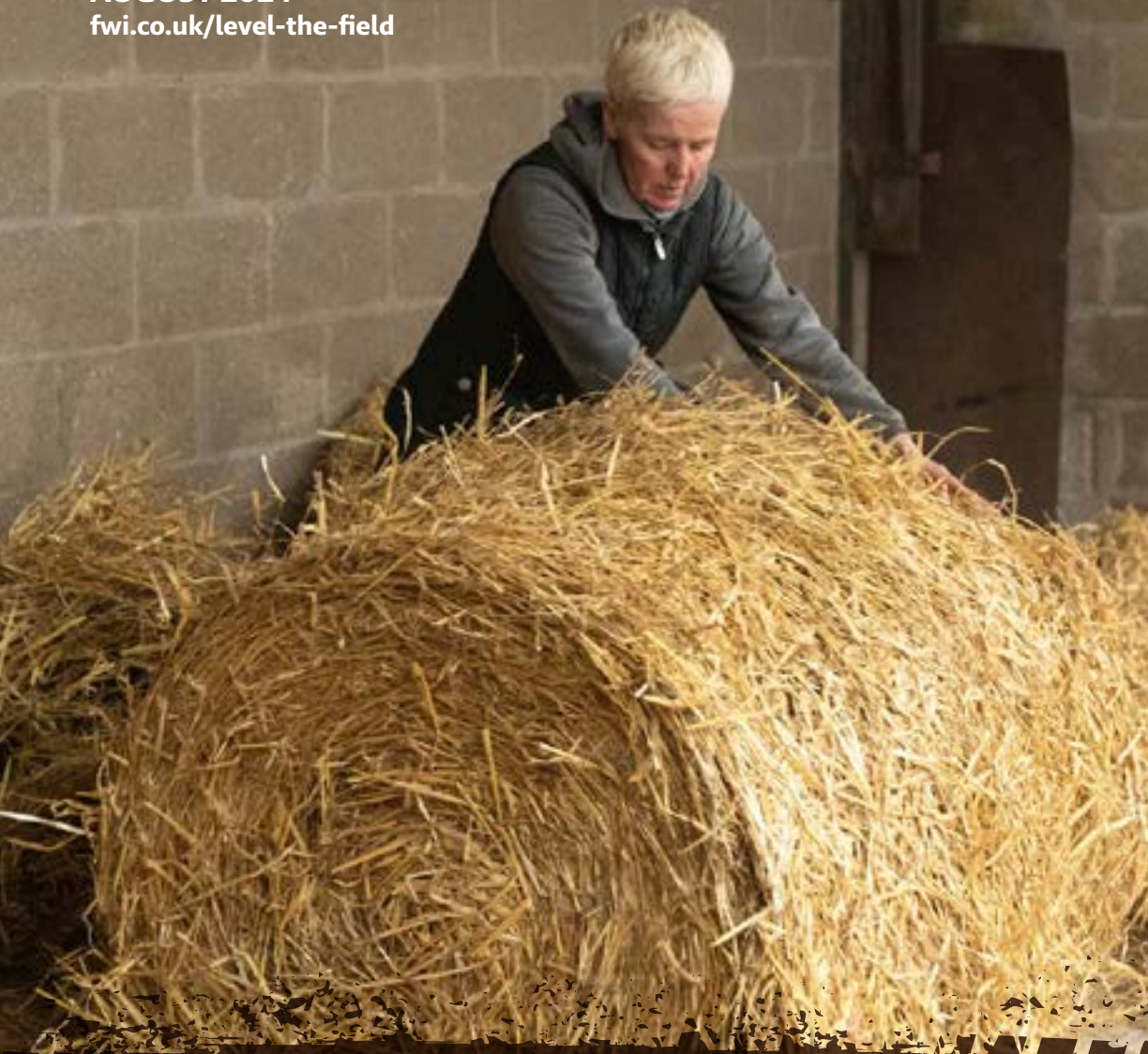


LEVEL THE FIELD

Working for a more equitable farming industry

AUGUST 2024
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A comprehensive guide to

Creating a code of conduct

Why it matters and how it can help your business

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WHY CREATING A CODE OF CONDUCT MATTERS

