



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Agriculture and Rural
Development

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Farm Safety: Farm Safety Partnership
Briefing

8 October 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Frew (Chairperson)
Mr Joe Byrne (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Thomas Buchanan
Mr William Irwin
Mr Declan McAleer
Miss Michelle McIlveen

Witnesses:

Mr David Small	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Mr George Lucas	Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland
Mr Bryan Monson	Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland
Mr Martin Malone	NFU Mutual
Mr Ian Marshal	Ulster Farmers' Union

The Chairperson: I welcome to the Committee Mr George Lucas, chairman of the Farm Safety Partnership; Ian Marshall, deputy president of the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU); David Small, deputy secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD); Martin Malone, regional director of NFU Mutual; and Bryan Monson, deputy chief executive of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Gentlemen, as always, you are very welcome to the Committee to discuss what is a very serious and topical issue. It is something that we as a Committee have decided to take work forward on and to build a body of evidence on to see whether we can help to make a difference to the numbers of fatalities and injuries that occur and to see what we can do to focus minds and raise awareness, even with the Department. It is a very important issue to the Committee. I should add that we do not have a remit on safety, whether on a farm or anywhere else. That falls within the remit of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and we have sought its permission and authority to proceed on this work in this manner. I am glad that we have that permission. We see this issue from day to day in our constituency work whenever we speak to the farming community, so it is very important.

Mr George Lucas (Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland): Apart from the partners that you mentioned, we have Michael Reid from the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster and Sean Fitzpatrick from the Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association (NIAPA). They are behind me, because of the protocol.

Thank you for your invitation. In that invitation, you ask what gaps still remain for DARD to address to enhance farm safety. I will try to address some of the actions that DARD has taken as part of the partnership. Of course, David is here to represent DARD. I will take this opportunity to provide an update on the partnership, and I stress that it is through a partnership approach that we will make an

impact. I read the transcript of last week's debate in the Assembly Chamber, and I was heartened by the clear importance attributed to the issue by the members who are here today and by their praise for the work of the partnership. So, thank you for that, Chair.

As was mentioned several times in the debate last week, the partners take very seriously the unacceptable death toll in farms in Northern Ireland. In the previous 10 years, there have been 72 fatalities in the industry, with a further three since April this year. It is clear to all of us that farmers' attitudes have to change to prevent another 70 members of the farming community from being killed over the next decade. It is also important to realise that all farm accidents are preventable. Farming is not unique in facing hazard and risk, but it has not really moved forward at the pace of other industries in the past 10 years. That is not to say that there are not world-class farms with first-rate health and safety practices. There are, but there are also farms with outdated and unsafe practices and, worse, poor attitudes to health and safety. Fundamentally, however, there is a need for all in the industry to adopt safe working practices, regardless of the activity, and not to accept hazards as a way of life. We need people to realise that, by taking simple, straightforward and cost-effective steps, the job can be done safely and efficiently.

With that in mind, the partnership developed its first action plan, which was launched in November last year. As many of you mentioned last week, it focuses on four key areas: providing information and promoting safe working practices; health and safety training; motivating good practice and discouraging poor practice; and collecting and analysing information. Within that framework, the partners have delivered a wide range of activities under those key areas over the past 11 months. Those have included, for example, the development and launch of a targeted media campaign, featuring TV, radio, press and outdoor work. The campaign was designed to raise awareness of farm safety in Northern Ireland and was jointly funded by DARD and HSE. There has also been the development of a new suite of farm-safety leaflets highlighting the main causes of accidents and promoting simple solutions; the issuing of media releases and articles to inform the farming community of relevant safety issues at strategic times in the farming year; the design and delivery of a new health and safety awareness course funded by DARD that aims to reach 3,000 farmers using existing farm family options, focused farms and existing trainers by March next year; the delivery of farm safety messages to 90 rural primary schools throughout Northern Ireland annually; and a recently completed power take-off shaft (PTO) safety week, where all the partners, along with the agriculture suppliers, promoted the fitting and proper use of PTO guards, which are a key issue in machinery safety. We conducted over 1,000 advisory visits to farms last year, and we will undertake another 1,000 visits to farms before March next year.

