAT highlights the age distribution of farmers in the Region and reveals that 78% of them are over the age of 45.

8 A higher proportion of the workforce continue in agriculture over the age of 45 compared to other occupational sectors (see figure 1). This suggests those working in agriculture tend to remain economically active and do not retire until much later in life, if in fact they retire at all.

9 Whilst there are inconsistencies between data sources as a result of different methodologies, sampling techniques and classifications, they all point to the fact that agriculture is and will continue to be, characterised by an ageing ownership/tenant base and workforce.

By way of example Defra data on farm holdings as at 2006/07 suggests:

| Holders of farm holdings - by age | |
|---|---------------|
| Age | %age |
| <35 | 3 |
| 35-44 | 14 |
| 45-54 | 23 |
| 55-64 | 29 |
| 65< | 31 |
| Source: | |
| Defra – Agriculture in the United Kingdom 2007 | |

10 Inevitably, older workers whether employed or self-employed are routinely engaged in physically demanding and potentially hazardous activities ranging from driving heavy plant (on the public highway and/or private land) and operating machinery through plant and property maintenance to manual and livestock handling and exposure to chemicals. This is reflected in the annual fatal accident statistics for the industry – where approximately 20% of fatal accidents in agriculture (as defined) occur to people above the national default retirement age of 65. Whilst the overall number of accidents to the elderly may not be (significantly) greater than expected, it appears that the accidents that do occur result in more serious injury or death than might be expected.

11 Analysis of reported accident data for agriculture in 2006/07, based on comparison of the proportion of the population working in the industry broken down by age compared with the number of reported accidents by age group indicates that:

- Whilst the number of accidents to older workers is less than expected, the accidents that occur result in more serious injury (major injury as defined by RIDDOR 1995) or fatality than might be expected; and
- Categories of accidents giving rise to particular concern in the industry include those concerned with handling livestock (*'Animal'*), falls on the level and from heights of up to 2m (*'Low Fall'*) and workplace transport (*'Transport'*).

12 For example over a 10 year period (from 1997/98 – 2006/07) in agriculture 45% of accidents involving animals occurred to workers aged 65+ (compared with an averaged working population over a 4 year period of 7% within the same age group). Similarly, 28% of all transport related fatalities involve the over 65s.

13 These findings are broadly consistent with emerging findings in the USA, the old Commonwealth and Scandinavia. Various explanations have been advanced most of which focus on the influence of physical limitations and declining health with age and/or human factors concerned with individuals' perceptions of their capabilities.

14 Research into the impact of the ageing workforce is a comparatively recent development. Currently the focus is on defining the nature and magnitude of the enhanced risk with a view to developing appropriate prevention strategies. This has clear and direct relevance to the development of healthcare strategies at national, regional and local level.

15 To the extent that any consensus has emerged to date, it is probably that effort should be directed to health awareness and health promotion i.e. to encouraging pragmatic and realistic approach to and appreciation of individual's limitations.

Current Approaches and HSE activity

16 Since the implementation of the Revitalising Health and Safety Strategy in June 2000, the introduction of Public Service Agreement (PSA) interim targets for injury, ill health, sickness absence and rehabilitation in 2004 and the implementation of HSE's 10 point strategy for agriculture in 2004/05, HSE has sought to work with industry stakeholders and partners to promote health and safety. Members are asked to consider how to tackle the incidence (and prevalence) of fatal and serious injury to older workers in the industry.

17 Recent work commissioned from Oxford Strategic Marketing with aim of developing outline marketing strategy and plans for tackling fatal and the other accidents in the industry based on:

- Evaluation of HSE's existing "10 Point Strategy for Agriculture"
- Development of a robust, evidence based strategy to inform future plans; and
- Development of the 'insight' to drive effective, future engagement with the self-employed sector in the industry suggests the focus should be

on fewer (possibly only three) priority segments to deliver a more impactful, integrated programme of activity over a more sustained period than has been the case to date.

One of the priority segments it is suggested might be lone farmers aged 65 or over.

18 No special initiatives have as yet been directed by HSE at the injury and ill health incidence rates among older workers in the industry and the work carried out to date is exploratory and should only be considered as indicative.

The Sector suggests:

- To conduct a more detailed analysis of fatal and major injury accidents to the over 50s, to examine the extent to which age is, or might be, a contributory factor
- A comprehensive trawl of national and international data to identify further relevant research
- Exploring the scope for incorporation of questions into future Labour Force Surveys to explore the extent of non-reported injury and ill health to workers and the self-employed in the industry amongst the over 50 age group.

Conclusions

19 As far as the agricultural industry is concerned, the Population Census shows an ageing workforce with proportionately fewer young people and more older people than in other occupational sectors in the Region. The relatively high proportion of older farmers reflects the fact that in many cases these businesses do not have a successor. It is often the case, particularly for tenanted farms, that where there is no successor the farmer cannot afford to retire.

Action

20 Members are asked to:

- (i) consider the problem and the approach suggested in paragraph 13;
- (ii) suggest further actions which could be taken; and
- (iii) Agree a plan of action.

Members are also asked to note the content of this paper as the basis for discussion on the way forward.