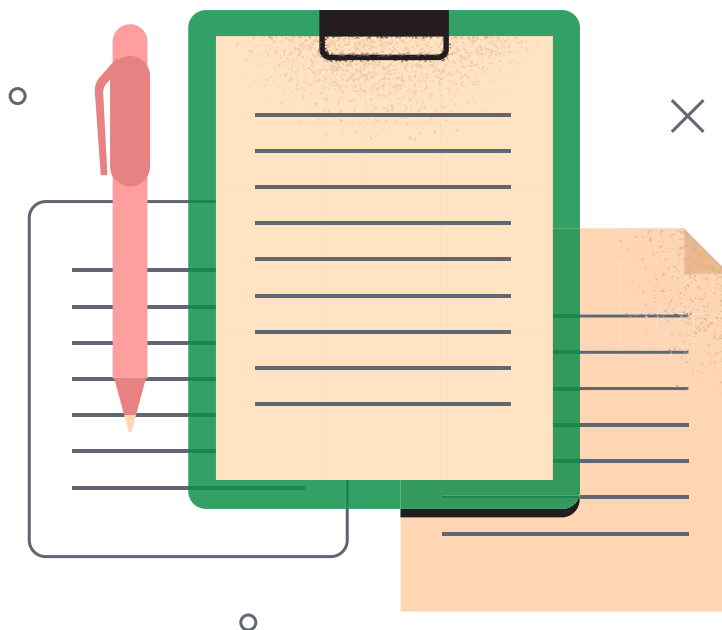
WHAT IS A CODE OF CONDUCT?

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GUIDANCE FROM TIAH

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DIVERSITY, EQUALITY AND INCLUSION (DEI)



Creating a code of conduct – why does it matter?

Running a farm isn't just about managing core enterprises such as crops and livestock anymore – it's also about managing staff, personalities and behaviours.

As the world around us changes, there's increasing pressure on farming businesses to ensure everyone on the team, from farmhands to managers, is happy at work and held accountable.

When on the hunt for a job, new entrants and existing farmworkers are increasingly looking into what employers can offer, what kind of people are being employed and how they could benefit if they were to join that business.

"If one of the first things you can say is that you provide a fair and open environment, it is going to make your recruitment process a lot more attractive," says Tess Howe, head of membership and partnerships at The Institute of Agriculture and Horticulture (Tiah). "We know labour is a big issue, and anything that puts you ahead of somebody else has got to be a good thing."

What is driving this push for accountability, and why is it needed?

1. Changing social and cultural norms

Rising ethical standards Today's society expects more from businesses, including those in agriculture. Ethical practices such as fair treatment of workers, environmental responsibility and inclusivity are no longer optional, they are essential. Farm businesses and ancillary companies are increasingly expected to reflect these values daily and hold staff accountable.

Social media and public scrutiny With the rise of social media, any mishap on the farm can become public knowledge in seconds. A single incident of misconduct or mismanagement can spread like wildfire online, leading to public backlash. This makes it more important than ever to ensure the wider team adheres to farm businesses' values and expectations.

2. Legal compliance

Stricter employment laws Governments far and wide are implementing stricter rules to protect workers' rights and ensure fair treatment. This includes laws covering discrimination,



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harassment, health and safety, and data protection. For farmers, this means accountability is not just a good idea – it’s a legal necessity.

3. Building a positive workplace culture

Creating a healthy work environment When employers and employees are held accountable, it contributes to a more honest and open workplace culture. This means less conflict, more respect, and a better overall atmosphere. When staff know that inappropriate behaviour won’t be tolerated, they are more likely to act in ways that support a positive and inclusive environment.

Boosting productivity Clear expectations and accountability lead to better performance. When your team knows what’s expected of them, they are more likely to give their best effort. This translates to higher productivity and, ultimately, a more successful farming operation.

4. Managing risk and protecting reputation

Minimising risks Health and safety hazards on farm are rife. Dangerous machinery, chemicals, livestock and working at height can all cause potential accidents and life-changing injuries. Unchecked behaviour can lead to serious risks, whether it’s a safety issue, legal trouble, or damage to your reputation. Ensuring people know what’s expected of them and providing appropriate training helps minimise these risks, protecting both your business and the staff who work for you.

Upholding a good reputation In today’s competitive agriculture market, reputation is one of your most valuable assets. Farms known for their ethical practices and strong values are more likely to attract and keep a team who become invested in representing that business and making it a success.

5. Meeting staff expectations

Increased demand for fairness and transparency Potential employees coming into the industry expect fairness and transparency in how their behaviour is judged and rewarded. They want to work in places where good work is recognised and poor conduct is not accepted. Meeting these increasing expectations ensures you’ll have happier and more loyal employees.

