

**EVALUATION OF PILOT TRIAL FOR INTERNET BASED
"AGRICULTURAL RISK ASSESSMENT"**

A Report produced for the Health and Safety Executive by Mr A E Williams

Executive Summary

Over the past 6 months the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has been conducting a pilot exercise to trial an internet based risk assessment scheme. The scheme is tailored to the agricultural industry and enables farmers to complete a competent assessment of the risks in their individual business. Through this assessment the HSE aims to increase and improve the use of risk assessments within the industry, thus increasing awareness of risks and their control measures. This in its turn could help reduced the high rate of accidents and ill health in the industry.

The idea of an internet based risk assessment tool, tailored to a particular industry, is itself a first for HSE. Some features within the tool are also new ideas, such as the use of industry “benchmarks”. These were aimed at making the general legal requirements of modern legislation more prescriptive to individual industry hazards.

The evaluation was conducted by addressing a set group of questions to farmers who completed this pilot exercise and also by encouraging them to elaborate on what they saw as its positive and negative aspects. The results will be used to fine tune this package before its official release in April 2004.

The pilot exercise has shown an overwhelming measure of acceptance for this scheme. The number of farmers who downloaded the package during the trial period was 1800, a high uptake for what was intended as a small pilot exercise. In purely numerical terms 98% of those returning the assessment to HSE thought the idea useful or very useful as a means of completing a risk assessment for their individual farms. 95% said that they would continue to use it as an ongoing management tool for health and safety and 99% said that they had or would recommend this package to other farmers – within the farming community this is considered the “acid test” of acceptance.

Additional comments were, by a large majority, complimentary of this scheme and individual aspects of it. At the same time many farmers gave constructive criticism of individual questions or suggesting additions that they thought should be made to widen the scope of the assessment.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Background
- 1.2 Objective
- 1.3 Project information

2 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 Construction of questionnaire
- 2.2 Delivery of questionnaire

3 RESULTS

- 3.1 Data collected
- 3.2 Numerical results of questionnaire, questions 1 to 11

4 CONCLUSIONS

5 OPTIONS FOR HSE

APPENDIX 1 – Summary of recommendations made by those interviewed for additions or alterations to the assessment form and its management.

APPENDIX 2 – Full list of additional comments made by those interviewed.

APPENDIX 3 – Questionnaire as agreed with HSE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The agricultural industry has one of the highest accident incident rates for any industry.

HSE has traditionally found the industry hard to influence. The reasons for this are varied but include the fact that the industry is comprised almost exclusively of a large number of small businesses most of which employ no regular labour on the farm let alone any secretarial employees. As a consequence of the lack of employees, farmers are themselves busy with practical aspects of their business and have little time or inclination towards extra paperwork, particularly that not perceived as being linked directly to production aspects of the business. Hence health and safety “paperwork” has been a long way down the agenda.

HSE has used many routes to influence the industry towards managing Health and Safety more effectively. Inspection, written advice, safety awareness training, publicity and others. Each of these has its merits but they also have downsides in their effectiveness or penetration of the industry towards achieving formal management systems for Health and Safety on most farms

However one recent change is that farmers are now using computer based systems to a greater extent as management tools as these become necessary for DEFRA recording system, crop assurance schemes etc.

HSE decided therefore to trial a web based industry specific risk assessment as a means of influencing the industry towards better health and safety standards. It was thought that by demystifying the term “risk assessment”, by providing an industry tailored system and by providing prescriptive standards to aim at in the form of benchmarks this would encourage farmers to complete risk assessments tailored to their own farming systems and enabling them to measure themselves against good practice standards.

It is hoped that by having all common risks and their solutions presented in an easy to use package with other management tools built in, then farmers will be more likely to follow up their own action points and gain a sense of ownership for their own assessment. Also by having the whole system available on their computer they are more likely to continue to use it as a management tool.

1.2 OBJECTIVE

The objective of the evaluation exercise was to attempt to measure the level of acceptance for this system as a general principle, the level of acceptance for benchmarks as a means of providing in situ information in practical rather than legal terms, and also to measure what value was put on other features of the package. It also aimed to gain as much comment as possible rather than simply yes and no answers.

1.3 PROJECT INFORMATION

This risk assessment package was made available on the HSE Agricultural website from October 2003. Its availability was publicised on the Farmers Weekly interactive website with a link to the HSE website. Farmers were invited to download the package and, as this was a pilot exercise, to forward their completed assessment to the HSE via a built in e-mail facility. They were also advised that after doing so, they would receive a telephone call to evaluate the effectiveness of the package.

The work to produce this report was undertaken by Andrew Williams who has 40 years of experience in the agricultural industry, most of this being concerned with health and safety aspects of the industry. The work was co-ordinated by Chris Molde and Neil Craig of the HSE.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 CONSTRUCTION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire has been designed to measure acceptance of and gain comment :-

- a) on the principle of a web based risk assessment and to measure acceptability of the package as a whole to farmers;
- b) on the success or otherwise in making risk assessment easier for farmers to understand and complete;
- c) on individual aspects of the assessment including the ability to print an action plan, to order leaflets online, to expand the assessment to other agricultural or non agricultural enterprises;
- d) on the use of benchmarks and to find if they are more acceptable than giving advice through leaflets or setting out requirements in legal terms;
- e) on the ease of use or otherwise of the software used for the system;
- f) to find if the information provided has resulted in farmers becoming aware of new industry risks of which they had not previously been aware.

A question was also asked as to what if any actions had already been taken as a result of completing the assessment. The results of this particular question cannot be given any validity however, as the timing of the interviews varied from two months after the assessment was completed to only a week, giving little time for action in many cases.

A copy of the telephone questionnaire as agreed with HSE is shown at Appendix 3.

2.2 DELIVERY OF QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was conducted through telephone interviews with those farmers who had returned questionnaires. This method of contact was selected as a result of research for a previous evaluation exercise into the best methods of contacting farmers. This research compared an equal number of farm visits, telephone interviews and postal questionnaires and showed telephone interviews to be the most effective.

An average of three telephone calls per farmer has been necessary to complete this evaluation. No farmer has refused to be interviewed which, in my experience with this industry, indicates in itself a high degree of acceptance for the system. Before making calls each farmer's risk assessment was checked in order to provide information with which to prompt further comment if this proved necessary. Comment was not encouraged on technical or legal aspects of individual assessment but if these were raised farmers were referred to their local HSE office.

During the interview process some information was passed directly to HSE rather than waiting for the final report. This was where comments had been sufficiently far reaching for HSE to need to consider them at an early stage if it proved necessary to incorporate any additions or changes before the April 2004 launch.

