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TECHNICAL NOTE 3

Germany

Farmer Health and Farm Safety Needs



As already [described in more detail](#) agriculture is an economic sector in which labour is predominantly performed by entrepreneurs and their family members. In 2020, around 937,900 people in Germany worked full-time or part-time in agriculture (BMEL, 2022).

Despite demographic trends and changes in educational behaviour, demand for agricultural professions remains stable overall. In 2020, around 32,469 young people were undergoing training in an agricultural profession (BMEL, 2022).

In 2020, agricultural businesses in Germany farmed around half of the area of the Federal Republic of Germany. The area used for agriculture totalled around 16.6 million hectares. Of the utilised agricultural area, 70.3% was arable land, 28.5% permanent grassland and 1.2% permanent crops. Cereals are the most important crop in Germany (BMEL, 2022).

Livestock farming in Germany focuses on cattle, pig and poultry production (BMEL, 2022).

Agricultural OSH in Germany - Recent developments

On Thursday, 30 November 2023, the Bundestag adopted the Federal Government's bill on the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 184 of 21 June 2001 concerning the Safety and Health of Workers in Agriculture (20/8655) by a large majority. The Convention is the first international instrument to contain comprehensive minimum standards on health and safety for workers in agriculture. In particular, it contains regulations on the protection of temporary and seasonal workers, on young workers in the context of hazardous work in agriculture and on the special needs of female workers with regard to maternity protection. It also contains regulations on working hours and the establishment of a social security system in the event of accidents at work and occupational illnesses, as well as minimum requirements for accommodation.

"Within the scope of ratification, amendments to national legal provisions are not required," writes the German government (Deutscher Bundestag, 2023). This ultimately underlines the fact that labour protection in agriculture in Germany already complies with ILO Convention No. 184 (ILO, 2024).

Germany

Location

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■ Priority Needs Register

Promoting occupational health and safety in the green sector is part of the statutory mandate of agricultural accident insurance (SVLFG). As all agricultural businesses are compulsorily insured by law, SVLFG has also access to a well-founded database on accidents and their development in the green sector in Germany.

[Key issues from that database](#) were presented and discussed in the German Community of Practice (CoP). From this, needs were compiled and developed in the CoP on the basis of the accident situation and health risks. These needs are already being met by measures or the specific measures are in the early stages of realisation or are desirable for the future.

Therefore, the [SVLFG's statistics on accidents in the green sector in Germany](#) served as the basis [for the Priority Needs Register](#).

In addition to other needs, three categories were identified that play a particularly central role in the occurrence of accidents: **Cattle Husbandry, Tractors and Agricultural Machinery and Health Hazards**. These three categories and their associated critical issues are analysed in more detail below, followed by a detailed description of specific challenges relating to these hazard categories.

Category 1: Cattle Husbandry

According to the SVLFG's accident statistics, over a third of reportable accidents at work occur in animal husbandry, and almost all fatal accidents here involve direct contact with animals. The main reason for this is the instinctive behaviour of all farm animals, which is not always predictable for humans. A brief fright or an unfamiliar or hectic movement can lead to the animal fleeing or reacting in defence. These situations are dangerous for pet owners. Milking, driving and handling cattle are particularly accident-prone.

Particularly Critical Issues:

- Free-ranging bulls not recognised as a danger (due to every-day experiences).
- Handling cattle and the hazards of squeezing and crushing.
- Hazards when loading cattle.

Category 2: Tractors and Agricultural Machinery

According to the German Insurance Association (GDV), 59 people were killed in accidents involving tractors across Germany in 2019. 618 people were seriously injured (GDV, 2023).

Accidents involving large agricultural machinery are often particularly dangerous, this can affect road traffic accidents, but also those involving the driver specifically. This is also reflected in the figures from the German Agricultural Accident Insurance Association (SVLFG) over the past few years that show the critical issues in details.

Particularly Critical Issues:

- Dangers when dismounting from tractors, tractor steps (Over 50% of accidents involving tractors occur when dismounting. Especially when dismounting from the last step to the ground).
- The use of mobile phones while driving. (Unexplained accidents such as lane departure among younger drivers suggest increased use of mobile devices while driving. Traffic observations support this assumption).
- Use of the seat belt (to avoid to be thrown out of the cabin)
- Application work with the tractor (lifting of persons, round bales handling)
- Danger to the surroundings (bystanders) when working with agricultural machines/tractors.
- Self-propelled machinery (utilisation, maintenance, fault clearance).