Empowering your team Accountability isn’t just about enforcing rules—it’s about empowering your team. When employees know what’s expected of them, they are more confident in their roles and more likely to take ownership of their work. This sense of empowerment encourages better performance and job satisfaction.



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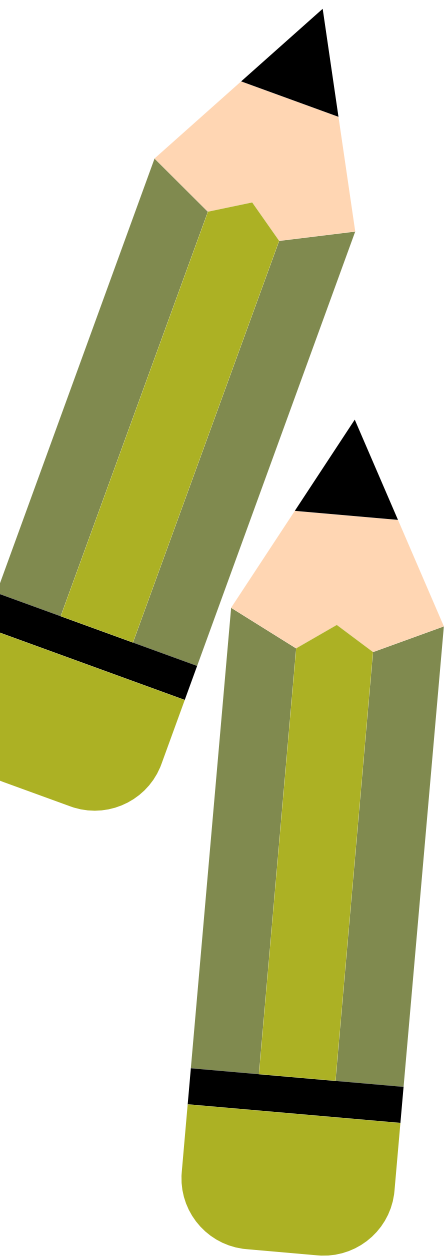
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What is a code of conduct?

A code of conduct is a rulebook for how everyone in a business should behave. It spells out what's OK and what's not, helping to keep things fair, safe and respectful.

It is there to guide how people should act, whether they are dealing with customers, working with each other, or making decisions on the job. Put simply, a code of conduct provides a way to make sure everyone's on the same page about what's expected of them.

Many farm businesses operate as tight-knit, family-run entities and some offer accommodation to their workers. So it's unsurprising that formal codes of conduct are frequently absent. These businesses are often dominated by close personal relationships and informal decision-making, leading to an assumption that everyone understands and shares the same values, and as such, trust is enough to govern behaviour.

The focus in farming is also often on immediate, practical tasks at hand, with typically less emphasis on formalised policies and procedures. As a result, a formal code of conduct can seem unnecessary.

AT A GLANCE

- A code of conduct acts as a rulebook, keeping things fair, safe, and respectful for everyone.
- On family-run farms, assuming shared values can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts.
- A code doesn't have to be rigid; it can start with simple talks about core values.
- Gradually developing a code ensures it becomes a valuable tool for everyone's success.

CASE STUDY: SARAH HENDRY

Former director general of the CLA Sarah Hendry co-developed a code of conduct with her wider team, ensuring it reflected the evolving culture and values of the organisation.

Initially, the CLA had established a set of core values, but they were largely unknown and lacked impact within the organisation. "These values were just single words and didn't resonate with the team or reflect our evolving culture," she says. "So we started from scratch, building our values with input from the entire team." Although the process couldn't be entirely democratic due to the need for certain foundational principles, Sarah emphasises the importance of involving employees.

Several workshops gathered insights from staff on what the organisation stood for and what should be at its core. "We created a word cloud, which is a powerful, visual tool that highlighted the most consistent ideas. The initial list was extensive, featuring more than 100 words, but clear themes emerged, with concepts like teamwork, professionalism and leadership standing out."

These were distilled into actionable core values, defined collectively to ensure they



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CASE STUDY CONTINUED: SARAH HENDRY

were meaningful and applicable. “For example, we didn’t just choose the word ‘respect’ arbitrarily,” Sarah explains, “we defined it so that if someone felt disrespected, they could refer to our shared understanding and have a meaningful conversation about it. This wasn’t about imposing rules, but establishing a clear set of behaviours for accountability.”

