



CASE STUDY



SUNDERLANDS PUTS MARTSAFE INTO PRACTICE

For Gareth Wall, director at Sunderlands Markets LLP and vice chairman of the Livestock Auctioneers Association (LAA), MartSafe Training has become much more than an annual health and safety requirement. It's an opportunity to bring every member of staff together, challenge existing practices and continually improve how the business operates.

Sunderlands, which operates in Hereford, Builth Wells, and Talgarth markets, has completed every MartSafe course since the programme was launched and now makes it an annual part of staff development.

"We've always taken health and safety seriously, but MartSafe brings everything back into focus," says Gareth. "It makes everyone stop and look critically at how the market works, from the condition of the gates and handling systems, traffic management on site, to the way livestock move through the market."

Unlike traditional health and safety training, MartSafe has been developed specifically for livestock markets, combining practical livestock handling with animal welfare, workplace safety and the latest industry legislation.

The training involves everyone working within the business, from auctioneers and drovers to office staff, administrators and directors.

"People often think it's just for those working in the pens, but everyone comes into contact with livestock at some point," Gareth explains. "Having the whole team learning together creates a shared understanding and a shared responsibility for safety."

One of the biggest changes has been encouraging staff to think proactively about their working environment.

"Before every sale, we're constantly assessing the market. Are the gates working properly? Are escape routes clear? Is signage in the right place? Are the handling systems doing what they're supposed to do? Those checks have become second nature."

The programme has also helped embed a culture where everyone feels confident raising concerns and suggesting improvements.

"Staff working on the ground are encouraged to report anything that could be made safer. It empowers people to speak up because everyone has responsibility for keeping both people and livestock safe."

For Gareth, understanding livestock behaviour has been one of the programme's greatest strengths.

"The animal vision exercise really changes people's perspective. Once you understand what cattle and sheep can and can't see, you begin to appreciate why they react the way they do. That knowledge improves safety, but it also improves animal welfare."

Beyond day-to-day operations, Gareth believes the training delivers wider business benefits.



"It improves teamwork because you're bringing everyone together in one room to learn from each other. It reinforces legislation, biosecurity, disease awareness and welfare requirements, but it also gives people confidence that they've been properly trained and know what to do in different situations."

Importantly, MartSafe is updated every year to reflect changing legislation and new industry challenges, ensuring the training remains relevant.

Looking ahead, Gareth believes the principles taught through MartSafe have value beyond the auction mart.

"The techniques we teach apply wherever livestock are handled. I'd like to see more opportunities for farmers to access this type of training because the benefits aren't just for markets – they're for the whole livestock industry."

For Sunderlands, the biggest measure of success is simple. "Our objective is straightforward: keeping all people and livestock safe and comfortable at the marts we manage."

About MartSafe

MartSafe is an initiative launched by the Livestock Auctioneers Association Limited, designed to promote health and safety in the livestock market. The initiative supports LAA members by providing bespoke health and safety guidance and a training programme for all staff within the livestock market.

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