3. RESULTS

3.1 DATA COLLECTED

In the four months since this package became available on the internet 1800 farmers have downloaded the software package and 119 forwarded their assessment to HSE for evaluation. This later figure was smaller than had been hoped.

The farmers responding came from a wide area of the UK although pure livestock farming areas were not represented e.g. Wales, Cumbria, Derbyshire, parts of Scotland etc. The largest concentration came from Suffolk, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.

The types of farming represented covered mixed farming (47%), purely arable (29%), purely livestock (7%) and 16% who only completed the common questions section. Returns represented both labour employing and family farms. They also included intensive vegetable and bulb production, two research farms, a race horse establishment, a vegetable packing company and a number of diversification schemes alongside a main farm enterprise.

3.2 NUMERICAL RESULTS

Percentage scores for individual questions are shown below and associated comments are shown in Appendix 2, although some are also included in the conclusion.

QUESTION 1

(Did you find this web based risk assessment a useful means of completing a risk assessment of your farming activities ?)

YES 98% NO 2%

QUESTION 2

(The next few questions are on specific aspects of the assessment form. Firstly for the benchmark information provided, did you find this:-

a) useful or not useful? YES 99 % NO 1%

b) do you prefer information in this form rather than in the form of guidance leaflets? YES 96 % NO 4 %

QUESTION 3

Did the range of questions in the assessment cover all or most of your farming activities or did you find some important activities not covered?

YES 96% NO 4%

QUESTION 4

Did you use the blank areas for items not covered by the set questions?

YES 12% NO 80% (and 8% said they would at a later date)

QUESTION 5

Did you find the ability to print out an action list useful?

YES 96% NO 4 %

QUESTION 6

Did you find the ability to print out orders for leaflets useful?

YES 86% NO 14%

QUESTION 7

Did you find the software aspects of this assessment easy to follow and to use?

YES 96% NO 4 %

QUESTION 8

Would you recommend this assessment to other farmers you know?

YES 99 % NO 1%

QUESTION 9

Has completing this risk assessment made you aware of any potential risks or legal requirements of which you were not previously aware?

YES 75% NO 25%

QUESTION 10

Have you already taken and actions as a result of completing this assessment?

YES 86% NO 14%

QUESTION 11

(Will you continue to use this assessment form in the future as an ongoing management tool to reflect changes in your farming activities or risks etc?)

YES 95% NO 5%

4. CONCLUSIONS

This web based assessment has undoubtedly been a great success for those farmers I interviewed. One outstanding impression I got as an interviewer was their willingness to be interviewed on this topic and their openness with extra comment. This, in the farming community, is unusual for a “safety” related item and is in itself a measure of its interest to them and acceptance. Success was measured by the high percentage of affirmative scores and in the complementary comments.

As measured against the objectives from Section 2.1 my views on this pilot exercise are as follows:-

a) To gauge acceptance levels for a web based risk assessment and to measure acceptability of the package as a whole to farmers.

Judged purely from the results of the interviews made and from the total number of downloads this risk assessment package has been a great success. However it must be said that the number of returns made to HSE was small and it would be of interest to pursue this point by comparative interview results with those farmers who downloaded the package but chose not to return their assessment to the HSE. I understand that HSE may carry out a separate exercise to follow up this point. The reasons for farmers not submitting their assessments to HSE could include the fact that they were completing their assessments in stages so have not yet completed them (as many interviewed had done), that they have no wish to disclose the state of their health and safety standards to HSE (a very likely scenario), or simply the feeling of why should they disclose information to HSE for no reason or gain. e.g. promise of no inspection for two years.

There were a number of constructive comments for software alterations and for future updates. These can be seen at Appendix 1.

Only two farmers interviewed did not think the assessment tool to be a good system. One of these gave reasoned arguments against having absolute requirements, being in favour of staged requirements to achieve an ultimate target. The other started by saying he did not like the system but questions revealed that his opposition really centred on only two livestock benchmarks with which he did not agree. He went on to say he would recommend the system to other farmers and continue to use it himself. All others interviewed were positive about the scheme and examples of some comments made are as follows:-

“Overall very good. Nice to have something which is not shoved down your throat. Well done HSE.”

"I actually enjoyed completing this assessment. It was practical and directly applicable to me and what I do every day."

"It is a pleasure to find something which is simple and practical to use"

"Excellent idea, not too long winded, we are busy people, short and to the point. Also provokes more thought and practical solutions in some areas e.g. road access."

"Absolutely superb and very enlightening."

"This is a positive idea, it made me think. Would I have done a full risk assessment of my farm without it? I think not."

Other measures of acceptability came from the question of recommending the system to other farmers and the question of continuing to use the assessment as an ongoing management tool for health and safety. Affirmative results for these two questions were 99% and 95% respectively. There were no adverse comments at all on recommending it to others but a few could not see themselves using it as an ongoing tool. Most of the later however thought they would do so if prompted by HSE with any updates in legislation or new risks. Comments included:-

"I have already recommended it to many others, including a crop assurance inspector who is interested to expand it to use it for his work"

"Definitely"

"I would definitely recommend this to others as legislation is much more in depth now, not black and white like it used to be."

"Because this is on the computer and I can check and alter it easily I will continue to use this as an ongoing management tool."

"Yes it has a structure and I can add further information. Also it gives a record of what we have in fact done already."

"I feel I have done this assessment and made my list of action points, which I will complete, then there is an end to it. I do not foresee using it again unless I am stimulated to by HSE so to do. What I would envisage to be needed is an e-mail in 12 months time letting me know what new issues have arisen and provoking me to perhaps look at my existing assessments again as well"

"I am concerned that I will complete my actions then it will remain unused. Can HSE send out a new updated one every year or two years? Better to do a complete one again rather than just have a short update section."

"Definitely (continue to use it as a management system). Without a shadow of doubt. Much the best way of managing things."

b) Making "risk assessment" easier for farmers to understand.

This objective had no individual question but was looked for in general comment. There were no adverse comments in this area, although some farmers pointed out individual questions which they thought either too vague or which they considered gave a benchmark which exceeded the legal requirements. Once again the large majority of comments were favourable and included:-

"The whole subject of risk assessment is very daunting to many farmers so they never get into it. This is easy to use and many farmers will get on OK with it."

"I found this a very quick and easy way of finding where the risks are in my particular type of farming."

"I was quite impressed with it. It guides you through things well and gives a lot of information in a small package."

c) Individual aspects of the assessment, including the ability to print an action plan, to order leaflets online or to expand the assessment to other agricultural or non agricultural enterprises;

Both scores and comments in these areas were again overwhelmingly favourable but constructive comment was also given.