The newly developed values have been integrated into the CLA’s daily operations and help make sense of business objectives and how they are achieved. “Our values are now a part of daily conversations, not something we preach, but something we live by. They provide a common language, which is particularly important in the workplace where different backgrounds can lead to varying interpretations of appropriate behaviour.”

She also believes they serve as a clear standard for resolving issues and ensuring everyone understands expected behaviour. This consistency helps maintain integrity across the organisation, from recruitment to daily interactions. “As we grow, these values guide our actions, helping us focus on priorities, avoid pitfalls, and turn challenges into opportunities.

“Regularly revisiting these values ensures we’re living up to them and continuously improving. Keeping the conversation open reinforces teamwork and ensures we’re all working towards the same goals.”

But these informal processes can spark misunderstandings, inconsistencies, and even conflicts, leading to mutual headaches for both business owners and staff. Changing this dynamic begins by recognising that a code of conduct doesn’t have to be a rigid, bureaucratic document. It can start small, with simple conversations about core values and basic principles that everyone agrees upon.

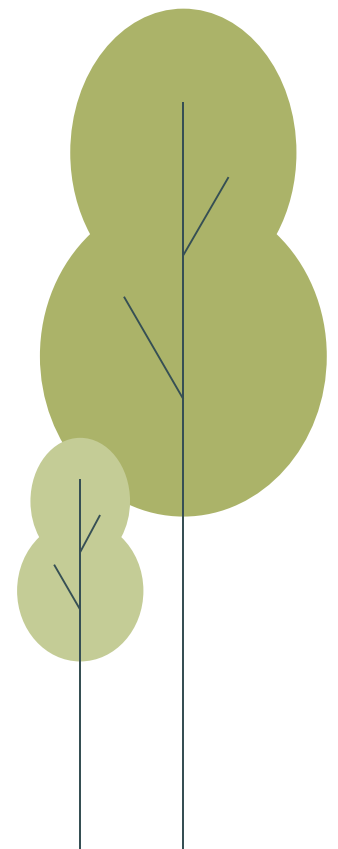
Rather than imposing formalities, farm businesses can gradually develop a code of conduct by reflecting on shared experiences, identifying common challenges, and articulating the behaviours that support a positive working environment. By starting with the basics – respect, honesty, and clear communication – a code of conduct can evolve naturally, becoming a living document that grows with the business.

This approach ensures that the code is not seen as an external imposition, but a valuable tool that enhances the wellbeing and success of everyone involved.

Questions to keep the conversations going

By keeping the conversation open, you can reinforce the positive impact of teamwork and ensure you’re all working towards the same goals.

1. Are the team living up to these values?
2. Are the principles still relevant?
3. Are there any changes in the industry or in the business that need updating in the code?
4. Are there any areas of confusion that need to be clarified?
5. Are team members being consistent in their behaviour and practices?
6. Should there be regular reminders or training sessions?
7. Are there areas where we can improve?



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What to include in a code of conduct

Although every business will have a unique set of requirements, a code of conduct will typically address those elements most closely related to employee behaviour.

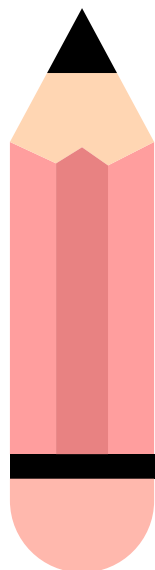
For a farming business, a code of conduct can address a wide range of issues, from animal and crop husbandry to adherence to health and safety regulations, to interactions with fellow team members or customers.

So how do you begin putting one together? There are many generic online templates available to use and Acas, an organisation which offers free and impartial advice to employers and employees, can offers lots of practical tips about what to include.

Acas Codes of Practice set minimum

AT A GLANCE: TOP TIPS FOR DRAWING UP A CODE OF CONDUCT

- Start by identifying your core values and principles.
- Involve your staff in the process.
- Make the code as clear as possible, using plain English.
- Make your expectations specific.
- Decide whether you want the code to cover contractors and suppliers, and write it accordingly.
- Decide whether you want the code to cover social media use.
- Provide examples of how the code will be applied in real-life situations.
- Make sure everyone on farm is aware of the code and trained to adhere to it.
- Lead by example.
- Distribute and display the code.



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standards for some areas of working life, such as disciplinary matters, grievances, flexible working and trade union representation.

