



Headline: Injuries Can Impact Farm Families for Life

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Rejean Pommainville from Limoges, Ontario, is aging at the same pace as anyone else but he seems to feel it faster, which is painful for his wife Barbara Pommainville too, who can't do anything to help him. All because of a farm injury.

On July 17 2009, the Pommainvilles were milking 45 dairy cattle and it was the middle of haying season. "It was on a Friday afternoon and we had some small squares to unload," recalls Rejean Pommainville. "It was something I'd done all my life." But that day, as he was climbing up the wagon the same way he had hundreds of times before, Pommainville fell a little more than 2.7 meters (just over nine feet) and landed awkwardly but feet first. The impact shattered his heel.

Barbara Pommainville remembers coming home from work to find her husband complaining of a sprained ankle from the couch. They had no idea how badly he was injured until the local hospital delivered the news that there was nothing they could do and he would have to see a specialist in Ottawa.

"The doctor told me, 'this will change your life forever,'" remembers Rejean Pommainville. Thanks to the talents of the specialist, 14 screws, some plates, and two months on crutches, he could walk again but he knew he'd never be the same. "I'd milked cows since I was a little boy but dairy is very demanding physically and if you cannot do it properly, you won't last long," he says. The cows had to go.

Rejean Pommainville considers himself lucky because he knows it could have been worse. After all, the third generation farm is still in business, albeit cash cropping. "I have a bit more time to travel, so we see the world," he says brightly. "There is life after cows." But he has to admit that he's almost 60 and feels the injury more than ever. If he works too long, he can't help but limp. "When you have an injury, it's after you're retired that the pain comes in," he warns. "You always heard that weather brought on aches and pains but I thought that was all baloney until now." All because of a fraction of a second, doing something he did all the time.

"We're not indestructible," Barbara Pommainville muses. "Falling off [a] wagon can happen so easily."

According to agricultural injury data, falls from height are the fourth leading cause of non-machinery-related agricultural fatalities in Canada (Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting), and the second leading cause of non-machinery-related hospitalizations (Canadian Agricultural Injury Surveillance Program).

Glen Blahey is an Agricultural Safety and Health Specialist with the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA). "The economic burden of injury connected with a fall can be very great for producers," he says. "Rejean may have climbed up an unsecured haystack a million times and nothing happened. But it only takes one time for something to go wrong," he says.



Sheila James works for Workplace Safety & Prevention Services as a farm safety consultant, raises beef cattle, and has been involved with farm safety volunteers in Ontario, including the Pommainvilles, for many years. Her own father suffered a farm injury back in 1992. At the time she was working as a paramedic in New York.

James says nothing can prepare you for the impact of an injury on your own family. She adds that even the most safety-conscious farmers can fall victim to life-altering, or ending, injuries, and that harvesting hay is an extremely weather sensitive activity and it's easy to feel rushed. That's when injuries happen. "Farmers do learn from other people's mistakes," she says. "What I've learned from farm safety is, in every job that I do, I think it forward through every step of the way before I even start."

Blahey agrees. "If you're haying, do you need to climb up a stack, or could machinery do it for you? If you do have to climb up, are the square bales stacked in a pyramidal fashion, which is more stable and safer to climb onto, or are you attempting to climb up a vertical face? Are you in a rush or sleep deprived?" he says, adding that these are all factors that can contribute to a dangerous fall.

Since Rejean Pommainville's injury, the couple has gained a new appreciation for family and friends. "We had a lot a friends and family come out to help," says Barbara Pommainville. As a thank you, they hosted a neighbourhood party. Since then, it's turned into an annual summer tradition. "I think it's important to have a back-up, you know, friends and family who can help you out," says Barbara Pommainville. She says if she could offer any advice, it would be to keep your neighbours and relatives close.

Rejean Pommainville agrees. "When something happens, it's good to have neighbours."

The Pommainvilles are one of four producer families across Canada sharing their stories over YouTube in the lead up to Canadian Agricultural Safety Week 2014. This year, the national public education campaign will run from March 9 to 15 under the theme "Let's Talk About It!" which focuses on the importance of communication in the farm workplace. 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. To watch their story, visit www.agsafetyweek.ca.

Cutlines:

CASW2014_RejeanPommainville_photo1.jpeg

Rejean Pommainville had 14 screws and a number of steel plates placed in his left heel after he fell more than 2.7 meters (over nine feet) from a hay stack in 2009. The longest screw is 40 millimeters (just over 1.5 inches) long.

CASW2014_RejeanPommainville_photo2



Rejean and Barbara Pommainville threw a neighbourhood party in 2009 to thank friends and family for helping them out after Rejean Pommainville was badly injured in a fall on his farm. This party, held just after the Pommainvilles sold their dairy herd, has turned into an annual summer tradition.

CASW2014_RejeanPommainville_photo3

Rejean Pommainville walks down his yard with the aid of a walking cast and crutches three weeks after he severely injured his heel in a farm injury. Walking without pain took about 12 months, including two months of rehab. More than four years later, Pommainville says he finds it difficult to walk on loose soil and rough terrain and the flexibility in his injured foot is gone.

CASW2014_RejeanPommainville_photo4

Barbara and Rejean Pommainville. Barbara Pommainville remembers coming home from work to find her husband Rejean Pommainville complaining of a sprained ankle from the couch. They had no idea how badly he was injured until the local hospital delivered the news that there was nothing they could do and he would have to see a specialist in Ottawa.