On the question of action lists, only four farmers did not use them. One because he had found no outstanding risks on his farm, two because they could remember what actions they had given themselves and so did not need to print out a list and one who had not realised that this facility was available. Others all found it a useful or very useful tool. Comments included:-

“ Very useful. For example I printed out the action list with the benchmarks and gave a copy to each employee. We then had a meeting to discuss them”
“Action list very useful on two counts. One for myself and secondly to point out formally to my landlord what items are his responsibility and have been recorded. e.g. asbestos policy for the buildings, farm layout and access gates to fields from main roads.”

“Having an action list which I pin up on my office wall keeps the actions in mind”

On the leaflet ordering facility there was unanimous acceptance that it was a good facility, though not all needed to use it. There were two comments on the length of time delivery took although most farmers said there was no problem from delivery. One complained at the restriction to 25 leaflets. The fact that it was possible to select leaflets as one went through the assessment was remarked on as a particular asset as was the automatic ordering facility at the end.

The ability to use blank areas to expand the assessment to other topics was not widely used. This could infer that the existing list is sufficiently comprehensive to cover most farming systems, or it could arise from some farmers not wishing to look further than those risks identified for them. However a number of farmers questioned said they had not realised that the facility was available, which may be a weakness in the presentation of this facility. A few who admitted to having a second business (farm shop, caravan site, buildings let out etc) said they had not realised that they could use blank areas to make a wider assessment of risks in these separate enterprises and would now do so. Others who said that they had not been aware of this facility stated that they would not have needed it anyhow. However this facility had been used by some farmers, either for completely different enterprises (horse racing, vegetable packaging plant) or for individual risks not included on the assessment (reservoirs, shooting syndicates, road crossings, rail crossing, stress, etc). Comments include:-

“Have just started a livery as diversification so will try to use it for that.

However I would prefer to have HSE benchmarks for this as well.”

I will expand this assessment to cover other risks when I get time to think them through”

“I have used it to add risks for my race horse establishment but did this after I sent in my form to HSE”

“Only some of the general questions apply to my business but it has stimulated me to think of the risks in my main business and I have already done a lot of things to improve safety and horse handling from reading these benchmarks.”

"I intend to use this for a schedule of individual maintenance and check items e.g. individual tractors, combines etc plus individual buildings. I have these at present on a spread sheet and combining them with this document will be more convenient and also allow me to use the software for action lists etc. for these extra items"

d) The use of benchmarks and to find if they are more acceptable than giving advice through leaflets or setting out requirements in legal terms.

Only one farmer did not like the principal of benchmarks and one said that leaflets were better than benchmarks. All others liked the use of benchmarks and gave a variety of reasons for this. The most common reason was the fact that benchmarks were immediately available in the sense that for each risk the benchmark was alongside it and there was no need to look for or order leaflets and wait to complete a section some weeks later when they arrived. Another reason was the relatively short and practical nature of the benchmarks in that they stated in everyday terms just what was needed.

Whilst very much liking the principal of benchmarks, many farmers made adverse comment on individual benchmarks as being two questions in one (how to answer one in the negative and one in the affirmative?), being too vague, going beyond legal requirements, not being possible to comply with (i.e. requiring information from an electricity company who will not supply it) and the lack of ability to have equivalently safe item but by means other than that given by HSE in the benchmark. These comments can be seen in full in Appendix 1.

On comparison to leaflets, most said that they preferred the benchmarks for the purpose of this assessment but some said that leaflets were still needed for a number of questions which needed more information than the benchmarks had or could provide. This was backed up by the fact that 86% of farmers had ordered a number of leaflets. Comments included:-

"Benchmarks confirmed what I had already extracted from leaflets."

"Benchmarks very useful, we do need our hands holding a bit and this does it very well."

"I liked them. They gave you something to work towards. In fact there is no way I would have completed it without them."

"Benchmarks much much better than leaflets. Leaflets take a long time to read and I loose concentration after one – imagine having to read all the leaflets to cover all the risks covered in this assessment and find the exact info you want to complete a risk assessment like this – it would take weeks even if you could find all the relevant leaflets."

"Preferred benchmarks to leaflets as they were right in front of me as I walked round the farm with a print out of the form. Leaflets would be impracticable for that purpose."

"Benchmarks very useful but I needed leaflets as well for some items."

"Brilliant. Lots of good information packed into a small package and quick to read and assimilate"

"Now you have all our e-mail addresses, why not use these to send us updates in the form of new benchmarks. I would definitely prefer them in this form as otherwise I will not get round to reading a long article. Just give it to us brief and practical so we can get on and get what needs doing done. You could send everyone an e-mail first to see who wants to be on this mailing list."

"I prefer leaflets as I cannot use a computer so cannot refer to my assessment and its benchmarks."

"Benchmarks can be too restrictive e.g. I have fitted hooks at the top of my diesel tanks for safe use of ladders, am I legal? My welder circuit is not as described in your benchmark but is RCD protected, does this comply? I cannot feed my Hereford bull from outside the pen but have an escape gap, is that OK? "

e) The ease of use or otherwise of the software used for the system.

No serious problems were encountered with the software. The only minor problems some encountered were with slow download times, the need to download acrobat software and, in two cases, the inability to download at all in that neighbours had to be called in to help! However these difficulties were mostly down to individual systems or lack of computer knowledge.

The fact that very few farmers will have access to Broadband was a sore point with three of those interviewed and they asked HSE to bear this in mind in future with anything HSE might provide for farmers via the internet i.e. not to produce packages which were too large for narrowband. Comments included:-

"I am not a PC expert but I found it very easy to use."

"Simple and easy to use. No problems" (many such replies as these first two)

"Download time was longer than HSE said. Not a problem in itself if I had known but it leads you to think the download is not working and you might start again"

"I downloaded this on narrowband then changed to Broadband. I could not then send it to HSE and this move messed things up generally on my computer. I had to download again and complete the whole assessment again before sending it in to HSE."

"I liked the coloured tags on the left hand side which was very useful as I completed this assessment piecemeal and these tags let me know which questions I had not yet looked at."

"This is an ongoing tool so the facility needs to be there to allow changes to be added BUT the previous history of 'actions taken' to stay on record. e.g. I can do an annual audit and after a few years it will show up if certain problems keep re-occurring so more drastic steps need taking for permanent cures."

f) to find if the information provided has resulted in farmers becoming aware of new industry risks of which they had not previously been aware.

75% of farmers interviewed said that they had been made aware of risks or legislation they had not previously known about. In most cases this applied to only one or two items. However most also said that it had acted as a prompt or more clearly explained other items which they had heard of but had not yet actioned.

