

Research Summary

Agriculture Sector, Farmers and Agricultural Workers Communications Testing and Development

Insight and Service Design Team, Health and Safety Executive
Research conducted by Jigsaw Research Ltd.

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Background and Objectives

Commissioning

This report is a summary of research conducted by Jigsaw Research Ltd. between September 2020 and December 2021. The research was commissioned by the Insight and Service Design in the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

The content of the report, including any opinions and/or conclusions expressed, are the views of the agency alone and do not necessarily represent the views of the HSE.

Business context

The farming and agriculture sector accounts for a disproportionately high percentage of workplace fatal and non-fatal injuries; despite only employing 1% of Great Britain's workforce, the sector accounts for 20% of workplace deaths each year. The sector is a key priority for the HSE and the HSE's Vulnerable Workers, Agriculture, Waste and Recycling Unit has a multi-faceted intervention strategy in place which aims to encourage better health and safety (H&S) compliance within the sector, and so drive down the number of fatal and non-fatal injuries.

Research context

Previous research had provided insight into farmers' attitudes and behaviours around risk on the farm and specifically provided:

- An attitudinal segmentation of farmers with four segments, each with a distinct set of attitudes and behaviours around risk - Planners, Pragmatists, Risk Takers and Unclear
- A model which illustrated risk-taking behaviour amongst farmers and agricultural workers

This programme of research builds upon this previous work.

To provide the HSE with insight that would facilitate the development of guidance materials, targeted at farmers and agricultural workers, the aim of which is to reduce accidents on farms by positively influencing farmers' and agricultural workers' risk-taking behaviour.

Research objectives

The overall aim of this research was to provide insight that would enable the HSE to develop interventions with the potential to positively influence farmer and agricultural worker risk-taking behaviour. The specific objectives of the research were as follows.

- To understand the content, tone, style, layout and call to action that is needed within the What a Good Farm Looks Like guide so that it is easy to use and implement by farmers and agricultural workers in their day-to-day activities
- To create a new set of principles (to include content, tone, style, layout and call to action) that can be applied when developing future messaging for each attitudinal segment of farmers and farm workers
- To understand the other motivations that can be leveraged other than 'safety' to reduce and/or prevent risk taking behaviours among farmers and agricultural workers
- To identify the key messenger/s and the optimum timing/channels/formats to reach farmers and agricultural workers
- To identify the new 'desired' behaviours which can replace the most common risk-taking behaviours
- To create visual communications that illustrate the new 'desired' behaviours and support cultural norming
- To create visual communications that engage those with low literacy levels and those who are not native speakers of English

Research Methodology

The research was qualitative in nature, and a multi-faceted, iterative approach was taken to answer the research objectives.

Research Approach

Stage	Objective	Method
Stage 1, Phase 1	Evaluate the existing What a Good Farm Looks Like (WAGFLL) publication guide Evaluate a range of other HSE communications materials	24 in-depth interviews with farmers and agricultural workers
Stage 1, Phase 2	Use input from Phase 1 to co-create ideas for a new version of What a Good Farm Looks Like guide	2 co-creation workshops: one with farmers from Phase 1 and one with agricultural workers from Phase 1
Pause and reflect	Using the insights from Phases 1 and 2, develop new content and format ideas, for a revised version of the What a Good Farm Looks Like (WAGFLL) guide	
Stage 1, Phase 3	Evaluate the new content and format ideas for the new What a Good Farm Looks Like (WAGFLL) guide	12 in-depth interviews with farmers and agricultural workers

Stage	Objective	Method
Stage 2, Phase 1	To explore reactions to a range of existing communications materials, to understand what message territories, communications styles and communications formats had the most power to engage and impact farmers' and agricultural workers' risk-taking behaviours	10 development workshops with farmers and agricultural workers
Pause and reflect	Using the insights from Phase 1, a range of communication materials were drafted for testing in Phase 2	
Stage 2, Phase 2	To explore reactions to a range of draft communications materials, to further understand what engages and leads farmers and agricultural workers to take action	8 mini-groups and 12 depths/paired depths with farmers and agricultural workers

Main Findings

Contextual factors

The research found that there are factors relating to farms, farmers and agricultural workers that have considerable impact on whether communications aimed at farmers and agricultural workers are engaged with, i.e., whether they are read and acted upon.

The contextual factors identified in the research are as follows.

Farming culture

Cultural norms in farming both drive and reinforce behaviours that can be risky. Farming has its own culture and there is a strong sense of belonging, as well as a sense of being set apart from the rest of society; the norms, accepted practices and rules set by that culture are strong. Attitudes towards safety and accepted practices around managing risk on the farm are culturally driven, with farmers and workers adopting the attitudes and behaviours that are common across farms. A degree of risk taking is inherent in this culture.