Acas has a wide range of guidance to help employers develop policies and working practices which are fair, legally compliant and non-discriminatory. This helps businesses to attract and keep the best people, have a productive and motivated workforce, and keep out of costly dispute situations. An employer who has signed up might also be seen as more attractive to potential employees.



WHAT TO INCLUDE IN A CODE OF CONDUCT

1. Company vision/mission statement

This is your farm’s guiding light – outline the mission that drives your business and the vision that keeps everyone moving in the same direction.

2. Safety standards and protocols

Make sure everyone knows how to keep themselves and their coworkers safe on the job.

3. Legal compliance

Stay compliant and confident by making sure every team member knows the laws that protect your farm and its staff. Spell out the essential rules everyone must follow.

4. Professional standards

Set the bar high with clear professional standards so everyone knows what’s expected – from the fields, to the office, to external events and even social media.

5. Diversity and Inclusion

Foster a workplace where everyone feels valued by championing diversity and inclusion in everything you do.

6. Discrimination and harassment policy

Establish zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment so staff know respect is non-negotiable.

8. Unacceptable behaviours and consequences

Draw the line with a clear list of things that won’t be tolerated – and what happens if someone crosses it.

9. Training guidelines

Keep your team knowledgeable and safe with training that is designed to build skills, boost knowledge, and uphold standards.

10. Disciplinary processes

Handle issues fairly and consistently by laying out a clear, step-by-step disciplinary process for when things go wrong.

11. Stewardship

Ensure your staff are all on the same page when it comes to animal welfare and environmental stewardship.



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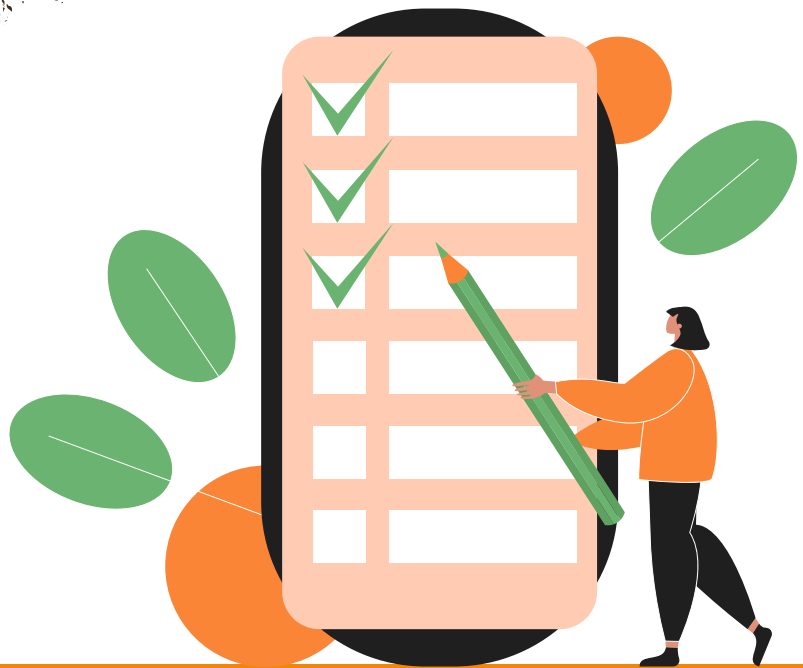
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CASE STUDY: RICK TURNER

At The Big Sheep, a popular family farm attraction in Devon, owner Rick Turner knows that values are the backbone of his business. With a diverse team and high seasonal turnover, clear values guide every aspect of operations from recruitment to daily interactions.

Rick identified eight key values he wanted the business to embody: communication, commitment, happiness, honesty, quality, respect, safety and family. These values were chosen based on what really matters to him, and are supported by his staff.

“You know values are meaningful if it bothers you when people don’t follow them,” he explains. For Rick, dishonesty is a major issue: “It really upsets me when someone calls in sick after a night out, because it affects the whole team.”

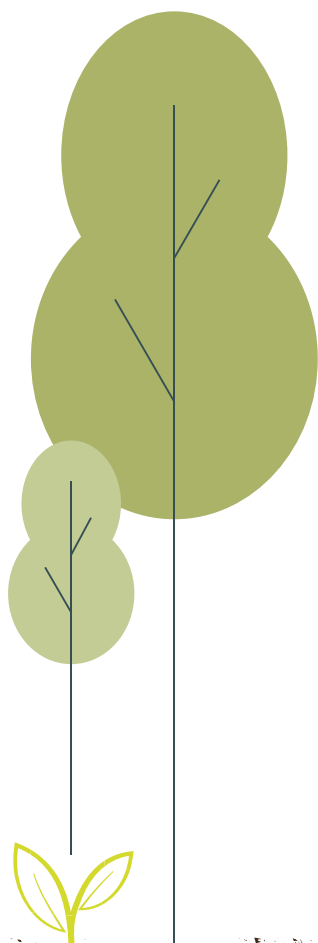
To ensure everyone knows what’s expected of them, Rick created a list of dos and don’ts for each value. These guidelines are shared during recruitment, making it clear that alignment with these values is essential.