The range of risks given as examples was wide, varying from those expected, such as relatively new legislation including "Asbestos Management plans" and "Ammonium Nitrate requirements", to simple and previously well publicised hard ware requirements such as chainsaw leggings, ATV helmets and machinery training requirements. Comments included:-

"Flagged up practical risks I had not thought of e.g. diesel tank fillers and slurry tanker handle extensions."

“Yes a couple, and one saved us money as we had had two new diesel tanks fitted recently, one with low filler one without – we were able to send this assessment to the delivery company and get them to fit a low filler.”

“Yes, the change in Ammonium Nitrate Regs and the Asbestos Management Regs.”

“No new areas of risk but it has highlighted new aspects I was not aware of e.g. the idea of training for manual handling, different chainsaw training courses, what to do if one hits a power line, having ladder stabilisers etc”

“Made me aware of one new point, asbestos management, and also more aware of several others.”

“New risks to us were the training and testing of FLTs and the Asbestos rules. We have now all been trained and had our FLT and telescopic examined –both needed new chains. I have had roof sheeting analysed and have found that it does contain asbestos, so at least I now know.”

Apart from the proviso of having a small sample, this pilot exercise has shown HSE’s internet based risk assessment to have been almost exclusively accepted as an efficient and effective means of completing risk assessments. It appears to have given the farmers interviewed a sense of ownership rather than health and safety being a subject imposed by authority. In this industry this probably means the difference between getting things done rather than putting them off indefinitely. As a bonus it has shown farmers a small percentage of new risks or legal requirements which other methods of communication with the industry has failed to do. Finally it has also been accepted by most farmers as an ongoing management tool for Health and Safety on their farm.

Recommendations have also been made by those interviewed to improve individual aspects of the scheme and to expand it into other areas of work activity. These are shown in Appendix 1.

5. OPTIONS FOR HSE

The following are suggested options for HSE on the future use of this risk assessment package:-

- 1) Provide the assessment package on HSE’s Agricultural website, clearly accessible and widely advertised, but have no inspector contact or follow up.
This would have the following advantages and disadvantages:-
 - a) Advantage. Cost saving to HSE as farmers who complete it will achieve an average of 7.6 risk areas identified for action per farm at no cost to HSE. This could equate to the number of risk areas which might have been identified during an HSE inspection at the cost of an inspectors time etc. This cost saving could in theory be extended to costs saved to the industry, to the NHS and Police etc by a reduction in accidents and ill health
 - b) Advantage. The cost of running this system to HSE will be minimal. Probably about one inspector week per year to update the assessment in line with new legislation and new risks areas.
 - c) Disadvantage. Advice from benchmarks for some items will not be effective as from an inspection as it will not be site specific.
 - d) Disadvantage. There will be no use of enforcement notices where these might have been necessary to speed up action, also prioritisation of issues may not be in line with risk as perceived by the individual farmer.

- 2) Send letters to a select group of farmers requiring an assessment return to be made to HSE which would be followed up by a telephone contact from an inspector in lieu of an inspection.
- a) Advantage. Written risk assessments will be completed by farmers who would not otherwise have done so and who may not legally have been required to do so.
 - b) Advantage. An inspector's telephone follow up will give added value to the farmers own assessment as risk areas (and others) can be probed verbally and adjustment made to priorities.
 - c) Disadvantage. As in option one, advice from inspectors cannot so easily be equated to site circumstances and the option of enforcement notices is not available.
 - d) Disadvantage. The time taken by inspectors in attempting to achieve telephone contact with farmers (average of 4 calls per farm?).
 - e) Disadvantage. As the farmer is submitting the assessment to HSE at HSE's request, he is less likely to be open and honest on the risk areas that he admits to.
- 3) Write to a selected group of farmers to inform them that an inspection is due on their premises in two months time and that if they choose to complete this risk assessment for their farm and either e-mail to HSE or present it to the inspector on arrival, then this is likely to reduce the time involved for the inspection, particularly if some actions have been completed prior to the visit.
- a) Advantage. This would achieve a more honest assessment of risks than in option 2 as it is known that the inspector will be calling.
 - b) Advantage. Less HSE time on each inspections visit.
 - c) Advantage. More actions definitely completed as many will have been done prior to the HSE visit in order to comply with the law and not risk enforcement.
 - d) Disadvantage. Clerical work in sending out batches of letters to fit inspectors proposed work.

My recommendation on the basis of this evaluation and on knowledge of farmers response to Health and Safety matters is for a combination of options 1 and 3. Option one being widely advertised for free use and option 3 being used by HSE on a rolling basis for farmers selected for inspection.

APPENDIX 1

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THOSE INTERVIEWED FOR ADDITIONS OR ALTERATIONS TO THE ASSESSMENT FORM AND ITS MANAGEMENT

Suggested additions alterations re benchmarks or questions

1. Three interviewees. A section should be added with specific benchmarks for the various horse handling businesses, ranging from race horse establishments to livery stables. The point was made that many farmers are diversifying into such areas as livery stables and, for horse racing alone, this is an industry with more employees than general agriculture and so well worth HSE's efforts to cover in a separate section of this scheme.
2. Three interviewees. Specific benchmarks should be included for intensive vegetable production (e.g. vegetable harvesters, vegetable washing, packaging and grading, and gang labour)
3. Two interviewees. Extra benchmarks needed for specific cropping such as bulb growing and other root crops apart from potatoes. The later appearing to be the only root crop covered at present. Make it clearer that Qs 71 onwards are for all vegetables, root crops and fruit, not just potatoes.
4. Three interviewees. Add benchmarks for stress.
5. One interviewee. Add benchmarks for reservoirs and artificial fishing lakes.
6. One interviewee. Add benchmarks for farm shops?
7. Two interviewees. Add benchmarks for gun handling / shoots.
8. One interviewee. Add benchmark for road crossings (cattle).
9. One interviewee. Add benchmarks for use of vehicles and transport of equipment on the road.
10. One interviewee. Add benchmark for orchards.
11. One interviewee. Add benchmark for use of rail crossings.
12. One interviewee. Add a section for COSHH benchmarks.
13. On the question re machinery heights, please add possible arcing distances so we can judge if the difference between our machines and the power lines is safe or not.
14. Three interviewees re bulls. One interviewee. Change benchmarks (Q 91 and Q 97) to allow access to bull pens by bull handler to enable handler to gain bulls respect and prevent future accidents, another to allow for handling with show bulls, another to allow feeding in pen if next to an escape gap.
15. Four interviewees. Change benchmarks which give targets for achievement which go further than actual legal requirements. The point was made that they had ordered leaflets on some topics and found the leaflet gave a more balanced view of when or if a certain action was needed. While benchmarks do not have space for this they could at least give a caution to order the leaflet for the full answer. e.g. need for a map of OHPLs, need for an outside competent engineer to examine lifting equipment which might mean fore end loaders but this could be done by an operator, need for written record for building survey, need for amber beacon on 'A' roads, sheep turner etc .
16. One interviewee. For asbestos management (Q 4) add the fact that this could be the responsibility of a landlord.
17. One interviewee. For electrical protection (Q 7 and Q 8 respectively), explain what is meant by an RCD and PAT testing.
18. Two interviewees. Some benchmarks too all embracing, two questions in one etc. Need one benchmark for one action. (e.g. Q 2, 7, 25, 36). Some too vague (e.g. Q 16) where no real answers is given so why ask the question.