Those are the aims of some of the actions that the partners have taken. The action plan recognises that, unfortunately, no quick fixes are available to address what has proved to be such an intractable problem not only here but in many countries across the world. The five-year average fatal accident and incident rate, which is the number of deaths for each 100,000 workers, is 12.8 for Northern Ireland. That is compared with the Great Britain rate of 11.1 and the rate of 17 in the Republic of Ireland. In the US and Germany, it is around 30, so it is much worse there.

The Farm Safety Partnership is taking action. Through the farm safety action plan, it has set out a clear strategy on the way forward. The partnership has been actively engaging with other countries, such as the Republic of Ireland, the rest of the UK and New Zealand, to identify common issues and share best practice on how to address farm safety. The work has been incorporated into the development of the next farm safety action plan by incorporating learning and best practice approaches to behavioural change. That reflects the partnership's recognition that the real power to make a difference to the terrible and sad safety record in farming ultimately lies with the behavioural change of the farmers. That change will come about only by farmers integrating health and safety into their plans and by giving it the same priority as profit, husbandry and productivity. Farming is a dangerous activity, but all farm accidents are preventable. We need to get across the four main causes of work-related farm fatalities: slurry, animals, falls and equipment, or our SAFE message. The challenge is to get it into the bloodstream of farmers, so that, before they engage in any hazardous work, they stop and think farm safe.

I and my colleagues are happy to take any questions from the Committee. I thank you again for your efforts on the issue and for the opportunity to come here today to update you.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much, George, for your presentation. It was very good, concise and clear. I will lead off with questions, and I know that other members will also want to ask questions.

I commend the work that the Farm Safety Partnership has undertaken to date. We see it as valuable, and that came out in the debate last week. You have goodwill from elected Members from all arts and parts. You went through the range of campaigns, media drops and work with schools that you have been doing and continue to do. There are no quick fixes, and I understand that. You heard me, and you will have read my contribution in the Hansard report of the debate last week, comparing this problem with that in construction, which I know very well. Although it was gradual, there has been a sea change in mindset. In the early 1990s, you basically did anything that you could to get a job done. Let me tell you that some circus acts were performed to get even the simplest lamp changed in a high ceiling. I could tell you stories of ladders being held upright and somebody climbing them. That changed to the situation where the onus was taken completely off the workers. You could not stand on a toolbox to change a lamp, because that was deemed unsafe. There was always somebody there to monitor and prevent you from doing work. How could you ever get that system into a farmyard, where there are maybe only one or two personnel? They are so familiar with the surroundings, because it is their home, and they just do their own thing, as they have always done. How do we ever get it implanted into their mindset that certain things are now deemed unacceptable and that they really need to think about things before they proceed?

Mr Lucas: That is a very good question. The simple answer is that, if we knew a simple solution, we would be doing it. You are absolutely right to draw attention to the construction industry. Roughly one construction person was dying a month, so it was 12 a year. However, in the past three years, there have been two fatalities, so that is a really good example. I guess that there was a mindset change in individual construction companies, because they had to change. There was pressure from the purchasing companies; if they were going to get orders, they had to show their health and safety statements and their working practices. There was an element of that, and there was an element of a moral dilemma in that, as they increased awareness, the contractors recognised that they could not continue to kill people on sites and so on so they needed to change. So, it was a combination of education, change and a little bit of increased activity from the Health and Safety Executive in prosecutions and so on, which increased awareness. There was a real cost. I think that the issue was that the more you improve your health and safety, the more payback you will ultimately get in efficiency, productivity and profit. That has been the same across most industries. No matter the industry, if you can get that across, and farming is no different, that is the route that we will embark on to make the change required.

The Chairperson: You used a couple of words, such as, I think, "enforcement" and "prosecution". That is basically what I am trying to get at, because in the construction industry, we were forced either not to do something or forced to do something in a particular way. There were a lot of complaints and moaning and groaning when you could not do things that you used to do or were trained to do. How do we ever get to that point? How do we get that arm of enforcement right in at the heart? Are you having conversations about that?

