

Paul Frew MLA
Chairperson, Committee
for Agriculture and Rural Development
Room 244
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw, Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX

Room 438
Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
Ballymiscaw
Belfast BT4 3SB
Telephone: 028 9052 4140
Fax: 028 9052 4170
Email: private.office@dardni.gov.uk

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Your Ref:

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Paul, a chara

Thank you for your letter of 28 November 2013. In this, you rightly point out the good work of the Farm Safety Partnership. I fully endorse this work and I think we are all agreed that Farm Safety is a major concern for us all.

I note that the Committee has decided to hold a farm safety awareness event in Parliament Buildings. I await further details on this important event and agree that awareness raising and changing attitudes is of the utmost importance.

A lot of good work has been completed by the Farm Safety Partnership since it formed in May 2012 and I am pleased to say my Department is one of the main partners alongside the Health and Safety Executive for NI, Ulster Farmer's Union, National Farmers Union Mutual and Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster.

My Department is already committed as part of the Farm Safety Partnership to rolling out actions to improve awareness and change attitudes. It will continue to consider what more can be done to enhance the work that has been done to date. To this end officials are working closely with the other partners to develop the Partnership's second Action Plan and I am sure that raising awareness and changing attitudes will feature highly and build on the previous good work of the Partnership.

As regards capital funding, during the debate in the Assembly on 30 September 2013, I said that I am actively exploring the possibility of supporting larger capital investments in the next Rural Development Programme that contribute to farm safety. The proposals for the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 on which we have just consulted include proposals for a Farm Business Investment Scheme which, if contained in the final programme submitted to the Commission, would allow for investment in larger items, including those to help improve farm safety as part of



farm competitiveness. I will be carefully considering the responses to the consultation before making decisions on the final content of the next Programme.

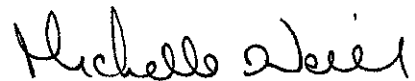
Following the allocation of additional funding in the 2014/15 Capital Reallocation exercise, on 21 October, I was also pleased to announce an extension to the current tranche of the Farm Modernisation Programme. This extension will allow for continued investment in farm modernisation, including items that contribute to farm safety, as we develop the next Programme. Letters of offer are currently issuing to farmers who applied but just missed out under the first allocation of Tranche 3 funding and they will all be issued by the end of the year.

It is important to note that capital investment is only part of the solution in making safer the working environment for farmers and their families. The key to improving safety on farms is to change attitudes and behaviour.

It is more than 10 years since farmers were last systematically surveyed on non-fatal farm accidents and safety issues. The Farm Safety Partnership is therefore awake to the importance of ensuring that the planned survey provides high quality data that can be used as a baseline for measuring change and as an evidence base to inform policy development. The Partnership also recognises that sensitivities may exist around questions on the causes of farm injuries and on farm safety practices. For these reasons, a pilot survey will commence before Christmas to test the content and format of the questionnaire, in advance of a full survey to be conducted in March 2014. The pilot questionnaire will be accompanied by a letter from the Chairman of the Partnership, seeking co-operation in this important work and guaranteeing anonymity to respondents. Findings and lessons learned from the pilot exercise will be taken into account in the design and conduct of the full survey. Copies of the cover letter and questionnaire are attached at Appendix 1 for the Committee's information.

I trust this clarifies matters.

Is mise le meas

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michelle O'Neill', written in a cursive style.

MICHELLE O'NEILL MLA
Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development



Dear Sir / Madam

The Farm Safety Partnership has been set-up with the aim of reducing the number and severity of farm accidents in Northern Ireland. Making progress on this difficult issue depends, in part, on knowing more about the situation on the ground and why accidents are happening. Therefore, the Partnership has developed a postal survey to gather information on non-fatal accidents, farm work practices, areas of hazard and farm safety investments.

Following a random selection of farms, you have been selected to test the enclosed survey questionnaire, as part of a group that includes farm businesses of different types, sizes and locations. Once this pilot exercise is complete, a larger scale survey will be undertaken. However, your participation now, means you will not be contacted later as part of the full scale survey.

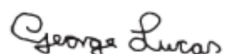
Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, but your co-operation would be much appreciated by the Partnership and would make a real contribution to preventing deaths and serious injury on farms by improving knowledge of the types of accidents which happen and the reasons for them.

I know that you may be concerned about providing information under this survey. However, I can give you an absolute guarantee that all the information collected will be held in strict confidence by DARD Farm Surveys Branch and no information identifying individual respondents will be released to any external organisation, including other members of the Farm Safety Partnership. Your responses to the survey will be combined with those from other farmers and will be used for statistical purposes only.

The questionnaire should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Simply fill out the attached survey form and return in the enclosed pre-paid envelope.

If you have questions about the survey, please feel free to contact DARD Farm Surveys Branch on (028) 9052 5432.

Thank you for your participation in this very important work.



George Lucas

Chair of the Farm Safety Partnership

5 Using 1 to 5 rank the five hazards that concern you most on your farm at the moment (start with number 1 as the most serious):

Section 6 - Barriers to Working Safely

7a Please tick any of the following improvements which you have made during the last 12 months: