

WAR WITH BRAZEN THIEVES

WAY

warns someone will be shot

By **GERALDINE COMISKEY**

dad added: "You do everything to keep them safe. You watch them like a hawk all the time."

"So it's all the more terrifying to think that these people can just walk on to our farm, which is our home, and do whatever they want. People are very frightened. My mother lives on her own in the old farm and she's very nervous."

His mother Betty said: "It's terrifying at night. You get the impression these people are a law unto themselves."

Despite high walls, corrugated iron gates on two of the entrances, electric gates at Michael's house, electric fences and shrubs inside the



CONCERNS: Former IFA boss Padraig Walsh

stud-railing perimeter, the farm is clearly vulnerable. Other deterrents include a mountain of tyres behind one of the farmyard walls.

"We're getting CCTV, but nothing will put these lads off, they don't care about the law. They were caught and they're still walking around," said Michael.

Getaway

"There's no way you can close in 180 acres - and they can come from everywhere to this place and make a quick getaway," Michael added.

Former IFA President Padraig Walsh, who farms in Durrow, Co. Laois, told the *Sunday World*: "We feel very vulnerable out here in the country. We can only do so much to make the place safe but they'll always find a way to break in."

ISOLATED: Michael Owens fought with robbers

OLDER FARMERS FACE HIGH RISK

MIDDLE-AGED Irish farmers are at greater risk of death on farms than their younger counterparts, according to a new study.

Last year was a black year for farming, with a death toll of 30 people making it the most dangerous occupation in the country.

A new study - by Teagasc and the Health and Safety Authority - on farm deaths over the past three decades has shown that farmers aged between 45 and 64 are 57 per cent more likely to die.

It also uncovered that farmers were more likely to be killed in certain areas of the country, with three major black spots for farming fatalities in West Cork, North Tipperary and certain areas of Co. Meath. Senior Inspector with the Health and Safety Authority Pat Griffin said the long-term study shows older farmers are most at risk.

"Those between 45 and 64 have a higher potential to be killed on a farm from an accident. It's the most risky age group."

"It came out quite clearly that west Cork, North Tipperary and certain part in Co. Meath were the three blackspot for farm deaths."

The country's hospitals and rehab centres are full of farmers who have had limbs amputated or become paralysed in the estimated 2,000 serious accidents in farmyards every year.

Mr Griffin said half of the fatal accidents on Irish farms are related to tractors and machinery.

"A lot of people might think if it is tractors and machinery that surely you can put a



LETHAL: Accidents involving tractors

By **LYNNE KELLEHER**

technical fix there to prevent that. But a lot of it is how people are actually working them. You might have the safest equipment, but you can still kill yourself if you're farming practice leads you to act in a certain way which puts you at risk.

"We're trying to say to farmers that even if you have the best equipment and all the safety features, you still have to behave safely as well."

Mr Griffin said last year was the worst year in over 20 years with 30 deaths, while this year there has been seven deaths recorded so far.

"I'm concerned it's a cyclical thing. When farming has a very bad year and there is a lot of focus and attention on it then farmers try to take care of themselves a little better and it can be followed with a year with less accidents."

"Then you can go back to another bad year. It's trying to find the solution to bring it down to single figures in a year or better and keep it there."

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