Mr Lucas: Yes; the simple answer is that the first stage was to go down the road of making advisory visits and ensuring that everybody was on board with what we were trying to do so that we had buy-in as a partnership. Undoubtedly, the next stage will mean that, as you educate people and try to explain things and so on, prosecution will have a part to play. I guess that that will feature more prominently in the next stage of the health and safety plan, which is a partnership that we are currently designing. In the construction industry, it is fair to say that that change took place over five or 10 years, and, therefore, in a sense, we are in that process as well.

The Chairperson: I have one final question before I open the Floor to members. I was very surprised to hear the figures for the USA and Germany. I did not know that until today. I was surprised, because they are two large industrial nations. What are they doing wrong?

Mr Lucas: Perhaps I could bring in Bryan Monson to answer that, Chair. He is the deputy chief executive.

Mr Bryan Monson (Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland): It is important to say that we are not comparing like with like. The industries in the United States and in Germany are quite different. In Germany, it is very hard to see what the underlying reasons are, because you would expect to see a different picture because of the federal system that they have in place and given how their insurance companies operate and how they run their economy. However, you do not see that different picture.

In the United States, a lot of the issues are about very lax approaches to legislation and control, but they are also to do with traditional farming methods continuing over long periods. In some ways, that is not dissimilar to what we see throughout these islands. When we look at the figures for Great Britain, we need to do so with a degree of caution, because they include farms in the south and east of England that are more like factories. If we were to compare ourselves with Wales and Scotland, we would see that we were probably very close to where they are in farming. That matches the type of farming that we are doing. There is also a prevalence of self-employed farmers working alone or in very small groups and on the types of farms that we see. The statistics are interesting, but you need to use caution in how you interpret them and compare them with what we see here.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the delegation and the Farm Safety Partnership's efforts to tackle the issue. Two Departments operate in that. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) operates through the Health and Safety Executive, and there is DARD. How much money are DARD and DETI investing in farm safety each year?

One would think that slurry penalties is an issue that could be tackled in a practical way. What thoughts have been given to some practical grant aid for slurry gasometers? That seems to be an issue.

Is the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) being used to provide practical training courses or refresher courses for our farmers, particularly young farmers? I think that, again, that could be a meaningful purpose.

Finally, will there be any grant aid for better PTOs?

Mr Lucas: Thank you. I will ask David to take that question.

Mr David Small (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development): I can certainly deal with the expenditure that DARD has committed over the past 12 months as we have been working our way through the action plan. Apart from a financial investment in the region of about £140,000, which is DARD's contribution to the media campaign, and a further £80,000 out of the rural development programme, which has been put, essentially, towards awareness training, we are also committing a substantial human resource to the farm safety programme work. I am actively involved as a member of the partnership. That involves attending all the steering group meetings, and I work very closely with colleagues on the partnership. I have several colleagues within my command who spend a lot of time on farm safety-type issues. So, I think that we are committing human resource as well as financial investment.

We have also committed something like £4 million under the farm modernisation programme, which has been delivered as an investment towards capital farm safety items. That is not to say that it is enough; obviously, we are always keen to do more work where we can, and we are looking at other opportunities under the new rural development programme in capital investment. Along with our partnership colleagues, we will be looking at what we have achieved so far with this current action plan and what further interventions or actions we can take. So, I would like to think that DARD has been making a significant contribution. The Minister is very committed to dealing with the farm safety issue, and the Department is committed and will continue to be.

Mr Lucas: Let me also say that the two Ministers involved in this have been extremely supportive of the Farm Safety Partnership. I will bring in Brian on the PTO issue that you mentioned, just so that he can elaborate on that.

Mr Monson: I can possibly answer on two elements: gas monitoring equipment; and the PTO. On the back of a number of tragic incidents, we looked at the practicality of gas monitoring equipment, and we have spoken to colleagues in the Republic of Ireland and in the HSE on the mainland. Our opinion is that the proper use of a safe system of work is much more important than a gas monitor. There are good technical reasons for that. In most instances, as soon as someone begins mixing, the levels of gas that are immediately adjacent to a mixing point will increase to a level where the monitor will go off. Our advice is that people should start to mix and then leave and stay out for 30 minutes. Over that time, the levels will decrease to safe levels again. Our concern with gas monitors is that they require calibration and constant maintenance, and if they are not used properly, they can give a false sense of security. They may be applicable in some instances and people could use them, but practical experience on farms, talking to people who have tried to use them and our experience with the industry suggests that a safe system of work is the foremost system of keeping people safe.