Contact

Samantha Peace
HSE Agriculture & Food Sector

UK POPULATION STATISTICS**TABLE 1: ESTIMATED MID-YEAR UK POPULATION (000's)**

| Age Groups | 1951 | 1961 | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 | 2001 | 2006 | 2011 | 2016 | 2021 |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Under 18 (to 2001) Under 15 (from 2006) | 13,248 | - | 15,798 | 14,470 | 13,184 | 13,356 | 10,737 | 10,912 | 11,428 | 11,947 |
| 18 - 59 (to 2001) 15 - 59 (from 2006) | 30,149 | - | 31,007 | 31,851 | 33,727 | 34,890 | 36,921 | 37,608 | 38,243 | 38,502 |
| 60+ | 6,828 | 7,747 | 9,123 | 10,031 | 10,597 | 10,590 | 12,928 | 14,240 | 15,304 | 16,741 |
| TOTAL | 50,225 | 52,807 | 55,928 | 56,352 | 57,508 | 58,836 | 60,586 | 62,760 | 64,975 | 67,190 |

TABLE 2: ESTIMATED MID-YEAR UK POPULATION (%)

| Age Groups | 1951 | 1961 | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 | 2001 | 2006 | 2011 | 2016 | 2021 |
|--|---------------|----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Under 18 (to 2001) Under 15 (from 2006) | 26.4% | - | 28.2% | 25.7% | 22.9% | 22.7% | 17.7% | 17.4% | 17.6% | 17.8% |
| 18 - 59 (to 2001) 15 - 59 (from 2006) | 60.0% | - | 55.4% | 56.5% | 58.6% | 59.3% | 60.9% | 59.9% | 58.9% | 57.3% |
| 60+ | 13.6% | 14.7% | 16.3% | 17.8% | 18.4% | 18.0% | 21.3% | 22.7% | 23.6% | 24.9% |
| TOTAL | 100.0% | - | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Notes

- (1) Based on ONS national census data and projections.
(2) Age groupings changed from 2006. Data projections for 2006 onwards only available in above categories.

INDUSTRY STATISTICS

TABLE 3: EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURE - AGE (%)

| Proportion of respondents by age band | Year | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 2001-02 | 2003-04 | 2004-05 | 2005-06 |
| 16-19 | 3.6 | 3.7 | 3.6 | 2.7 |
| 20-24 | 6.8 | 5.1 | 6.2 | 5.4 |
| 25-29 | 7.2 | 7.4 | 7.9 | 7.1 |
| 30-34 | 9.7 | 9.7 | 8.1 | 8.6 |
| 35-39 | 13.0 | 12.4 | 11.0 | 10.0 |
| 40-44 | 14.5 | 12.6 | 14.0 | 13.8 |
| 45-49 | 11.1 | 13.2 | 13.0 | 11.6 |
| 50-54 | 10.3 | 11.1 | 10.2 | 12.7 |
| 55-59 | 10.4 | 10.0 | 11.4 | 11.2 |
| 60-64 | 6.6 | 7.5 | 7.6 | 10.0 |
| 65-69 | 4.3 | 4.0 | 4.0 | 3.7 |
| 70+ | 2.6 | 3.4 | 3.0 | 3.1 |

1. Source: Office for National Statistics - Labour Force Surveys 2001-02 to 2005-06 (inclusive)
 2. Where Agriculture is defined by the Standard Industrial Classification (1992) codes 01,02 and 05 comprising agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing (excluding sea fishing)

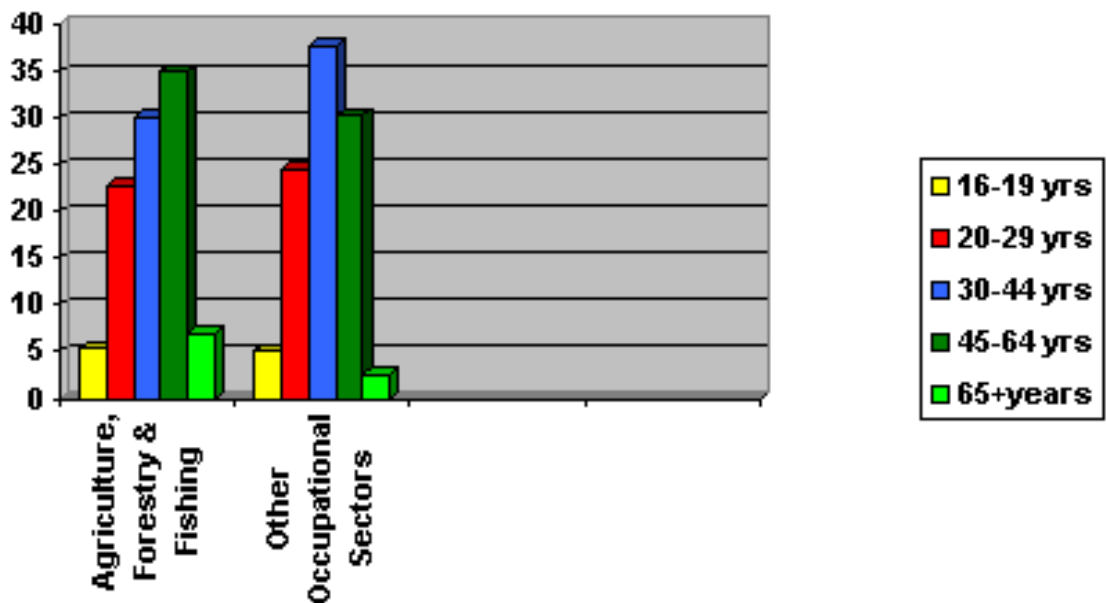


Figure 1: Age Groups within Industrial Sectors as a percentage of all workers in that Sector (1991 Population Census).