And Q 41, what devices are you referring to and is it a choice of one or all devices.

19. Two interviewees. Some questions cannot be complied with so are we in breach of law? (e.g. Q 34), cannot get a map from local electricity supplier and cannot safely measure the height of OHPLs. Also Q 44, seed corn comes in heavier bags. Others we comply with in different ways e.g. Q 36, I have hooks for a ladder on my tank, Q 9 I have RCD protection for welder and it does not trip.
20. Two interviewees. Q 89 - the benchmark states that the cover should be kept 2m back from the edge of a silage face. This will result in loss of quality of silage and hence of production. Where does this 2m rule come from in legal terms.
21. Two interviewees. Q 102 – a sheep turnover crate creates more risk of manual handling injuries as after a ewe has been in once it knows what to expect and resists on subsequent occasions. More risk struggling with such a ewe as just to turn the ewe manually.
22. Need more information on what age/type of roof sheets contain asbestos.
23. One interviewee. Add a section for monitoring health of staff and selves.
24. Move question 107, pressure washers, to the general common section as only pig farmers have the chance of completing it.
25. Question 40, ladders. Make it clear that we do NOT necessarily have to get rid of existing ladders if they do not have BS markings.

Software changes to assessment scheme.

1. Four interviewees. Get rid of the requirement to justify N/A answers. It is a real pain to have to add meaningless words when this item does not apply! Also allow a print out of all items answered both Yes and No (not the N/As) i.e. all items pertaining to our farm.
2. Add facility for HSE to automatically acknowledge any assessment sent in to them, just so we know you have it.
3. Add the facility to have an action plan on screen, not just as a print out.
4. Leaflets from non HSE organisations should be obtainable with a direct link to that organisation's site.
5. Need more guidance on the priority choice i.e. high, medium or low. What timescales would these refer to approximately?
6. Add the facility to allow previous information to remain on our assessments when new information is added. we need to be able to keep a history of past actions even if they have since been complied with. At present a change of response deletes old information.

Suggested management changes to assessment scheme

1. Contact Supermarkets and crop assurance organisers to get this as a pre requisite to completing their forms. Will save some questions on their forms as well.
2. Make it much clearer at the very beginning that we may not need to complete all 109 questions – I nearly gave up before I began because of this.
3. Add a list of HSE telephone numbers so that we can get clarification from an inspector if questions need it, or even request a visit.
4. Send out CD ROM instead as this allow more information e.g. leaflets to refer to as well. Also get round long download time.

5. If you write to us to submit this to you please only do it in Dec – Feb. This is the only time we can complete such a project . Ditto if you send out updates, choose the right time of year.
6. Many interviewees. We will expect HSE to provide updates to this assessment to reflect changes in legal requirements and new risks which come to light. This could be annual or bi annual. It can be in the form of a complete assessment again or simply just the additions. It could be notified by advertisements or by direct e mail to existing participants.
7. I did not like getting a stream of e-mails asking me to return this assessment to HSE. I found it useful for my own purposes but that is all.

Further suggestions resulting from comments on understanding the guidance on using the assessment:-

In view of a few comments from farmers about missing the point on some items I suggest HSE consider clarification of the following:-

1. the question was voiced that some benchmarks “went beyond the law”. I suggest that under “Benchmarks and Risk assessment” make it more “up front” that benchmarks are not the law. They are a standard which HSE will recognise as having achieved a legally acceptable standard but there can be other ways of achieving compliance with the law. e.g. livestock questions re bulls and sheep turners, others?
2. on the same point in the first heading “Meeting the benchmark”, add “....or if you have met the requirements in another equally safe way.”
3. re the hierarchy in the third heading “Meeting the Benchmark”, make it clearer that the list is itself a hierarchy and that these options should be considered in order of importance and practicability– this was not clear at first to some who are not up to speed on such matters as safety hierarchies! Would numbering help this or having First choice, Second choice etc in front of each?
4. one missed the point that guidance could be ordered automatically. How about adding the words for automatic ordering “....just put a tick in the check box of the relevant question for automatic ordering”
5. submitting your form to HSE. Some did not realise that they did not have to submit the form and one said he had been reluctant to commit himself to too many negative answers to HSE so had not filled in as much as he would otherwise have done if it was just for his use. How about “This self assessment can be sent to the HSE if you wish. The advantages are.....”
6. to reassure people more clearly that work done will not be lost, under “Tips for using the form” add “.....or ‘exit’ from the file menu – what you have entered so far will not be lost.”
7. I have noticed that quite a number of farmers are dutifully committing themselves to make written records to “comply” but at the same time saying that the risk does not exist on their farms. Examples are for measuring machine heights and heights of OHPLs. This is where they say they only have pylons or have no machines which reach serious heights, but they still perceive the law as requiring a written record. Can the wording of these questions be reconsidered? Also would HSE require a self employed family farmer to keep all such written records e.g. of his building maintenance for the few small buildings he has? Some seem to have read into the benchmark that written records are a legal requirement in themselves and extra paper work for the self employed is a source of a few grumbles from this evaluation.

APPENDIX 2

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS MADE BY THOSE INTERVIEWED

The following comments are all those given during interviews excepting that I have not included the numerous complimentary comments which repeated each other and were short simple comments such as very useful, good etc. I have however included all those which were negative or which gave constructive criticism.

Question 1

This is HSE for the first time working with people to jointly make farming a safer place, instead of in the past working against each other and trying to trip each other up.

Found this very useful way of completing risk assessment. (a lot of similar comments)

Overall very good. Nice to have something which is not shoved down your throat. Well done HSE.

I am a safety officer for research farms and found this extremely useful for this aspect of my work.

I found this a quick and easy way of finding where the risks are in my particular type of farming.

I actually enjoyed completing this assessment – it was practical and directly applicable to me and what I do each day.

Useful because I could complete it when I wanted to and a bit at a time. Compared to a safety inspection which happens at an inconvenient time.

Makes you think and it is always there for you to check back on.

It is a pleasure to find something which is so simple and practical to use.