We ran a recent initiative on the PTO guards. We spoke to the machinery suppliers who supply the guards, and we found that there is a huge variation in the standard of construction of PTO guards. However, all the guards that we have seen — again, we have spoken with our colleagues in HSE on the mainland — currently meet the European standards that apply to PTO guards. We have drawn that concern to the attention of our link person on the HSE, who will deal with Europe and the European standards. We have asked them to look at it. As far as we are aware, the standard has been improved twice in the past 10 years. We have also spoken to farmers and there is a range of opinion. Some believe that the standard of guards are poor and inadequate, while others say that, if you buy the appropriate guards, fit them and maintain them properly, they are adequate. So, we will continue to encourage people to buy the better-quality guards that are available, and we are looking at whether there is an opportunity to effect changes in the European standard. We will also speak to our colleagues in the Republic of Ireland, because they have a voice in Europe on this matter. However, I do not hold out hope for a rapid change.

Mr Small: I will make a final comment in response to the question about DARD workshops and getting information out to the industry. We have now completed 61 workshops under the farm safety awareness programme, with over 1,000 people registered for that training. We will continue to promote that training programme with partners.

Through our DARD Direct office network, DARD has also delivered health and safety messages at various DARD events, including the Balmoral show and various other agricultural shows. Since November 2012, CAFRE has held 257 events. Over 8,000 people have attended those events, and all those individuals will have received a health and safety farm safety message. CAFRE has strengthened the health and safety message in its curriculum and education programmes with a stronger focus on farm safety, which we developed in partnership with the Health and Safety Executive. So, we take the issue seriously. We recognise the importance of workshops and of getting farm safety advice and messages out to the industry.

Mr Byrne: I appreciate those answers. I want to make two comments. A lot of money is being spent on what I would call the soft side or the PR element, with leaflets, adverts and so on. I would like to see some urgency in getting a practical definition of the health and safety aspects of PTOs, because I think that a stricter standard has to be applied.

Does CAFRE have any intention of offering accredited courses so that anyone who completes a course in a meaningful and practical way gets an actual certificate?

Mr Small: We started with the intention of trying to raise awareness. We considered accredited courses at the outset, but, at that point in time, we decided not to take it that far but to develop awareness-raising programmes. However, the partnership is looking at plans and considerations that might take us to accredited training courses.

Mr Buchanan: I, too, thank you folk for coming to the Committee today. I commend you for the work that the partnership has been doing to date to try to reduce accidents and fatalities on farms. I know of the farm safety awareness schemes and the workshops that have been held in the various community facilities. The advertising and so forth have brought this matter to a higher level. Is it too early to say how effective that has been in reducing farm accidents?

Some farmers still face financial pressures, especially those whose farms were closed because of TB and who cannot sell their animals. I have a couple of those farmers in my own constituency. They are under so much pressure that they are not fully alert to the imminent dangers when they are out working. Obviously, that causes a problem. So many other things are occupying their mind, such as the financial pressures that they face and how they will get through this week, next week and so forth. Is there light at the end of the tunnel for those farmers? What type of work is being done with them? I believe that they are among the people who are at the greatest risk of something happening to them on the farm, because they are not as alert as they ought to be.

Mr Lucas: That is a very good question. There is no doubt that financial pressures, as well as the speed of things at this time of year, give an extra dimension to all the things that we are talking about. Bryan, would you like to elaborate on that?

Mr Monson: HSENI is treating all farms the same. It visits areas where there have been high accident rates. We have not specifically targeted any particular groups of farmers in that way. We have an advisory role. People who wish to can contact us and ask for an advisory visit. However, I

suspect that people in that sort of situation are less likely to do so because of concerns that they may have.

Mr Small: It is difficult to pick out individual groups, whether it is farms affected by TB or farmers who are involved in slurry spreading and are trying to beat the closed period deadline. I think that all farmers are under pressure, whether that is financial pressure or simply farming pressure against the farming calendar. So, it is difficult to pick out one group.