To keep the values alive, Rick uses creative methods to engage staff. He quizzes them on the values, offering rewards such as cash or chocolates, which fosters team spirit. “It’s about bringing the values to life,” Rick says. “Many big companies have values, but even the owners don’t know what they are.”

When someone doesn’t live up to the values, they do not receive personal criticism, but a reminder of the agreed-upon principles. This approach makes managing issues straightforward and removes personal elements from difficult conversations.

The result is a happier, more cohesive workplace. By having everyone on the same page, Rick has reduced frustrations and stress, ensuring that when the pressure is on, the team pulls together.

“Living by your values isn’t just good in theory – it’s essential in practice. This approach benefits large companies and makes a huge difference in small businesses, even with just two employees,” he says.



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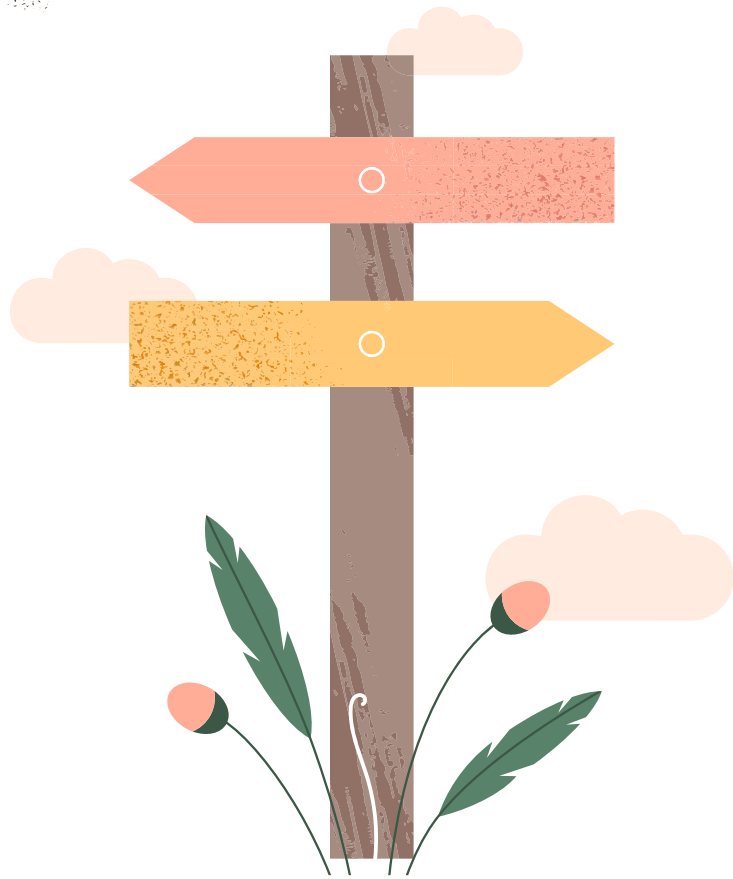
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Guidance from Tiah

Tess Howe, head of partnerships and policy at **Tiah**, explains that creating a code of conduct is about setting clear boundaries and helping everyone understand their responsibilities.

In a small farm business, it's easy to assume everyone knows what the manager is thinking and will do things the way you want. But everyone's different and, as we welcome more people from non-farming backgrounds, it's crucial to remember they won't have the same understanding as those who've grown up on farms.

A meaningful code of conduct isn't just handed out with an expectation of compliance. It should be an agreement that reflects the values of your workplace, a place where everyone feels safe, respected, and valued.

Remember, a code of conduct isn't just about what you expect from your employees; it's also a commitment from you as an employer. Even if you run a small farm or work with external partners, having a code that aligns with your values ensures everyone you do business with respects your standards. And it doesn't have to be as corporate or formal as you might think.

It's better to have a simple code of conduct than a non-existent one. Openness and accountability mean calling out bad practices, even if it's uncomfortable. The key issue is ensuring employees feel respected when they do so.