I printed the whole thing out then walked round the farm with it so I had all the information with me from the benchmarks. However some questions need more information or need dividing into two or three separate questions. Some questions too general e.g. barn machinery – covers a lot of things. On the question of heights for OHPLs I could not get any information from the Electricity company and so if I do not reach the benchmark I presume I do not comply with the law.

I have taken on H&S responsibility for the farms in the last year and this system targeted me on what to look into.

Excellent idea, not too long winded, we are busy people, short and to the point. Also provokes more thought and practical solutions in some areas e.g. road access.

As a technique to develop H&S this is fine but need to change its ethos. In its present form it is no use to anyone as a driver to improve H&S. Yes/No needs to have a graduation change as well. Benchmarks are absolute they need to allow for graduation of progress and/or different means of achieving it. Make the benchmarks advice instead. Allow a farmer an assessment of where he stands in relation to an ultimate goal.

Absolutely superb and very enlightening.

No, did not find it very good. But OK found it easy to do. However some things went beyond the law. (he commented on livestock recommendations being wrong- see comments at end. This seems to have been his main problem with the assessment as he went on to say he would recommend it to others and he would continue to use it)

More useful than I envisioned it was going to be. Pleasantly surprised and interested.

This is a positive idea, it made one think. Would I have done a full risk assessment for my farm without it? I think not.

Very useful tool and especially for cascading the information to staff.

I would like to see this as an annual thing, say an update or reminder. Best over winter. We are all busy people as farmers and we are getting used to this way of managing e.g. with the ACC scheme where we have to do an annual assessment. So give us an update and having an HSE inspector phone to discuss individual points is also useful but not essential. So, keep it going HSE.

I was quite impressed with it. It guides you through things well and gives a lot of information in a small package.

Certainly focused my mind on things safety wise.

This fits very well where farming needs to be today and fits very well with requirements of supermarkets and crop assurance schemes. I suggest HSE contact these organisations and get them to include a requirement for a farmer to complete this HSE assessment as a pre requisite for their schemes – could also then remove a few overlapping questions in their schemes.

Yes. HSE must have worked quite hard on that. Quite impressed.

Q2 a)

All but one found these good /useful /very useful

For most farms yes but in my case as a safety officer I do need to know the exact regulation requirements sometimes.

Benchmarks very useful, we do need our hands holding a bit and this does it very well.

Excellent way of providing information.

OK, makes you realise what is what, but some things go beyond law (same person as commented on this above)

I liked them. They gave you something to work towards. In fact there is no way I could have completed it without them.

Benchmarks very useful but just a couple which I found rather vague or ambiguous (could not remember which off hand)

Only some of the general ones are applicable to my business but it has stimulated me to think of the risks in my main business and I have already done a lot of things to improve safety and horse handling from reading these benchmarks.

“Brilliant. Lots of good information packed into a small package and quick to read and assimilate”

Very useful, brought things to mind which I might have overlooked or which I had not realised could be a risk.

Are all these benchmarks absolute? It seems some of them may be what you (the HSE) think is best but that appears to be more than the law wants sometimes. Not that I think they are not an excellent way of providing us with information, it is just a doubt with some of them.

Q 2 b)

Benchmarks much much better than leaflets- leaflets take a long time to read and I lose concentration after one. – imagine having to read all the leaflets to cover all risks in this assessment, find the exact info you want to complete a risk assessment like this – it would take weeks even if you could find all the relevant leaflets.

Leaflets specifically ordered like this for what I see as a problem I read, unlike leaflets I pick up at a show which I don't often get around to reading.

Benchmarks very useful but need leaflets as well for some items.

Already had most of info from leaflets but this would have saved time if I had not got the info already.

Preferred benchmarks to leaflets as they were right in front of me as I walked round the farm with the form. Leaflets would not be practicable for that purpose.

Confirmed what I had already extracted from leaflets.

I prefer leaflets as I cannot use a computer so cannot refer to my assessment and its benchmarks.

Benchmarks can be too restrictive e.g. I have fitted hooks at the top of my diesel tanks for safe use of ladders, am I legal? My welder circuit is not as described in

your benchmark but is RCD protected, does this comply? I cannot feed my Hereford bull from outside the pen but have an escape gap, is that OK?

Q3

I was put off by having over 100 questions until I realised I could select for livestock and general only and even then could leave out questions which did not apply.

A major part of my farm is in bulbs and these activities were not covered.

Does not cover vegetable packaging, although I managed to cover most things from the general questions. More detail in this area would be good however.

Pretty well covered everything, pretty impressed.

Q4

Have used it to add risks for my race horse establishment but did this after sending form in.

Will expand this to cover other risks when I get more time to think them through (research establishment)

I had already done a risk assessment for the farm on paper so have now transferred this onto your system which makes it much more manageable e.g. action list, deadlines etc.

Have not used this yet but will use it to add on risks in bulb enterprise.

Not used as I did not know this was there. Will think about using this for the vegetable packaging.

Have just started a livery as diversification so will try to use it for that. However would prefer to have HSE benchmarks for this as well.

I was not clear about using these. Did not realise that I should work out my own risk for enterprises not included on the HSE assessment. e.g. I have buildings let out to non farming companies for storage.

I intend to use this for a schedule of individual maintenance and check items e.g. individual tractors, combines etc plus individual buildings. I have these at present on a spread sheet and combining then with this document will be more convenient and also allow me to use the software for action lists etc.

I had not noticed this aspect of the form. I will now use it for my livery stables and also for holiday cottages I let out.

Did not realise what these were for. I will now use them for the caravan site I have on my land.

I was not clear about using these. Did not realise that I should work out my own risk for enterprises not included on the HSE assessment. e.g. I have buildings let out to non farming companies for storage.

Q5

Timetables are very useful and having an action list which I pin up on the office wall keeps the actions in mind.

Very useful to be able to cut it down to just the action points.

Action list very useful on two counts. One for myself and secondly to point out formally to my landlord what items have been recorded which are his responsibility e.g. asbestos policy for buildings, farmyard layout and access gates to fields from main roads.

Very useful, helped me to communicate main points to staff.

OK I suppose but I have not used it. Remembered what is needed.

Very useful. For example I printed out the action list with the benchmarks, gave one to each employee then we had a meeting together to discuss them.

This is essential. Keep this feature.

I did not use this as I made notes as I went through. Had not realised it was available until I had started to make notes.

Q 6

The limit of 25 leaflets is restricting. Better if we could order more in one shot.

I ordered some leaflets in September and only received the last one in early November.

I ordered leaflets but had problems with one so used the email facility to enquire about it and this worked well as I was then sent the correct leaflet.

Important to keep these leaflets free or farmers will not order them!

I ordered relevant leaflets and will put them in a folder for employees to read along with the action list.

