

Policy Recommendations for Consideration of the European Parliament, Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development

Issued by the Safety Culture and Risk Management in Agriculture (SACURIMA) COST Action 16123

Introduction

SACURIMA CA16123^{1,2} is the first COST Action of its kind to look into Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in the agriculture sector. COST Actions³ are EU-funded networks of researchers and experts who work together on a given topic in open networks that transcend borders. COST Actions can pave the way towards establishing synergies, which provide an ideal basis for international research initiatives.

The SACURIMA Cost Action was born out of deep concern by researchers, agricultural OSH experts and farm organisations for the level of death, injury and ill health in those working in agriculture. This COST Action aims to produce benchmarked and evidence-based recommendations on improving OSH in agriculture and to inform EU and National leaders about innovative initiatives and efforts. Initially expected to attract only a handful of countries, this Action now includes 32 COST Member Countries across Europe, 2 Near Neighbor Countries (Jordan and Egypt) and institutions and observers from 2 International Countries (USA and Australia).

The SACURIMA COST Action strives to understand the determinants of safety culture on farms, particularly the underlying behavioral and contextual factors, which are critical for improving OSH in agriculture from a policy and practical point of view.

The SACURIMA COST Action, through its Chair, Prof Risto Rautiainen⁴, calls for consideration of the impact of EU policies on the safety, health and well-being of EU farmers and farm workers, including their level of stress and mental wellbeing. The public should be made aware of the price that is paid in terms injuries and lack of wellbeing of those working on the land to produce the food for EU citizens.

The need for Policy Change

Current statistics from Eurostat indicate that the agriculture sector accounts for around 500 fatalities per year. However, this is likely a gross under estimation. For example; 2013 Eurostat data on workplace deaths show that Greece reported 0, France reported 1 and Poland reported 4 fatalities in agriculture. In the same year, Germany reported 76 fatalities in agriculture and Austria reported 49. The discrepancies in reporting are partly explained by the fact that most member states do not report fatalities or injuries to self-employed persons, particularly in the agriculture sector. A recent survey sent to all member states received 20 complete responses indicating that 75% of member states do not record, report or investigate fatalities to self-employed farmers and persons not having a contract of employment. This means that it is possible that the real figure for agriculture deaths across Europe may be as high as 2,000 per year. This figure for does not include fatalities due to work-related illnesses, which according to some estimates are even more numerous than deaths from injuries.

EU Policy Recommendations

Proposed by members of the COST Action 16123,
Safety Culture and Risk Management in Agriculture (SACURIMA)

1. Integrate OSH into current and future agricultural policies.

Justification: Labour is a key factor in agricultural production, along with natural resources, capital and entrepreneurship. However, the current high risk of occupational fatalities, injuries and ill health within the sector is a significant threat to the overall sustainability and future development of the agricultural sector. The disproportionate numbers of deaths, injuries, and work-related diseases within the sector result in considerable financial and social losses in rural communities. Farmers are ageing, and the image of farming as a dangerous occupation is a barrier to generational renewal, making it difficult to attract young people into agriculture. Current CAP objectives fail to recognize the importance of ensuring the competence, safety, health and wellbeing of producers and workers. CAP objectives should support and protect those who work in agriculture by building a better safety culture, adopting vision 'zero injuries' on all farms, and using the 'one health' principle in protecting the welfare of farmers, workers, animals as well as the environment. The 9 CAP key objectives need to be updated to include Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for farmers to meet the challenges in implementing the new CAP requirements. Enhancing workplace risk management using 'Safety Culture', 'Zero Vision' and 'One Health' principles should be part of this CPD.

2. Establish a European Network for Agricultural Safety and Health.

Justification: Currently safety, health and well-being programs are not well coordinated and supported at the EU or national level. While EU Directives, International Standards and Conventions are in place, their application, coordination and implementation within agriculture at EU level is lacking. SACURIMA COST Action has brought together a highly competent multi-disciplinary network of experts representing over 32 countries. This network is capable of organizing a coordinated EU initiative that generates new knowledge through research and helps implement evidence-based programs in occupational safety and health in member states. This proposed network should include a central coordinating unit with dedicated staff, managed as part of an existing organization such as EU-OSHA. The network of affiliated institutions and experts from member states would collaborate at the EU, national and regional levels on specific existing and emerging risks utilizing the strengths and interests of the participants. Given the unacceptable high levels of risk and the resulting death, injury and ill health in the sector, consideration should be given to the development of an EU OSH Directive for Agriculture.