This isn't just about enforcing rules for your staff – it's also about management stepping up and being accountable. Regular check-ins, even if informal, are crucial. If an issue, like improper mobile phone use, keeps coming up, address it as part of upholding the code of conduct.

This approach allows for ongoing monitoring and management in a less formal way, but if serious issues arise they can be escalated through the proper grievance procedures.



Tiah has developed a range of free, informative templates available to farm businesses, regardless of size. To download the documents visit www.tiah.org



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The mutual benefits of having a code of conduct

Benefits to the employer

Minimise conflicts A code of conduct acts like a farm’s rulebook, laying out exactly what’s expected from everyone on the team. It cuts down on misunderstandings, keeps conflicts at bay, and ensures that everyone is pulling in the same direction, creating a more harmonious workplace.

Improved decision-making With clear guidelines in place, your team can make decisions that reflect your farm’s values and goals. This is especially crucial where choices around animal care, environmental practices and resource use can have big impacts.

Smarter risk management Potential risks can be spotted before they become big problems. Whether it’s legal issues, safety concerns, or damage to your farm’s reputation, you will have clear steps for handling any misconduct, ensuring issues are addressed quickly and effectively.

Keep your best hands A fair and positive work environment makes employees feel respected and valued, which means they’re more likely to stick around. A good code of conduct helps create this environment, cutting down on turnover and saving you the hassle and cost of constantly hiring new workers.

Boost your reputation Farms known for their strong values and ethical practices naturally attract more customers, suppliers and partners. A well-crafted code of conduct builds and maintains this positive reputation, setting your business up for long-term success.

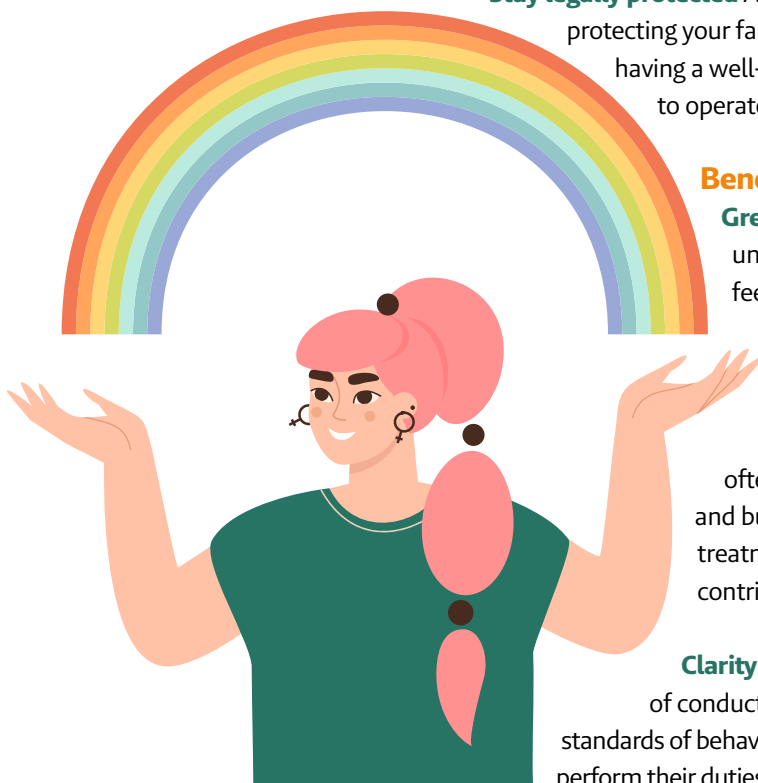
Stay legally protected All legal obligations and ethical standards will be clearly outlined, protecting your farm from potential legal headaches. If a dispute ever arises, having a well-documented code shows that you’ve done your due diligence to operate by the book.

Benefits to the employee

Greater job satisfaction and security When employees understand rules and expectations, they are more likely to feel secure and satisfied in their roles. A code of conduct helps facilitate a sense of fairness and transparency, reducing the likelihood of conflicts and grievances.

Protection against unfair treatment A code of conduct often includes policies related to discrimination, harassment and bullying, providing employees with protection against unfair treatment. This not only enhances job satisfaction but also contributes to a more inclusive and respectful workplace culture.

Clarity on responsibilities and workplace behaviour A code of conduct outlines the specific responsibilities of employees and the standards of behaviour they are expected to uphold. This clarity helps employees to perform their duties more effectively and reduces the risk of misconduct.