Not used. Had all relevant leaflets already.

Good idea, especially as you can print them off as you go and don't have to make notes or try to remember which ones you wanted.

Leaflets are better as they give a truer legal position. Benchmarks give impression that some things are absolute in law when leaflet says it is not e.g. under LOLER benchmark wants an outside competent person to examine a fore loader leaflet says this can be done in house.

There was a delay of about ten days in leaflets coming which is not a problem except that the inspector phoned before they had come so I had not done anything by then.

Q 7

I am not a PC expert but I found it very easy to use (lot of such comments)

Simple and easy to use. No problems.

Perfect.

Quite easy.

I found the best aspect of this the fact that you could complete it over a period of time. I came back to it after discussing points with others and could make changes as I went along.

Being out in rural area the download was very slow – no hope of broadband for most farmers so bear this in mind HSE.

I have Windows 98 and so could not download this until I spoke to one of your technical chappies who told me how to download some software from Microsoft.

Download time is longer than HSE said. Not a problem in itself but leads one to think it is not working and try again. Better if you said it could take up to half an hour as mine did. (4 other comments the same)

I downloaded this on narrowband then changed to Broadband. I could not then send it to HSE and this move messed things up generally on my computer. I had to download again and complete the whole assessment again before sending it in to HSE.

I liked the coloured tags on the left hand side which was very useful as I completed this assessment piecemeal and these tags let me know which questioned I had not yet looked at.

Would be a good idea to send it out as a CD ROM. Easier for many farmers to use it then, plus more info from leaflets could be added to the CD ROM.

Would like to see software built in at HSE's end to give me a reminder on my priority dates e.g. when 'medium' timescale expires and same for 'low' timescale.

Original letter did not say I needed adobe acrobat so I could not download until phoning HSE. Make this clear in guidance next time, thanks.

This is an ongoing tool so the facility needs to be there to allow changes to be added BUT the previous history of actions taken to stay on record. e.g. I can do an annual audit and after a few years it will show up if certain problems keep re-occurring so more drastic steps need taking for permanent cures.

References were made to leaflets from non HSE organisations. It would be useful to have a direct link to these documents. I could not download some of them – did I need to be a member of the NFU to do so?

Took a long time to download, we don't have broadband out in the sticks, how about posting discs to us instead?

It would have been nice to have had an acknowledgement that HSE had received this submission – could be automatic. I had been expecting an inspector to call but had no contact at all.

Some questions not easy to answer as we have two answers or partial answers or we can reduce the risk in another way to that suggested by the benchmark – so cannot put a YES down when we think we do comply and cannot put YES and NO down when we have done one thing but not another! e.g. we have three diesel tanks and have low filler on one and not on other two. Or have ATV training but no helmet Or have MCBs on switchboard not RCDs etc.

Could not send it to HSE. Message said your receiver could not accept it. Sent it by post instead.

I would like the ability to have the action plan on my PC, not just as a print out.

Q 8

I have recommended it to many others including a crop assurance inspector who was interested to expand it and to use it for his work.

I would definitely recommend this to others as legislation is much more in depth now, not black and white as it used to be.

Definitely!

Yes worthwhile so why not.

Recommend it to everyone.

Yes would recommend it to others with a similar scale farm but probably would not be sufficient for very large farming companies.

Suppose so. Is as easy a way of doing it as any I suppose.

I would recommend this to other farmers because the whole subject of risk assessment is very daunting to many farmers so they never get into it. This is easy to use and many such farmers would get on OK with it.

Yes would recommend it provided we have some inducement such as no inspection for a while.

Q 9

Yes a couple and one saved us money as we had two new diesel tanks fitted recently, one with low filler one without – we were able to send this assessment to the delivery company and get them to fit a low filler.

A few items e.g. plug type for welder

New areas I was not aware of where highlighted e.g. needing a map of OHPLs and needing an asbestos plan.

Flagged up practical risks I had not thought of e.g. diesel tank fillers and slurry tanker handle extensions.

No new areas of risk but it has highlighted new aspects I was not aware of e.g. the idea of training for manual handling, different chainsaw training courses, what to do if one hits a power line, having ladder stabilisers etc

Nothing I did not know about but some things we had not really bothered with before like chain saw leggings which we have now put on the action list.

Made me aware of one new point, asbestos management, and also more aware of several others.

Was aware of all items which applied to my farming type although it has jogged my memory with the asbestos issue.

Yes, asbestos management, but then I found it was the landlords job not mine. Should make this clear in the benchmark.

Yes, the change in Ammonium Nitrate Regs and the Asbestos Management Regs.

New risks to us were the training and testing of FLT's and the Asbestos rules. We have now all been trained and had our FLT and telescopic examined –both needed new chains. I have had roof sheeting analysed and have found that it does contain asbestos, so at least I now know.

Did not know about the need for signs and have some put up at entrance to yard as vehicles from another business go through our yard.

Made you think. I found a number of things I had previously overlooked.

Q 10

Yes, did not know I needed ATV training and have now booked a course.

Yes, we have fixed the welder supply, fitted new rails to steps and put up a lot of signs.

Early days but I have got an ATV helmet for my husband.

Only completed it last week so have made no actual changes but have made enquires about some already.

Not yet. These are all planned as winter jobs.

Q 11

Yes, it has a structure and I can add further information. Also it gives a record of what we have in fact done already.

HSE should be committed to update this as different laws come in or different risks become apparent.

Because it is on the computer and I can check and alter it easily I will continue to use this as an ongoing assessment.

I intend to keep my assessment up to date with changes on my farm so trust HSE will also update any changes in the law or advice on their part.

Yes, will look on this as a means of keeping up to date with new legislation.

I feel I have done this assessment and made my list of action points, which I will complete, then there is an end to it. I do not foresee using it again unless I am stimulated by the HSE so to do. What I would envisage to be needed is an e-mail in 12 months time letting me know what new issues have arisen and provoking me to perhaps look at existing my existing assessment again as well.

Will definitely continue to use it.

Will continue to use it. For one thing farm assurance needs us to have a safety system so this is the best way to satisfy that requirement at the same time as having a good safety assessment of our own.

Definitely. Without a shadow of doubt. Much the best way of managing things.

I cannot continue to use it as I do not have a computer. I just have the print out from my sons computer (he does not live or work at the farm)

I would like an e mail to remind me to carry this audit out again in twelve months time, plus any updates.

OTHER COMMENTS

I completed this at home and then gave it to my employer and he has taken on the action point list – and now made me responsible for checking H&S on the farm! (From a farm worker)

Areas not sufficiently covered were risks from other people coming on site and my responsibilities (This from a research farm)

Need some risks for vegetable production and large gangs of casual labour.

