



**Spring Safety Advice Article**

**Header: New Voluntary Guidelines for Young Farm Workers**

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**Byline: Canadian Agricultural Safety Association**

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Farm kids are a special breed. They are often precocious, dedicated, smart and willing to help out on the farm. However, even the most advanced young worker doesn't have the knowledge, experience or judgment of a seasoned farm worker. With so many youth starting summer jobs on the farm, parents and employers of young farm workers need to have a clear understanding of youth development levels, abilities, limitations and know when and how to set clear rules and boundaries for any work assigned to a young person.

Greg Englot is a grade 12 student and young farm worker from Abernethy, Saskatchewan. "I enjoy [working on the farm], I would do it for no money," he says. However, Englot says that young workers can put themselves in harm's way, "Sometimes you get full of yourself and think you can do something you probably shouldn't. [Young workers] want to prove themselves, especially if they are really into the job they are doing and can end up putting themselves at risk," he says.

In March, the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA) and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture launched "Let's Talk About It!, a Canadian Agricultural Safety Week campaign focused on encouraging farmers to talk about farm safety. Talking to young workers is one part of good communication in the farm workplace. Glen Blahey is a Health and Safety Specialist with CASA. "Many young workers tend to generalize their skills from one task to another, feeling they possess the size and strength to overcome any problem. They feel that they are immortal and can't be hurt—this can put them at risk," he says. CASA has developed a resource that provides information about the needs and limitations of young workers. The Canadian Model Youth Policy is a voluntary guideline that enables parents and farm owners and operators to plan and talk about keeping young farm workers safe. The policy was adapted from a similar document developed by youth safety advocates and agricultural leaders in the United States.

The model policy advises farm owners and operators to provide a basic orientation program for young workers, which helps introduce guidelines, expectations and policies for work on the farm.

The policy also reviews the importance of supervision. Young farm workers require the highest level of support during the orientation and training process. The level of supervision of a young worker depends on the individual as competency and maturity levels vary from person to person. It is important to participate in on-the-job, hands-on training. All work should be directly supervised until the young worker can prove their competency at a task. Young workers should work alongside experienced mentors and should not be placed in a work-alone situation.



When assigning general or specific tasks to youth it is also important to factor in the hazard level involved. For instance, job assignments for 14 and 15 year old youth should occur in non-hazardous work environments only. The range of options can expand for 16 and 17 year old youth, but only if they have taken either vocational or other work-based learning programs and have the written consent of their parents.

Hours of work are another important factor to consider when scheduling young workers for farm tasks or shifts. Young workers require shorter work hours and more frequent breaks than an adult. This is because youth under the age of 18 are in a rapid state of growth and development and need more time for sleep and rest. Also, young workers need time to participate in school, family and community recreation activities to help them develop into balanced adults.

These are just some of the voluntary guidelines covered in the model policy. That said, it is important to acknowledge that nothing magical happens at age 18 in terms of maturity or risk of injury, so it is important to always evaluate the competency of a young worker against risk of injury on a task-by-task basis regardless of the number on their driver's licence. And as always, it is important to review the provincial legislative requirements for young workers, which govern hours of work and safety and health regulations.

Young workers can be an excellent asset to any farm workplace during the busy summer months but it is important to provide them with the special attention, supervision, training and orientation they need to be productive and safe.

For more information on the *Canadian Model Youth Policy: Youth Employment in Agriculture*, visit [casa-asca.ca/CanadianModelYouthPolicy](http://casa-asca.ca/CanadianModelYouthPolicy). Do you have any questions about safety? Contact CASA at [info@casa-asca.ca](mailto:info@casa-asca.ca).

Photo Cutline: May 2014 Young Farm Worker

CASA had developed a set of voluntary guidelines for farm operators to use when employing young workers on their farms.

