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ANIMAL WELFARE AND THE SAFETY OF THOSE WHO CARE FOR ANIMALS

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Abstract: *The duty to ensure animal welfare should go hand in hand with responsibility for the health and lives of those who care for animals. For the farmer, safety and the quality of work are just as important and valuable as the profitability of production. The main causes of accidents involving animals are: improper handling, poor condition of buildings and premises, animals' unruliness and aggression, being taken by surprise by an unexpected event, failure to use restraints, cattle prods.*

• Introduction

The proper treatment of animals has a positive impact on production performance, animal health and the quality of the raw materials obtained, and consequently allows for better utilisation of the animals' genetic potential. However, animal welfare cannot be considered in isolation from the welfare and safety of the farmer.

The aim of this article is to present the state of Polish agriculture and the safety of farmers, particularly those who care for animals

• Material and method

Information on accidents at work was taken from official reports published by the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS) – 1990-2005.

Table 1. Accidents in Polish agriculture

	1995	2015	2025
Number of accidents per 1,000 insured persons	27.9	10.3	7.2
Fatal accidents in agriculture	318	63	40
Including fatal accidents involving animals	6	2	5

• Results and discussions

A report provided by the Agricultural Social Insurance Fund (KRUS) shows that in 2025, 8,631 accidents were reported – 1,299 accidents (13%) fewer than in the previous year. The accident rate in small-scale farming (number of accidents per 1,000 insured persons) in 2025 stood at 7.2 accidents per 1,000 insured persons. Among these incidents, 40 fatalities were recorded in 2025, 38 in 2024, 45 in 2023, 45 in 2022, 45 in 2021 and 35 in 2020. Fatal accidents involving animals account for a significant proportion of accidents: 2013 - 5, 2014 - 4, 2015 - 2, 2016 - 10, 2017 - 3, 2018 - 4, 2019 - 2, 2020 - 4, 2021 - 4, 2022 - 2, 2023 - 3, 2024 - 2, 2025 - 5. The main causes of accidents involving animals: improper handling, poor condition of buildings and premises, animals' skittishness and aggression, being taken by surprise by an unexpected event, failure to use lead ropes or cattle prods when handling animals, being struck, crushed or bitten by animals, etc.

• Conclusions

In Polish agriculture, we are seeing a decline in the number of accidents, including fatal ones. This indicates an improvement in workplace safety and the effectiveness of preventive measures. Nevertheless, incidents involving falls, the operation of machinery and the handling of animals still predominate. The main causes of accidents involving animals are improper handling, the poor condition of buildings and premises, the skittishness and aggression of animals, being taken by surprise by an unexpected event, failure to use lead ropes or herding boards when handling animals, and being struck, crushed or bitten by animals. Despite the fluctuating number of farms engaged in animal production, the associated risks remain. Farm animals, primarily cattle, horses, pigs and poultry, can be a source of dangerous incidents and diseases. Therefore, when discussing animal welfare, we must take into account the risks to human health and life.

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