

Right: The MeritAgCheck app puts daily checks in the hands of operators to help identify and report defects



“Clients wanted a simple system for recording daily checks on farm equipment”

Keeping safety to hand

WORDS SIMON HENLEY
IMAGES TOM CRITCHELL

A new app has been designed to take the drudgery out of performing and recording daily inspections and maintenance checks. *FMJ* put the new system to the test



When it comes to farming, understanding liability and negotiating your way around health and safety regulations can be difficult. This is the day and age of shared responsibility, where the line separating public liability from professional indemnity is becoming increasingly blurred. In layman's terms, this means the man on the tractor seat is responsible both for maintaining his equipment and reporting any defects that might affect safety. It's something we should all be doing, and now there is an app that could potentially make daily checks easier.

Oliver Dale is a farmer's son from St Ives, Cambridgeshire, who runs Safety Revolution Ltd, a health and safety consultancy business for the agricultural industry. Last December, Oliver and his team set about

producing what they have since named the MeritAgCheck app, which has been developed as a means of making the working environment safer and more efficient for farmers and their employees.

“We started to develop the app following discussions with some of our clients,” reports Oliver. “The outcome was they wanted a simple system for recording daily checks on their farm equipment, which was foolproof, easy to manage and easy to update.

“The law obliges the operator of any machine to inspect it on a daily basis before it is used. On many farms, particularly on large estates or in larger contracting operations, this is an established process. However, recording and/or documenting the condition or service requirements of specific machines is frequently the weak link in the chain.

“Paper checklists and note books

are frequently lost or become illegible, so what we've done is design a system that has been specifically engineered for farms, contractors and estates so it can be used by operators of all skill levels on whatever type of machine they are using.”

How does it work?

The first task is for farmers or farm managers to sign up for an account and operate the dashboard through the Merit Inspection Solutions website. This website can be accessed on a computer, tablet or phone.

The next task is to activate the dashboard by entering the farm's



Left: QR code stickers make it quick and easy to bring up information on a machine in the app

HOW THE MERITAGCHECK APP CAN IMPROVE FARM SAFETY

1 A website link is used to download the Dashboard programme, which can be uploaded on to a computer, tablet or smart phone

2 The latest reports for each piece of machinery are posted directly on to the dashboard once they have been submitted by the operator

3 Check lists on the smart phone app feature ticks for a pass, an exclamation mark for a warning, and a cross for a condition rendering the vehicle unsafe to operate

4 Once a description of the problem has been made, the app will ask the operator to confirm the report and then sign and submit it

5 Having submitted the report, a notification will immediately show up on the dashboard system to alert of any further attention required

machinery details in the appropriate menus, detailing the types and makes of machinery used on the farm. This includes details such as the make, model, serial and registration numbers, and whether or not the machine is currently in service. These details are required to identify every machine on the farm.

Once the dashboard is operational a link to the system via a smart phone app is shared with the farm employees. The app provides limited access into the MeritAgCheck system, meaning employees can identify the machines they will be using but cannot make changes to the information logged in the dashboard programme.

Below: Developed by Safety Revolution Ltd the MeritAgCheck is a simple system for recording daily checks on farm equipment

With access to the app, an operator will be asked to proceed with a safety check of their machine. In default mode, the list for a typical tractor involves about 34 different categories,



however this can be edited within the dashboard to make it more specific to a respective machine's requirements.

When the operator has checked each item on the list, he can either mark it with a green tick stating it's okay and functioning properly, an amber advisory to note an impending problem that does not currently affect the operational safety, or with a red cross to identify the vehicle as unsafe to operate.

Where an amber advisory or a red cross are recorded, the app will allow the operator to make a note about the defect or problem. There is also the option to upload a photo of the reported issue. The report is then signed by the operator using his finger on the screen and submitted, where it will immediately show up as a notification on the system's dashboard. An email will also be sent to the appointed person monitoring the dashboard to advise them an operative has logged a service issue. It is then the job of the manager to respond to the notification.

Regular maintenance

In the real world, having received a notification the farmer or manager would most likely call the operator and find out what's going on. What is important is the outcome of this phone call and the eventual repair of the affected machine must be documented and updated on the dashboard or the machine in question will continue to be identified as inoperable to other users.

To make things even easier, the system also offers QR coding that provides a bar code that can be attached to any machine and used to identify a specific vehicle's details by simply scanning it.

The MeritAgCheck is also very affordable. The standard version of the system is free, however if you're going to make use of what's on offer properly then we would suggest opting for the premium version. It costs just £4.90 per month (including VAT) for up to three users and includes over 100 types of machine with customisable check lists. More users can be added for 49p per user per month.

The days when making excuses for poorly maintained or unsafe farm equipment are fast disappearing. For those who need the inspiration to improve their daily maintenance inspection routines and keep their records updated MeritAgCheck is a step in the right direction.

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