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Diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI)

DEI isn't just a nice-to-have in agriculture – it's essential. It drives innovation, strengthens community ties, meets consumer demands, and ensures that the industry remains fair, competitive, and sustainable for the future.

Ignoring DEI can also increase the likelihood of legal troubles. Discrimination lawsuits and penalties for breaking laws can cost your farm business. But it's about more than just ticking legal boxes – there's a moral duty to ensure that everyone working in agriculture is treated fairly, and with the respect they deserve.

By embracing DEI, you're not just keeping pace – you're setting your businesses up for long-term success. A diverse team brings fresh ideas and skills, ensuring your operation can thrive no matter what the future holds.

The importance of diversity, equity and inclusion is widely acknowledged in large corporations, often supported by extensive HR departments and formal reporting mechanisms. But unsurprisingly, in small businesses – particularly in the agricultural sector – these processes are underdeveloped if not frequently absent.



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Impact

Many agricultural businesses are also unaware of basic legal protections under the Equality Act 2010, which safeguards individuals against discrimination. BVEDs (see case study below) has helped educate businesses and organisations about these legal requirements and supported them to implement practical policies for a safer, more inclusive workplace.

Generic DEI policies often fall short in addressing the unique circumstances of individual businesses, so involving staff in the development of these policies is crucial. Each business is different, and when employees have a say in shaping the code of conduct, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility towards following guidelines they helped create and maintaining a positive workplace culture.

Introducing these conversations not only helps protect against discrimination, but also strengthens the overall integrity and attractiveness of the business.

- **BVEDs** are keen to work with and have support from individuals and organisations who want to make a difference.
- **The Equality Act 2010** offers a basic framework of protection against direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

CASE STUDY: NAVARATNAM PARTHEEBAN

For farm vet Navaratnam Partheeban, it was personal experience of discrimination – and what subsequently unfolded – that prompted him to co-launch the British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society (BVEDs).

BVEDs aims to make the profession more diverse, inclusive and equitable to people from all backgrounds. The move has had a powerful impact in agriculture and veterinary practices, where DEI policies have traditionally been overlooked.

“The creation of BVEDs was borne out of necessity,” says Navaratnam. “When I sought to report an incident I encountered, I realised there was no support for black, Asian and minority ethnic (Bame) vets, nurses and students facing discrimination in the profession.”

His experience highlighted a critical issue: without formal processes for reporting and following up on discrimination, employees are left without support, leading to a culture where discriminatory behaviour can persist unchecked.

“In small businesses, the lack of HR departments or dedicated DEI officers often means that when issues arise, employees have no clear path to resolution,” he says. “This absence of structure not only leaves employees vulnerable, but also exposes businesses to legal and reputational risks.

“One of the biggest challenges small businesses face is the misconception that DEI practices are only necessary for large organisations, but that is not the case. Unlike larger companies, where issues can be escalated to HR or legal departments, small businesses – especially in farming – often lack such resources, making it even more crucial to have a clear, accessible code of conduct.”



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AT A GLANCE: TIPS ON WHERE TO START WITH DEI

- **Know the law** Familiarise yourself with the **Equality Act 2010** and ensure your business complies with legal requirements.
- **Define your values** Clearly state your business’s commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. Outline what behaviours are unacceptable and how you support a fair workplace.
- **Develop a reporting mechanism** Create a straightforward process for employees to report issues. Ensure there is a clear follow-up procedure with defined timelines and consequences.
- **Tailor your policy** Avoid generic templates. Develop a policy that reflects the specific needs and culture of your business. Talk to your staff and let them help you and increase engagement.
- **Educate and support** Offer ongoing education and support for employees on DEI topics. Encourage a culture of continuous learning and improvement.
- **Review and revise** Regularly review your code of conduct – even if it’s just during a coffee break – to keep it relevant and effective. Be open to feedback and make adjustments as needed.

YOUR COMMENTS WELCOME

REGISTER FOR FUTURE LEVEL THE FIELD GUIDES

GIVE FEEDBACK ON THE CAMPAIGN

EXPERT INPUT PROVIDED BY:

- **Tess Howe**, head of membership and partnerships, Tiah
- **Sarah Hendry**, former director general of the CLA
- **Rick Turner**, owner of The Big Sheep
- **Patricia Hicks**, adviser, Acas
- **Navaratnam Partheeban**, co-founder BVEDS