3. Allocate specific funding for agricultural OSH research in Horizon 2020 / Horizon Europe.

Justification: Currently, there are no sources of funding at EU level to support research and development in the health, safety and well-being of farmers and agricultural workers. Horizon 2020 has no calls that are specifically applicable to this field. Some EU member countries have national funding sources, but funds are limited, and not coordinated to enable significant international projects. The plans for Horizon Europe need to be updated to allocate funding that can be used for competitive research and development projects advancing the safety, health and well-being of agricultural producers and workers.

4. Develop and implement OSH education and skills programs for farmers and workers in the agricultural sector.

SACURIMA surveys have identified great variation in programs and organisations that deal with the safety, health, and well-being of farmers in EU member states. In some countries, the limited resources are deployed in regulatory agencies and enforcement activities. In some countries, risk assessment and limited training programs are provided to farmers. Specific agricultural occupational health services have been developed and implemented in some member states. Countries with strong social insurance institutions may include preventive services to members. Agricultural schools, in many cases, include safety and health training. Some countries have invested primarily in university-based research while other countries focus on dissemination through agricultural advisory services. While all of these programs can contribute to building a competent labour force, the effectiveness of these approaches has generally not been evaluated, and the different programs are not coordinated at the EU or even national level. There is a need to evaluate programs and support the development of an effective mix of preventive efforts. Programs are needed that include practical training in risk management & risk assessment, easily accessible for self-employed farmers, family members, workers and students in agricultural schools, which can be implemented in all member states to help reduce the level of death, injury and ill health in the sector.

5. Improve statistics to reflect the true level of agricultural workplace death, injury and ill health.

Justification: SACURIMA research has identified great variability in most recent (2013) Eurostat statistics of accidents in agriculture. Significant under-reporting is common, illustrated by comparing fatal accidents in four neighboring countries: Germany (76 cases), Austria (49 cases), Poland (4 cases) and France (1 case). The great variation in Eurostat agricultural accident statistics is predominantly due to the non-reporting of workplace fatalities involving self-employed farmers, family members and casual labour not having a contract of employment. Some inconsistencies are structural due to the lack of social insurance and surveillance programs for farmers, family labour and undocumented workers. Improved design and implementation of ESAW harmonizing rules is urgently required to provide better and more detailed information on fatality and ill health causation. Alternative methods, such as adding questions to agriculture census surveys and conducting standardized injury, illness and exposure surveys, could augment Eurostat statistics.

10th Key Objective for the CAP

Education and continuous professional development (CPD) of farmers and farm workers to meet the challenges of the modernized CAP.

This key objective focuses on the education and development of farmers and farm workers to ensure they have the skills to implement CAP objectives including; food security, food safety, protection of ecosystems and biodiversity, climate change mitigation while also protecting their safety, health and wellbeing. CPD and lifelong learning are critical for meeting the challenges within the CAP and the ability to manage increasingly complex agricultural enterprises in the future. Farmer CPD will assist in developing a safety culture to reduce the high rate of fatalities, injuries and ill health on European farms and help attract young farmers into the sector ensuring generational renewal.

Impact: This objective will help secure food and enterprise sustainability, protect fragile rural communities and benefit society at large.

These policy recommendations were prepared by SACURIMA Working Group 5 (Dissemination) members with input from the SACURIMA Management Committee, which includes members and observers from the following countries: AU, BA, BE, BG, CH, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IL, IT, JO, LT, LV, ME, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK, TR, UK, US

Contact Information:

Risto Rautiainen, SACURIMA Action Chair, risto.rautiainen@luke.fi

Pat Griffin, SACURIMA Communication Manager, Pat_Griffin@hsa.ie

Anne Marie Heiberg, Working Group 5 (Dissemination) Leader, anne.marie.heiberg@live.com

¹ Safety Culture and Risk Management (SACURIMA) Website maintained by the COST Association:

<https://www.cost.eu/actions/CA16123/#tabs|Name:overview>

² Safety Culture and Risk Management (SACURIMA) Website maintained by the SACURIMA COST Action:

<https://www.sacurima.eu/>

³ COST European Cooperation in Science and Technology. What are Cost Actions? [https://www.cost.eu/cost-](https://www.cost.eu/cost-actions/what-are-cost-actions/)

[actions/what-are-cost-actions/](https://www.cost.eu/cost-actions/what-are-cost-actions/)

⁴ Prof Risto Rautiainen is Special Research Scientist at the Natural Resources Institute, Finland and Professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, College of Public Health, Department of Environmental, Agricultural and Occupational Health. He directs the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health in Omaha, Nebraska. His main interest is in studying why agricultural injuries happen and how they can be prevented. He has over 30 years of experience in agricultural safety and health research and outreach in Finland, Canada and the United States.