Characteristics of farmers and agricultural workers

Farmers and farm workers share a set of characteristics – a degree of risk taking is one of them. Farmers take satisfaction in being a ‘jack of all trades’; they are proud of their wide range of skills and their ability to tackle a wide range of tasks. They believe in their strength, resilience and self-sufficiency and feel competent to take a degree of risk in the tasks that they do. Farmers and agricultural workers know they could die/be seriously injured, however, they don’t really believe that it will happen to them. They have a strong sense of and belief in their own ability to judge the level of risk they are taking and to be able to handle it.

Attitudes to safety

Safety is important to farmers, but it is one of several things they are juggling, with crop and animal welfare paramount. In the main, they are not aiming to get ‘safer’. They do not feel they lack knowledge on the sources of risk on their farms and have established ways of managing these risks, thus they do not feel the need to seek out more information on this.

They feel they operate at a ‘good enough’ level most of the time and that is all that is realistic i.e., they don’t believe that such a thing as a ‘totally safe farm’ exists and are aiming more for a ‘safe enough’ farm. They tend to accept that accidents happen and are unavoidable at times i.e., some things are out of their control – ‘farming is like that, it’s

dangerous'. This is especially true of livestock farmers, who report that dealing with cows will always be unavoidably risky.

They ascribe most accidents to cutting corners and/or a lapse in concentration, rather than to poor systems/practices – creating a sense of 'it could happen to anyone' regardless of the procedures in place.

Taking all of these factors together, farmers and agricultural workers are a challenging audience to engage with. To be successful, communications will need to challenge and overcome these deeply held beliefs and behaviours.

What a Good Farm Looks Like (WAGFLL) guide

The research indicated for a potential new What a Good Farm Looks Like guide to be easy to use and implement by farmers and agricultural workers in their day-to-day activities, the following would be required:

- A title that draws farmers in to encourage initial engagement, for example, 'A Guide to Reducing Accidents on the Farm'
- An Introduction page that gives farmers and workers a reason to read on
- A guide that is easy to read, short and makes as little use of text as possible; the use of visuals instead of text to get the message across can have more impact
- Language that is clear, easy to understand and jargon free
- Visuals that are recognisable, credible and relatable
- Content that focuses on the key sources of injury and fatality on farms
- Clear advice on simple and practical steps to avoid these accidents
- Reasons to believe; farmers and workers need a reason to adopt the suggested behaviours. This could come in the form of case-studies, first person narratives/quotes, evidence, e.g., statistics.

A set of principles that can be applied when developing communications aimed at farmers and agricultural workers

The research indicates that communications are able to 'cut through' with farmers and agricultural workers. A set of principles that will optimise the effectiveness of communications are detailed below.

Utilise messaging territories that resonate with farmers and agricultural workers

A range of possible messaging territories was explored in the research. The territories that have most power to engage farmers and agricultural workers were:

- The possibility of receiving a life changing injury as the result of an accident has real impact on farmers and agricultural workers, more so even than the possibility of death.
- This is driven by the potential fear of losing their independence and their ability to farm effectively. Also, the related concern of being a burden on their family.

The possibility of causing harm to those they care about and/or have responsibility for also has real impact on farmers; this would include family members or anyone else working on the farm i.e. workers, contractors.

Maximise cut-through by taking a 'less is more' approach

The research showed that farmers and workers will not engage with lots of text and so communications should keep the amount of text to a minimum. This was especially the case for agricultural workers for whom English was a second language or who had lower literacy levels. They tended to only engage with the visual elements and header/footer text of any execution. This was also true of others who, even in a research setting, only tended to skim read the body of the text in the executions tested.

Farmers are very unlikely to invest time in working out what is going on in a piece of communication. It is important therefore to keep the message simple and very clear; it must be instantly obvious what is happening in an execution, both the visual and the text.

Farmers responded best to communications that were primarily visual and so the message should be largely communicated in a visual way.

In summary, the research showed that farmers and workers are more likely to engage with executions that are highly visual, with a clear message and limited text.

Relatability & credibility are key to success

Farmers must be able to relate to the execution, i.e., to be able to project themselves into the situation portrayed and believe that it could happen to them or happen on their farm. Relatability can be effectively achieved through examples and case-studies, but it is essential these feel current/up to date and as though they are based within the farming community. The research indicated that a balance needs to be struck between giving enough detail that farmers understand what is going on and too much detail which can pave the way for farmers to 'pick holes' in the execution and so dismiss it.

The research also found that first person narratives and quotes provide authenticity and so add to the overall impact.

Farmers must feel the scenario depicted and any call to action are credible. Farmers are very quick to pick up on anything that reinforces their view that the author doesn't understand farming and will reject the whole communication once they have done so.

Providing evidence/'proof points' can help with credibility and so has the potential to cut-through with farmers. However, it is hard to get these 'right' and they can be easily pulled apart and dismissed by farmers and workers.

