



CASW Safety Advice Article #2

Headline: Talking to Your Kids About Farm Safety

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You would probably do just about anything to keep your kids safe on the farm. That's what over 90 per cent of Canada's farmers said in a farm safety attitudinal survey conducted by Farm Credit Canada in 2011. But how do you know what to do?

From 1990 to 2008, Canadian Agricultural Reporting (CAIR) recorded 248 agricultural fatalities of children under 15 years of age. That's an average of 13 deaths a year. Approximately 44 per cent of those fatalities involved children under the age of five. The most common causes of fatalities included being run over by equipment, drowning, or equipment rollovers. In many cases, these fatalities were work-related, though the child wasn't necessarily performing the agricultural task at the time of the injury.

So what can you do to raise your children to celebrate farm life, while keeping them safe? You'll need to have a really good handle on child development levels, abilities and limitations, as well as when and how to set clear rules and boundaries, so that everyone stays happy, healthy and safe.

While you can't completely child-proof your farm, creating a safe play area can limit their exposure to hazards including traffic, agricultural production and environmental concerns. A safe play area is a carefully planned location with safe, age-appropriate play equipment designated by physical boundaries such as fences, gates or shrubs. Establish any necessary play rules and supervise your children appropriately.

Next, identify areas on your operation that are off-limits to children, such as confined spaces including grain bins or silos, pesticide or fertilizer storage facilities, bodies of water, and manure pits. Can a fence be installed to barricade a hazardous area? Can materials be stored inside locked cupboards or locked buildings? Do it. When it comes to visiting the barn, storage buildings or bin yards, establish age limits for entry. For example, if a child is younger than 10 years old, establish a rule that they have to stay in the fenced yard area; if a child is 10 to 13 years old, they can enter these areas if they are accompanied by an adult.

When it comes to farm chores, the ability of a child to carry out an agricultural task is dependent on several factors, including age, motor skills, cognitive function and awareness of the world around them. Children under seven years of age are dependent on adults to provide them with a safe environment and should not be engaged in agricultural tasks. A seven- to nine-year-old child generally doesn't have good hand-eye coordination. They have a short attention span and need parents to demonstrate a task each time. For this age group, short tasks that don't require a great deal of accuracy such as yard and garden work or feeding the animals would probably be okay, as long as they are under constant supervision. Contrast this with 16- to 18-year-old youths, who can usually begin adult tasks, but may have a tendency to be a bit reckless and easily distracted. However, every child is different, so be vigilant and adjust tasks based on your day-to-day assessment of their abilities. And when it comes to youth employment, whether you are hiring your own child or another youth, be sure to check legislative requirements to ensure you are operating within the legal parameters of your area.

Guide your child through the farm workplace and protect them from the obvious, often overlooked, hazards on the farm. It will help keep them safe while setting them on a path to become a safety-conscious farmer in the future.



For more information on talking to your kids about safety, visit agsafetyweek.ca/producer-tools and browse through over 20 free resources designed to help producers make their farms safer. This article was produced in support of the Canadian Agricultural Safety Week 2014 Let's Talk About It! campaign, which encourages farmers to engage in conversations about safety. CASW is brought to you by the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, with support from the Government of Canada through Growing Forward 2, long-time corporate sponsor Farm Credit Canada, Ag for Life, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, CHS, Imperial Oil and Pioneer Hi-Bred Limited.

