



Headline: Practice Makes Farm Safety Perfect

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Word Count: 1227

Safety planning on the farm is getting some attention this year from Alberta producers thanks in part to a farm safety plan pilot project and some willing volunteers. Two of those guinea pigs include Terry and Humphrey Banack of Roundhill, Alberta. The couple has signed up to produce and implement a customized written health and safety plan for their farm with help from the Alberta FarmSafe Plan, a business-risk management tool developed by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, with support from the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA).

The Banacks run a grain and oilseed operation on land that has been in the family since the early 1900s. In addition to farming, Humphrey Banack also spends a lot of time jet-setting across the country talking to a lot of other farm families in his role as Vice-President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. He says he has noticed that stories of farm-safety-gone-wrong are all too familiar everywhere. He says he hears about folks who have experienced close calls or warnings before an injury occurred, only to ignore the warning signs until it was too late. "I hear stories across the country of farm injuries; and most, or all, are preventable," he says.

Banack admits that he has had his own fair share of close calls and muses that animals act smarter than people sometimes, pointing out that you wouldn't see animals coming back for seconds after experiencing the pain of an injury. Banack himself went right back to work after putting his own fingers through a pulley.

"Every injury out there is causing pain and loss to someone and we're not an animal that loves pain and loss," says Banack thoughtfully. "That's why we got involved in this project."

It takes a crew of six on the Banack farm—still largely made up of family and one or two hired hands—to power through harvest season. Humphrey Banack says that while everyone on the farm is involved in the process of identifying risks and discussing strategies for safer practices, his wife Terry Banack is the one managing the process of implementing the written health and safety plan on their farm.

"It's not so overwhelming that I can't understand what I have to do but it's very involved," she says. She thinks writing the plan, and then implementing it, is going to be like learning a new sport or how to dance for the first time. She says it is one of those things that requires training, focus, and then lots of practice before you get it right.

Humphrey and Terry Banack will be sharing their passion for farm safety and experiences so far in developing a written health and safety plan with other producers and farm safety supporters



at a Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) launch in Olds, Alberta in March. They'll also be featured in a YouTube video series posted at www.agsafetyweek.ca in the lead up to CASW, which runs from March 9 to 15, 2014. This year, the farm safety public education campaign focuses on the importance of talking about safety. It's organized by the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, with support this year from the Government of Canada through *Growing Forward 2*, Farm Credit Canada, Ag for Life, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, CHS, Imperial Oil and Pioneer Hi-Bred Limited.

"Safety's got to be a priority no matter what," says Terry Banack, "but if you do these projects, it makes it physical and a constant."

Banack isn't the only farmer to find the process very valuable for her farm, if not a little bit daunting at first. "Developing and piloting the Alberta FarmSafe Plan has been quite an intense process but we're definitely seeing progress," says Laurel Aitken, Farm Safety Coordinator for Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD). So far, the FarmSafe development team has been able to help train and put in place five FarmSafe Advisors who are providing guidance to pilot project producers. Two teams of farmers are working through draft manuals and workbooks to build their first safety plans. Aitken is very grateful for the Banacks and the other volunteer producers. She says they have been offering great direction to her on how the Alberta FarmSafe Plan can be improved for the final rollout.

"Building a health and safety plan can seem a little overwhelming when you're starting from scratch and it can seem never ending," she says. "I don't want farmers to get stalled at step one by trying to think of absolutely every hazard on the farm. It's great to be getting all this feedback so we can break the process down into bite-sized pieces."

Glen Blahey is an Agricultural Safety and Health Specialist with the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association. He authored the original plan on which the Alberta FarmSafe Plan is based and has worked with organizations and producers across the country on farm safety planning. "I think farmers will find that the benefits outweigh the costs from a business risk-management perspective," he says, citing reduced injuries, improved staff retention, better insurance premiums, and greater productivity and efficiency. "Overall, the operation will be a safer place and that to me is a positive and healthy farm workplace."

Aitken says that a wide variety of farmers have come forward to volunteer for the pilot so far, including grain farmers and a variety of livestock producers. Some of them are small, family-based operations like the Banacks' but others involve over 100 employees. Some of the feedback so far has involved requests for ARD to supply specific safe operating procedures (SOP's) for agricultural tasks. Aitken says building these resources to be applicable to every farm situation is impossible, though she admits there is a lot of overlap on some general tasks that farmers could share. Aitken says the challenge her team faces is in providing farmers with as much information as possible to make implementation as easy as possible, regardless of operation size.



“It’s so easy to let yourself off the hook, especially if you have every confidence that nothing bad is going to happen. You’ve done it that way for 30 years and never been hurt, but that is no guarantee of safety,” she says. “Getting farmers to commit to putting in the time and effort required to develop a safety plan can be a challenge but it is worth the effort.”

For Humphrey Banack, making the commitment is as simple as adopting the rule that “you walk, don’t run” around pools as a kid. It often meant you first had to be taught, and then reminded many times; but with time, you did learn not to run around pools because it just wasn’t safe to go that fast near a hazard. “I think the same context goes here [when] working on the farm,” he says. “You’re going to get to the end and you’re going to get there on time. It’s come time to realize the pace we want to aim for is down here.”

The Banack farm is one of 10 participating in the Alberta FarmSafe Plan pilot project, which began in late 2013 and is run by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development with funding from the Government of Canada through *Growing Forward 2*. ARD will use feedback from the Banacks and other participating farmers to develop the final plan and e-course in 2015.

Cutlines:

CASW2014_Banack_picture1.jpeg

Terry and Humphrey Banack are working with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development to implement a health and safety plan for their crop and oilseed operation.

CASW2014_Banack_picture2.jpeg

Humphrey Banack says agriculture is one of the few industries that run out of a producer’s backyard, often by friends and family. That is why Banack is a big supporter of farm safety and Canadian Agricultural Safety Week.