We have tried to be inclusive in providing advice and making the farm safe awareness-training programme available to all farmers. I think that we would like to continue with that approach.

If we see a particular issue, we will try to address it. We did that recently with the PTO week, which was an acknowledgment that a strong focus on a particular aspect might be useful. However, I think that, in the background, we need to maintain an inclusive approach to try to get messages out to all farmers and to raise awareness. We are all agreed that changing attitudes and mindsets is by far our biggest challenge; that is what we need to try to address.

Mr Ian Marshal (Ulster Farmers' Union): I endorse David's comments that our priorities are awareness and behavioural change on farms. It is interesting that an analogy is drawn between agriculture and construction and their attitudes to health and safety. However, I think that we need to bear in mind one fundamental difference. A health and safety cost is factored into the costing of every tender that a construction business puts in. I would welcome the day when we factor a health and safety charge into the sale of agricultural produce. However, unfortunately, that is a long way off. We have to accept the position that we are in.

Thomas talked about the financial pressures on farms, and those are certainly the reality. It was brought home to me last week when I spoke to machinery dealers, who made a couple of points to me. First, they feel that the cost of PTO covers and guards is excessive, and they questioned the standards to which they are manufactured. Secondly, one of the dealers said to me, "If I have a client who needs to spend £500 on replacing damaged or inferior PTO guards or on diesel to fill a tank to run a machine, you know what he will choose." That is not to say that that is the right decision, but it shows the pressure that the farmer is under. That is part of the mix of addressing health and safety on farms.

Mr Irwin: I, too, commend the farm safety partnership for the work that it is doing to make farmers aware of the issue. As a farmer myself, I am fully aware of the dangers. However, as I have said before, everyone thinks that accidents happen to someone else and not to them. It is important to get across the message that it could happen to you.

Our researcher indicated that, between 2007 and 2012, 27% of the fatalities were caused by animals, 27% were caused by falls, and 27% were caused by machinery. That percentage breakdown surprised me a little, but the fact that there is a spectrum makes it even more difficult. It may be easier if it were narrowed down.

Do you think that the TV ads and things like that make a difference? I think that it will come down to shock tactics to make people fully aware of the dangers. Farmers are aware, but they think that an accident will not happen to them, and that is the problem. I am only after texting my farm workers, who are putting out slurry today, to tell them be very careful. I know that accidents, particularly those involving animals, can happen to older people too, but there is a particular danger with young people, when they are rushing around machinery and so on. The slurry ban comes in next week, and everyone will be flat out, and you are just afraid of accidents.

I commend you for the work that you are trying to do. I think that the more shock tactics and the more awareness we can get out there, the better. That is vital.

Mr Lucas: That is a very good point. We consulted with farmers in preparing the advert, which made the point about farmers losing the farm and not being able to leave it to their children. Although many people have been talking about it, the evidence at the moment is coming back through word of mouth. We hope to have more analytical information come Christmas or whenever.

We are trying to get the message across. It is a bit like your point, Chair, about other industries and road deaths and whatever. There is no doubt that, where road deaths are concerned, the shock

tactics really got the message home to younger drivers. I guess that we will incorporate that into the next stage of our plan.

Mr Small: William's point about shock tactics is interesting. Our radio ad about the PTO is quite shocking; if you listen to it, you cringe. One of the radio stations refused to use it because it thought that it was too shocking and too pointed. So, we have to get the balance right. It is certainly something that we are looking at.

Mr Monson: That said, quite a few other radio stations carried it, thankfully. I agree that sometimes we need shock tactics. Critical to the plan, as it was set out when we developed it a year ago, was the fact that, at this stage, we need to raise the awareness. What is causing the accidents? What are the simple solutions, which will not cost huge amounts of money and which will protect people? There is no one thing that will sort this problem. It will have to come from a range of informing, educating, encouraging, looking for disincentives — should I call them — to doing things wrongly or recklessly, and supporting. It will be across the range that you will see the change, and it will have to happen over a period.

