



# Training, motivation, and a culture of safety at Maple Leaf Agri-Farms

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## Introduction

*Our goal is to always provide consumers safe, great tasting food produced in a safe work environment.*

– Maple Leaf Safety Promise

This paper will explain the development stages of the safety program at Maple Leaf Agri-Farms and show how the shift of employee engagement towards a culture of safety was encouraged. It will discuss the training techniques and motivation behind the health and safety program at Maple Leaf, which helped to create a culture of safety and accountability within our teams, along with the future goals for safety within our facilities.

Maple Leaf Agri-Farms has worked hard over the years to shift our occupational health and safety program from a **reactive system**; one where action was taken in the case of an injury, to a **proactive system**; one that works as a collaborative unit to prevent injuries from happening. A system that holds its workforce, the ones performing the tasks on the front lines, accountable. This workforce must come together to keep themselves and each other safe; while management must take all necessary action to provide them with the tools to do so. Maple Leaf Agri-Farms has achieved a substantial improvement in lowering the number of injuries in our facilities since this journey began, but more importantly we have changed the mind set of the workforce from “accidents happen” to “all incidents are preventable”.<sup>1</sup> Zero injuries within the entirety of our system is an achievable goal with the proper commitment and engagement from the team; this is the system Maple Leaf Agri-Farms continues to strive for.

## History

The Maple Leaf Agri-Farms health and safety program started as a top down initiative. Safety rules came from and were enforced by management. We value our people therefore management made safety a priority in all areas. So much so that working safely was and still is, a condition of employment. This stage was critical to initiate awareness with the team, however, there was minimal credibility and very low accountability. There was room for improvement. Binders of papers with safe work procedures and rules sat in the office with little engagement from the team. Incident investigations were done because something happened, because legislation dictated the requirement. It was a reactive system, not a proactive system.

At this time, there was also a push from the Canadian government, making workplace health and safety a legislation. Legislation states that all employees have the below rights:

1. Right to know (about hazards in the workplace)
2. Right to participate (in health and safety committees and activities)
3. Right to refuse unsafe work
4. Right to work without being subject to discriminatory action for exercising any of the rights listed above or as described in the *Manitoba Workplace Safety & Health Act or Regulations*.

A shift began as the employees started to partake in the health and safety initiatives at their sites. They began to realize the

importance of their input on safety matters. Getting home safe at the end of the day became a priority/desire for workers and less of a “rule”. They began to look out for themselves and contribute to making things better in their workplace. This behavior was strongly encouraged by management, contributions were listened to and action was taken by management to follow through on suggestions, thus the ownership of the health and safety program was beginning to take form. Action and encouragement from management created a relationship of trust between the varying levels of Maple Leaf Agri-Farms. Management trusted the employees to speak up if there was a concern and the employees trusted that when a suggestion was offered to improve their workplace, management would evaluate the suggestion, develop a strategy, and take action whenever feasible.

To continue receiving these suggestions and to motivate the process to propel even further, management encouraged these suggestions with rewards. These could be in the form of a simple thank you from higher ups, recognition of a job well done, or physical rewards. For example, if the site reaches 365 days straight of being injury free the senior management team will take the staff for a nice dinner, plus the staff receives an item or gift. This practice is not only a physical reward for their hard work, but also a beneficial team building experience.

As the workforce began to feel confident in management and aware of health and safety initiatives through constant motivation, a third shift began. This is the point where Maple Leaf Agri-Farms currently sits in this process. Health and safety is a team initiative, everyone is aware and works to keep each other safe. Looking out for one another, thinking collectively and working together has been encouraged and continues to be successful through team initiatives and collective goals.

## How the shifts occurred

Stage one had a struggle with a lack of accountability, “nobody taught them” the binder, there was a lack of buy in from employee’s. Rules were just rules with no reason or explanations.<sup>2</sup> A system like this is not ideal for a variety of reasons. It is difficult for anyone to understand and follow a rule if they are not explained why this rule is in place; they will have their own ways and reasons for doing things differently, an “easier” or “faster” way. As a company, Maple Leaf recognized a strong need for employee engagement and standardization. Engagement allows people to be involved in the creation of rules, provide valuable input and hear feedback. In turn, they will be involved in creating the rules they are required to follow. Thus, health and safety committees were developed further which allowed for stage 2 to begin. These committees are open to all hourly staff to discuss any concerns or ideas they have to improve their workplace. The health and safety committees also allow for engagement between all the employees, at all sites to get together and discuss any safety issues or concerns within their sites. This engagement between employees and management allowed our near miss reporting (preventative measures) to increase by almost 600%.<sup>2</sup> With the employees taking more ownership of the program, we began shift into the third stage. The proactive rather than the reactive stage, where we are today. Employees want to improve their workplace; most importantly employee’s want to go home safely to their family’s and wish the same for their teammates. We are currently at a place where employee run health and safety

committees and write the majority of safe work procedures to be reviewed by management, they are the solution. It is no longer a top down delegation to be safe, our health and safety initiatives are coming directly from the employees within all facilities at Maple Leaf Agri Farm's.