Need more of workshop risks.

Need to include risks from reservoirs as a new benchmark as lots of farms (particularly potato growers) now have them and this is an area where I and others are not sure just what the law requires.

There is a need for a complete section on the equine side e.g. race horse establishments alone employ more than agriculture. It would be very welcomed in this industry and there is a big need as standards are not clear.

(comment from the farmer who did not think much to this package!) – Like varnish it does what it says on the tin. Leads you to what to do. However some things it says are beyond the law, or are not safest way to do things. Example 1 – bull handling, it recommends feeding etc from outside pen. This is not a good idea as you never establish yourself as dominant so if you do ever go in with the bull then you are a stranger and not the boss so are more likely to be attacked. Example 2 – turnover crates for sheep are not a saving in respect of manual handling risk for foot trimming. Once a sheep has been in one it gets harder to get them in again, in fact more work than turning them by hand. I had a turning crate once but have now sold it to another mug.

Root crop section needs expanding, it only refers to tatties. Needs to cover other vegetables and root crops.

Did not know what an RCD was. Please explain this in the benchmark as I felt a fool asking others!

Silage and forage clamps – advice to keep covers back 3 metres is excessive. It will expose silage to secondary fermentation, wastage and reduce silage quality.

The Priorities option needs some more guidance. I appreciate that a particular hazard can be a different risk in different circumstances but we need to know if “High” means 2 weeks, six weeks or what. Then the same for “medium” and “low”. Then we can judge better what priority to give.

Most useful aspect was being able to do it in my own time and in evenings, as against spending half a day with an HSE inspector at a time of their choosing. But you have got to be honest with it, no good just ticking everything.

A follow up telephone call from an HSE inspector was very useful as it helped to explain some items not fully understood.

I am concerned that I will complete my actions then it will remain unused. Can HSE send out a new updated one every year or two years? Better to do a complete one again with updates than just have a short update section.

Now you have all our e-mail addresses, why not use these to send us updates in the form of new benchmarks. I would definitely prefer them in this form as otherwise I will not get round to reading a long article. Just give it to us brief and practical so we can get on and get what needs doing done. You could send everyone an e-mail first to see who wants to be on this mailing list.

How about adding a section for COSHH? All it needs is general areas or risk such as dust, fume, chemicals etc with benchmarks and some of these can be moved from within this assessment. This will save us all having two documents for H&S and enable us to use the software of this assessment for COSHH as well.

I do feel a need to maintain a record of what I have done and when, so if HSE plans an update I would like to be able to keep past actions in the document. At present I am liable to lose these if I answer YES in a new document and the system will not let me keep my previous negative comment and notes. Also it will be a pain to type it all in again, can a new document be merged or added without disrupting the old one?

On the question of HSE’s letter. This gave me the impression that I would be left alone to get on with my own assessment and actions. However I then get this phone call and am told I must get my FLT training within three months or I am in breach of the law. Not claiming I am not in breach or saying this assessment is not a good thing but I felt that this was a bit of a backhanded way of doing things. Make it clearer in the first place in your letter exactly what you mean.

Sending out your first letter in September is no good, farmers will have no time for this in depth assessment at that time. Best time is December to February. It

took me half a day to complete the assessment and no way I could spend that time in September.

Examples very useful.

Question on silage clamp needs changing. It results in loss of quality to the silage. Change the wording for this benchmark, there are other ways of doing this job safely.

Some of these items are asking a lot of us in time, e.g. recording lots of items and the chain saw course now being four days is excessive for the type / amount of chainsaw work done on farms.

I liked the inspector phoning up.

Updates in 12 months please.

Make much clearer right at the beginning that we may not need to fill in all 109 questions! This was very daunting until I realised this and it nearly put me off.

N/A requires a justification. This is a pain and time consuming having to do this to no purpose each time. Please take this requirement out. (three farmers commented on this)

It was useful having a phone call from an inspector to clarify and discuss items with.

There is only one time of year I could do all of this. So make sure any launch or revisions are sent out in December or January.

We grow fruit only. Would like to see benchmarks to cover this.

It would be better to allow us to quantify risk more than your benchmarks allow. E.g. what is a risk on one farm may only be a hazard on my farm. You do this with many questions e.g. seat belts, but in others there is no such allowance for circumstances.

Children. In some circumstances they have to be allowed around the farm yard e.g. I have a livery business attached to the farm yard. I educate all visitors to risks as much as possible but your benchmarks are more absolute e.g. if younger children accompany older children and parents to the livery. Incidentally it would be useful to have an equine section in this assessment.

I would expect HSE to do an update for this about every two years with publicity to remind us. If so I would prefer a complete assessment again, not just a few items which are new.

Can you add a section which allows me to monitor the health of employees and ourselves? e.g. to record any work related illness against possible causes on the farm.

You quite rightly ask us to measure our machines, then quite rightly ask us to find out the height of our wires then you leave us right in the lurch. How do we know what clearance is safe in what conditions? Electricity companies give a ridiculous

answer so that we cannot get near half our fields! Can HSE do some practical research on this please and give us practical workable answers?

**APPENDIX 3
QUESTIONNAIRE AS AGREED WITH HSE**

TELEPHONE EVALUATION OF RISK ASSESSMENT

Q1. Did you find this web based risk assessment a useful means of completing a risk assessment of your farming activities ? Y..... N.....

Any Comment:-

Q2. The next few questions are on specific aspects of the assessment form. Firstly for the benchmark information provided, did you find this:-

a) useful or not useful? Y.....N.....

b) do you prefer information in this form rather than in the form of guidance leaflets? Y.....N.....

Any Comment:-

Q 3. Did the range of questions in the assessment covered all or most of your farming activities or did you find some important activities not covered?

Y.....N.....

Any Comment:-

Q 4. Did you use the blank areas for items not covered by the set questions?

Y.....N.....

Any Comment:-

Q 5. Did you find the ability to print out an action list a useful aspect?

Y.....N.....

Any Comment:-

Q 6. Did you find the ability to print out orders for leaflets useful?

Y.....U.....

Any Comment:-

Q 7. Did you find the software aspect of this assessment easy to follow and to use? Y.....N.....

Any comment:-

Q8. Would you recommend this self assessment to other farmers you know?

Y.....N.....

Any comment:-

Q9. Has completing this risk assessment made you aware of any potential risks or legal requirements of which you were not previously aware? Y.....N.....
Any comment:-

Q10. Have you already taken any actions as a result of completing this assessment?
Y.....N.....
Any comment:-

Q11. Will you continue to use this assessment form in the future as an ongoing management tool to reflect changes in your farming activities or risks etc?
Y.....N.....
Any comment:-