I go back to your opening remarks. Having been involved in trying to raise standards in the construction sector, five or six years ago, I know that the huge difference is that you had main contractors and subcontractors upon whom we could have much greater influence. When it comes to self-employed farmers, our level of influence through the action that we can take is greatly reduced. It also means that if we take individuals to court — I am not in favour of that, unless there is a very good reason for doing it — the likelihood of a fine that will cause a change in behaviour by that individual, or by other farmers, is very slim, because of the nature of farming at the minute and the margins that exist. In fact, we may have people saying, "That individual got away with a £200 fine for something that may have killed somebody; therefore, I'll take my chance." So, there is a fine balance, and we need to approach it slightly differently from the way in which we approach situations where there are organised business structures in place that we can work with to influence, positively or negatively.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your answers. I want to interrogate you on the detail of a couple of them. I will go to the shock/trauma adverts first. We have seen that being used very successfully on road issues. I might say that it is used to a shocking degree and to the point where you almost switch off or turn away. Nonetheless, they are effective, and they are probably an essential piece of kit in dealing with this issue. I am aware of the one on the radio that you talked about. It is shocking and you do cringe, but it is something that you hear. To me, visual will always have a deeper impact than hearing. Are there any plans to do something similar on TV and to have TV adverts that are so graphically detailed? Is there any way of replicating that in a farm setting?

Mr Lucas: That is a very good point, Chair. It is, undoubtedly, something that we will take into the next stage of the plan that we are preparing at the moment, once we get the analysis of what has worked. As you say, we have looked at other industries. There are, undoubtedly, lessons for us in that regard, and we will be pursuing that.

The Chairperson: Bryan, you mentioned not going down the road of sensors but towards a safe method of working. Surely, both methods can be compatible, because even though we all should have a safety method and best practice model for safety enhancement, we still need to have detection. We have been working with canaries for centuries. How else will a farmer detect a substance, where there is no odour or anything visual? Surely, this must work hand in hand. Does it not?

Mr Monson: A detector could be used as a backup, but, as I said, there are a couple of difficulties with that. They were used on a number of farms to see how it would work out. The experience from the farmers who used them was that they kept going off, so they put them away, the battery ran out, or they did not calibrate them. Over time, people became oblivious to the fact that the thing went off. As you start to mix, the level will go up to the point where, if you are close to it, the thing will go off. At that point, you should be leaving. If you wait to the point when the thing is going off, a couple of breaths and it may be too late. The guidance is to start mixing and leave and stay out for 30 minutes. There is potentially a role for detectors in when you go back in, but the evidence shows that, by that stage, the levels of fumes or gas will have decreased, unless we are dealing with very confined areas. So, we are not saying that you should not use them, but our concern is that people can become oblivious to them because they will hear them regularly when they start to mix. Secondly, they need to be maintained properly and calibrated and the batteries kept right, and there are other things that can affect them. If that does not happen, somebody may end up relying on one of these things and

thinking that they will just stay around and keep an eye on things. A few months ago, I asked a farmer why he stayed close to it, and he said that he just wanted to see what was happening. I asked him what he was going to see, and when I put it like that, he said that he did not really know.

The Chairperson: Surely, that comes into the methodology of how you work; that you know how to rely on the sensor, you know how to calibrate it, you are trained to calibrate it or you get it calibrated periodically. Surely, that goes hand in hand with the best practice model. It becomes not so much about how you mix the material, but how you mix the material and rely on devices around you. Surely, there could be more progression there.

Mr Monson: As I said, we have looked at it, and we are happy to look at it again. We looked at it along with colleagues on research that was done in the past at Hillsborough, and we are currently having other research done along with HSE on the mainland, so we can look at it again. I just have some concerns that we may end up with people who have a false sense of security.

Mr Lucas: I will just add to that. Your opening comments were about it being a very diverse industry with 47,000 people, and how you keep it as simple as possible. In many ways, that is the road that we are on at the moment. We want to get something very practical and very simple, to give simple advice and hope and try to make sure that people follow it.