Category 3: Health Hazards

Working outdoors leads to increased exposure to solar radiation and skin damage, which can lead to skin cancer. Working outdoors also leads to increased circulatory stress due to high summer temperatures, which are increasingly caused by climate change.

Agricultural work regularly takes place in dusty conditions, especially when working in stables, which can lead to lung diseases. Noise pollution during agricultural work and hearing loss in old age are common. Hand-arm vibration (white finger disease) and whole-body vibration (spine/spinal discs) are also common health risks, as well as musculoskeletal disorders caused by heavy work such as heavy lifting and carrying are also prevalent in agriculture.

Recognising stressful/challenging situations, how to deal with them and life/work balance are also important factors that influence physical and mental health.

Particularly Critical Issues:

- UV radiation, Heat, Dust, Noise
- Heavy lifting and carrying
- Ergonomics in general
- Vibration
- Stress, workload, existential fears
- Mental Health

Other relevant areas

- Falling and tripping in all work situations (28 % of reportable accidents), especially on unpaved, natural ground.
- Hazard falling when working at height (use of ladders, roof work). 14 % of fatal accidents
- Hazard from lifting persons using a front loader with unsuitable technical equipment.
- Hazard during fault clearance work on machines (balers, combine harvesters, forage harvesters, brushwood chippers, etc.) when the drive is switched on and running.
- Hazards during tree work with a chainsaw (felling, processing).
- PPE, technique and behaviour when handling pesticides that come into contact with pesticides.
- Ticks and general insects such as oak processionary moths, wasps, etc. with the potential to cause damage and disease.

■ Challenges

Category 1: Cattle Husbandry

All animal accidents are caused by direct, unintentional contact with the animals. Added to this is the unexpected reaction of the animal, which is not always predictable even with extensive knowledge of natural animal behaviour. In the case of cattle in particular, accidents caused by direct contact are significantly more serious in comparison to pigs, sheep or other smaller animals, which must be taken into account in possible solutions. Considered solutions take into account following aspects:

- Priority of technical solutions over all other solutions due to legal requirements and proven effectiveness of measures.
- Technical equipment in stables to implement a safe work organisation with safe processes and technical procedures.



- Research and development of safe technical solutions for contact avoidance for installation and integration in existing barns.
- Information and practical training on the natural behaviour of animals with the aim of sensitising and raising awareness. Offers and information at all levels of accessibility.

Category 2: Tractors and Agricultural Machinery

On the one hand, tractors and machines make work easier and more efficient. On the other hand, there are hazards associated with their use and technical design. The fact that small farms often operate old tractors and machines must be taken into account. As the standardisation work and the legally required market observation show, technical safety is an objective for manufacturers that is generally not the top priority. Special attention must therefore be paid to machine safety in accordance with the European Machinery Directive. Considered solutions take into account following aspects:

- Additional technical testing beyond the CE declaration of conformity of new machines as a kind of tested technical safety (EU-Regulation 167/2013 applies to tractors, > no CE marking).
- The safety specifications for tractors are too general in 167/2013, which is why the prescribed type approval for safety aspects is generally not sufficient. Here too, an exclusive assessment of safety should be developed through a separate test procedure.
- Development and incentives for retrofitting older machines to improve technical safety.
- Driver safety training and safety courses on accident black spots and their prevention.
- Standardised EU-wide accident monitoring system for tractors and machines.
- Regulations and decommissioning premiums for machine technology with an unacceptable accident risk.

Category 3: Health Hazards

Health hazards on farms are a daily occurrence and are often only recognised when damage to health becomes noticeable. In addition, climate change brings further negative health effects such as heat and UV radiation, which can also have a negative economic impact on the production process. An increasingly difficult social environment due to sustainability requirements is also leading to a noticeable increase in stress levels. Particular attention must be paid to multi-generational farms with their special needs. Considered solutions take into account following aspects:

- Technical measures are to be favoured over personal measures.
- Research and studies on ergonomic working methods on farms.
- Advice on economic conditions and business practices.
- Self-help programmes must be developed to meet the needs of the individual target groups.
- Programmes to support a healthy lifestyle

Services for extreme situations in life and other situations that require immediate help, keyword crisis hotline.



■ References and Literature

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