The tone of the communication makes a big difference to its impact

The research found that messaging works better with farmers and workers when it looks to persuade rather than prescribe. By their own admission farmers do not like being told what to do and communications that try to do this, will be rejected.

It is important therefore to avoid any sense of instructing or lecturing as this causes farmers to switch off; in this context, words like 'always', 'never' and 'don't' are best not used.

Ideally the communication would give ownership for the decision to the farmer or worker, acknowledging their expertise and giving them a reason to want to change their own risk-taking behaviours.

Ensure the 'take out' is clear

Any communication should ideally include either a clear call to action or an end line that clearly sums up what the take-out should be.

Any calls to action need to offer practical advice/reminders that can be easily (and cheaply) implemented.

A more general 'stop and think' message can have value as a 'take out' as it benefits from being universally applicable and is therefore harder to pick apart or dismiss as not relevant. It is a more relatable way of talking about assessing risk.

As with the rest of the communication it is important that the 'take out' is clear so that farmers do not have to have to work to understand the message.

Motivations other than 'safety' that can be leveraged to reduce and/or prevent risk taking behaviours among farmers and agricultural workers

As described two key motivations that could be leveraged to reduce risk taking behaviours among farmers and agricultural workers are:

- The possibility of receiving a life changing injury as a result of an accident, driven by the possibility of losing their independence and their ability to farm effectively, as well as the related concern of being a burden on their family.
- The possibility of causing harm to those they care about and/or have responsibility for including family members or anyone else working on the farm i.e. workers, contractors

The research also indicated that farmers and workers may be influenced by the following:

- Near misses/close calls; without exception farmers and workers can relate to a situation where they have had a close call or a near miss. Messages talking to the idea that the next near miss might be their last or that 'he had always gotten away with it before' may cut through.
- How every day, normal situations can quickly turn to tragedy; this sort of scenario really strikes home with farmers. It has the potential to cut through complacent attitudes and remind farmers of the dangers they face every day and accidents happen when they are tired and/or under pressure.
- The power of 'shock'; scenarios which take a surprising turn for the worse have a strong impact. This works better when it serves to make farmers think, rather than being overly graphic; imagining what happened, and projecting themselves into the situation are both more evocative and have a more long- lasting impact.
- Modernisation/professionalism; there are younger farmers who want things to change in the sector and, to see a move towards greater professionalism. Tapping into this desire with a message aimed at younger audiences that talks to the opportunity to question the ways of older generation/do things differently may cut through.

Executions that talked to the financial impact of accidents had little impact, and indeed tended to be reacted to negatively, it risks feeling somewhat cynical/callous.

Optimum channels, formats and timings to reach farmers and agricultural workers

Channels

As described earlier, farmers and agricultural workers are not seeking out information on health & safety. The research showed that to engage farmers, a 'push based' communications approach will be needed, i.e. the communications will need to go to them and be in places where farmers and workers are.

Farmers and agricultural workers are engaging with a wide range of media and communicating through these appeared to have the best chance of cutting through.

Farming publications such as Farmers Weekly and Farmers Guardian are widely read across all age groups, albeit the younger farmers and workers tended to be reading the online versions over the hard copy. Local and regional newspapers are also widely read by this audience.

Farmers and workers of all ages are using social media with Facebook more popular amongst the older age groups and Tik Tok and Instagram amongst the younger age groups.

Farmers and workers are also using YouTube, following farming influencers and watching farming programmes on TV.

Finally, farmers and workers all spend time at farmers markets, agricultural shows, equipment sales and other such forums. Younger farmers and workers also attend young farmers events.

Formats

The formats used for the communication need to work with the channels farmers are accessing and, in this context, the research indicated that video formats backed up by print/poster formats were likely to be most effective when communicating with farmers and agricultural workers.

Short videos appeared to be the most powerful and engaging way of getting a message across and are highly suited to delivery through social media or YouTube.

Posters/print also has an important role to play to reinforce the message and keep the message front of mind. Although it lacks the emotional connection of the videos, it still has an important role to play. Poster/print formats using impactful visual imagery, a memorable slogan and a small amount of text seem to be most effective.

Timings

The farmers and workers reported that the best time to reach them was during periods downtime, enforced or otherwise. They described scrolling through social media while waiting for something to happen, standing around at markets and equipment sales with nothing to do other than scroll through their phones or read any posters that happened to be there, reading farmers publications during a break and other such behaviours.

Communications that engage those with low literacy levels and those who are not native speakers of English

The research indicated that the principles and approach described for communicating with farmers and agricultural workers as a whole, were equally applicable to those with low literacy levels and those who are not native speakers of English.

However, for these audiences, it is vital that text is kept to a minimum and that the intended message is communicated primarily through a visual means.



Further information

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