## Training techniques

As a baseline we use two online training systems to encourage health and safety engagement. Every employee has their own personal account that is monitored by management to ensure training is completed in a timely manner. Both systems use online videos followed by interactive quizzes.

The first system is called Alchemy Systems. This is a mandatory program that every employee in the system must complete regardless of where you work (feed mill, logistics, barn etc.). It is specific to safety while performing MLAF (Maple Leaf Agri- Farms) tasks. It is scheduled to be completed annually every employee to refresh and stimulate our thoughts of staying safe, complacency kills!

The second system is Pork Avenue training in conjunction with our safe animal handling program. This system is specific to the MLAF production team staff who are hands on with the animals. This training is focused specifically on learning how to perform tasks on site with the animals in a safe manner for both the staff and the animals. This portion of the training involves online videos, online quizzes and a hands-on portion where the employees must perform (or "teach") their daily tasks to mentors on farm properly and safely in order to be signed off.

Another system used that could be considered training is cross audits within the sites. Managers from different sites will internally "audit" other farms within their production pyramids to help other managers find areas for improvement. This method allows for a fresh set of eyes to look over the barn to even further improve safety and encourages dialogue amongst peers around what was witnessed, possible solutions, potential gaps and lateral learnings. This method is also fantastic for increasing motivation and engagement because it inherently instills a sense of value to the person when they are chosen to go visit another site and offer their opinions.

Involvement through Maple Leaf interactive health and safety committees can be seen as further training as it is peer mentoring; having open discussions at minimum once a month. These committees encourage hourly employees to develop and record the Safe Work Procedures for their areas, do task observations to see how daily routines can be improved to make them safer, and discuss equipment and PPE trials (Personal Protective Equipment).<sup>3</sup>

## Motivation

Proper engagement and training is an excellent tool for motivation. If employees feel they are a valued team member whose opinions are respected, they are much more willing to partake in keeping themselves and others safe. Going home safe at the end of the day is the greatest reward/motivation anyone can receive, but below are a few ways MLAF perpetuates a constant focus on health safety within the barns:

1. Daily huddles: Never become complacent with awareness of health and safety issues, it is made to be fresh on the minds of every employee at the start of each morning in MLAF facilities. Before going into the production area the team sits together to plan the day and discuss the tasks at hand. They take this time

to discuss any near misses from their own farm and other MLAF sites. A discussion takes place on safety tips for the day to keep each other safe. It is critical to have daily reminders for the team to avoid complacency.

2. Daily reminders: Reminders or catch phrases are on all barn clothing (scrubs, t-shirts, and coveralls) to "Work Safe". Posters on the wall and corkboards in the office/lunch area dedicated strictly to health and safety initiatives and motivational messages.

3. Mandatory PPE: Anyone entering a production area of an MLAF barn must wear full PPE as required by MLAF standards (staff, contractors and visitors included). The full PPE required is: protective safety glasses, ear plugs, dust mask, cut resistant gloves, steel toed footwear and a personal H<sub>2</sub>S monitor on their chest AT ALL TIMES. If an individual is moving sows, entering the loose sow housing areas OR working with finisher pigs they also must wear metatarsal boots. The company provides all of the above.

4. Incentives: at Maple Leaf there is a Recordable Injury (RI) Free incentive program. This consists of every 50 days that a barn goes RI free, they receive a "gift" and recognition by the management team. Something like doughnuts, pizza party, etc. If the site goes 365 days RI free they will be taken out to a dinner by management plus receive a gift (backpack, jacket etc.). There is also an annual monetary bonus that recognizes and focuses on teams who consistently deliver on health and safety requirements. These efforts help to prevent incidents from happening. If a team is not performing in this area they are at risk to lose their bonus. This is a strong method of motivation to increase proactive measures, and report all areas for improvement.

Health and safety requires continual focus and high level of commitment from everyone at all levels of the company. Everyone needs to work together to keep not only themselves but each other safe, this is how to truly motivate a workplace culture.

## Summary

Employee engagement, team building and fast action from management have been three of the key ingredients to Maple Leaf Agri-Farm's success in creating a culture of health and safety. But above all, health and safety is more than just T-shirts and posters on the wall or rewards; it is a daily discussion between all staff.<sup>1</sup> A commitment to doing things the safe way every time and being personally accountable along with holding others accountable to do the same. It is a constant daily focus and commitment to go home safe at the end of the day, because that is the greatest reward of all.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately this empowerment and awareness is what has substantially decreased the number of injuries in the workplace at Maple leaf Agri-Farms. Collectively we have changed the mind set from "accidents happen" to "all incidents are preventable".<sup>1</sup> It is a culture driven by the employees, it is a proactive system. Having zero injuries in a workplace is an achievable goal, it is Maple Leaf Agri Farms goal. Maple leaf Agri Farms will strive to continue being a leader in the progression of health and safety initiatives not only within the company, but globally.

## References

1. Robertson, N. (2018, October 22). Email.
2. Bugera, F. (2018, September 7). Personal Interview.
3. Bugera, F. (2018, March). Christensen Farms – March 2018 PowerPoint Presentation.