The Chairperson: The whole country will hear about a tragic fatality; a community will hear about somebody losing a limb; and a family will hear about a head injury or minor fall. There is a black hole there with regard to statistics. To add to that, there are pressures with regard to heart attack, stroke and all the other indirect injuries that you could have through your day-to-day work. How do we record that, and how do we tackle it?

Mr Lucas: That is a very good question. I will bring in Martin Malone at this stage to elaborate on the accident statistics.

Mr Martin Malone (NFU Mutual): We have some fairly robust information, but, at the same time, it is limited in degree. We currently record all claims that occur above £100,000. They are the more catastrophic claims. The difficulty is that they usually come on the back of somebody else, other than the proprietor of the business, being injured. That is the limiting factor, because if it is the business owner who is self-employed, it is not a public liability claim and it is not an employers' liability claim. Therefore, we would not necessarily get to hear about it. However, from 2007 to 2012, we have accurate information on claims above £100,000.

The Chairperson: Could you share that with the Committee?

Mr Malone: Yes; absolutely. There were 87 claims in that five-year period where we estimate that the loss will be above £100,000, with current reserves of £30-plus million on them. Some have been paid out, and some will be ongoing in terms of what they will end up settling at, because it will depend on the severity of the injuries over a longer time. Unfortunately, we do not record the accidents where the claim is estimated to be below £100,000. That is a piece of work that we are commencing, and we are changing our IT systems to be able to record that information. Certainly, in gathering information, there is a hole — for want of a better word — around the recording of information, but we do have it where there are larger, more substantive claims. The difficulty is that if the business proprietor perhaps loses a finger, it is highly likely that that will not be recorded at this time and we will not have information on it. I would say that, from an insurance industry perspective, it would be the same with the rest of the market.

The Chairperson: It would be useful if you could provide that information to the Committee Clerk. That would be great, and it would go towards our evidence base.

Mr Small: We are about to commence a postal survey, which will seek to draw out more data and information on farm accidents. That will go out to over 8,000 farmers and is designed to give the partnership more working data. I am sure that, when we have it, we can share that as well.

The Chairperson: I have one final question about something that I saw at first hand during the snow crisis in my constituency and the neighbouring constituency of East Antrim. The heavy snow damaged the infrastructure and led to the collapse of old buildings. I suppose that it is a question for Ian and David. How concerned should we be at present about the lack of investment over the last five

or 10 years into the infrastructure of farms, to the point where buildings are creaking and highly dangerous?

Mr Marshal: We are seriously concerned about the lack of reinvestment and the lack of moneys committed to making infrastructure safer and up to an acceptable standard. As we are all aware, with the statistics on profitability in agriculture showing a 52% reduction in real terms in profit on farms last year, the priority has to be keeping the business in business, and, therefore, there are other things that suffer, ultimately. I believe that, going forward, with a return to profitability, we can address some of those issues. However, that is a long, slow process, and it will need some assistance, because, quite frankly, the focus has been on survival through the last number of years. Circumstances have been difficult on a lot of farms.

The Chairperson: I know that David will be keen to get in, but, around farm modernisation schemes, would you push for having something perhaps more meaningful than the £4,000 ceiling, in order to do some of that work?

Mr Marshal: Certainly, we will have to encourage and say that we need that sort of commitment to deliver financials on the farm to make it a safer environment. That has to be a priority. Unfortunately, there is a feeling out there that some of the money spent is maybe not wisely spent on modernisation, and maybe there should be a more targeted, focused approach to committing capital to things that really will make a difference.

Mr Small: I want to make just one point. You will be aware that our proposals for the next rural development programme are out to consultation at the moment. Those proposals include a foreign capital investment scheme, which, we envisage, could make the kind of investment that you are describing. I suppose that there is a balance between improving what is already there, the focus that is coming from Going for Growth, which is about improving competitiveness on farms, and investing for further growth. Those decisions would be for individual farmers to make, but we anticipate that, within the next programme, we will have a capital grant scheme that will provide higher levels of investment support, hopefully, to do what you describe.

The Chairperson: OK. Thank you very much, gentlemen, for your time, your presentation and your answers. They were very good. Martin, will you be able to provide that information to us?

Mr Malone: Yes.

The Chairperson: OK, that is brilliant. Thank you.