THE Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC) is once again backing Farm Safety Week. This year the initiative marks its milestone 10th anniversary in the UK and Ireland. Over the years, LMC has joined voices with hundreds of stakeholders as part of the campaign to promote high standards of farm safety and ultimately reduce the number of farm accidents and fatalities.

LMC chief executive Ian Stevenson said, “A decade on from the first Farm Safety Week, farming continues to have the poorest safety record of any occupation in the UK and Ireland and ranks as one of the most dangerous professions that any person can aspire to undertake.

“Recorded farm deaths paint a stark picture of the industry’s safety record. In 2020, a total of four fatalities were recorded on local farms. The ages of those who tragically lost their lives in these incidents ranged from 44 to 66 years old. The following year the number of recorded deaths rose to seven, with accidents involving people from 21 to 92 years of age.

“Such statistics make for uneasy reading, but if we delve deeper it quickly becomes apparent that this is just the tip of the iceberg. Many more accidents causing severe life changing and other more minor but impactful injuries are occurring on NI farms throughout the year. Most of our farms in Northern Ireland are small family businesses often with sole operators so any traumatic safety incident will have devastating consequences.”

“Over the past ten years a lot of positive change has been initiated within the industry, particularly through the work of the Farm Safety Partnership of which LMC is an Affiliate Member, but with a persistently poor safety record, it is evident that more must be done.”

Promoting safe practices is at the core of LMC’s work and the Commission has long held the belief that all agri stakeholder bodies should promote farm safety standards as a priority.

“Through the Northern Ireland Beef and Lamb Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (NIBL FQAS) LMC has implemented improved safety standards for both animals and farmers over recent years,” Ian explained, “These include the need to have suitable well-maintained livestock handling systems on farm and the provision of slurry storage and mixing facilities which focus on the safety of stock, farmers and farm workers.

“Farm safety cannot and should not be something we merely pay lip service to. We appreciate farmers carry heavy workloads and time is precious but errors in judgement have proved fatal. There is no room for complacency when it comes to farm safety. Building a culture of safe behaviours and working practices will drive positive and sustained change, but ultimately the onus is on us all as individuals to ensure we execute tasks in a safe manner.

“Farm Safety Week invites us to pause and consider our day-to-day practices and the possible hazards involved. During Farm Safety Week and beyond I encourage all farmers and those working in the agri industry to make safety a priority.”