



Smart, Savvy and Safe Farm Kids

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The value of hard work, a sense of responsibility and pride in a job well done are characteristics that all parents want to nurture in their children. There is nothing more gratifying than seeing your child accomplish great things through hard work and determination.

Farm kids are lucky because they see first-hand how to accomplish tasks successfully, be stewards of land and livestock, and take pride in hard work. However, raising a successful, smart and savvy farm kid doesn't have to come at the price of their safety.

Discussions concerning the issues of farm safety and children often can be controversial and emotionally charged, but there is one point that everybody agrees on – the death of even just one child is a horrific tragedy.

It's important that parents and caregivers understand that children aren't miniature adults. Even the most advanced eight-year-old is still a child. And these wonderful young people don't have the experience, physical strength or understanding to always make the right choice, handle large equipment or be entrusted with complicated farming tasks.

Children grow and progress through different stages of physical, mental and emotional development. Physically, children are different than adults. Some children are big for their age, that's true, but their stamina, strength, and fine motor skills are still developing. Mentally, children don't always understand consequences of risky behavior. Even the most mature child doesn't have the life experience or critical thinking skills to always make the best choices. Emotionally, children haven't developed the skills to balance impulses against risk or to always know when to ask for help.

Take a critical look at your child. Do they always make the best choices? Are they always physically capable of doing mundane tasks? Do they act impulsively? All children do impulsive things, aren't always physically up to the task and sometimes make poor choices. It's up to parents and caregivers to establish boundaries and guidelines, not just in everyday life, but also when it comes to farm safety.

Risk taking is an important part of growing up. Children that take age-appropriate risks and engage in age-appropriate tasks stand a better chance of growing up into skilled, capable, and confident adults. The North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks is an excellent resource that parents and caregivers can use to guide decisions about what kinds of farming tasks are age-appropriate. These are guidelines, you know your child best, but remember to





take into consideration that parents often overestimate their child. Be critical and be truthful about your child's ability when determining what tasks are appropriate.

Children's safety on the farm just doesn't end with assigning appropriate farming tasks. It also depends on their role models and decisions that those adults make regarding safety on the farm. According to the Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting, there were 248 agricultural fatalities among children and youth in Canada under 15 years of age. Although 71% of the agricultural fatalities among children were work-related, in 8 out of 10 cases, the victim was not actually doing the work. These young victims were killed by someone else who was engaged in agricultural work.

So what can we do to prevent these untimely deaths? First, we have to rethink "tradition". Farmers are often on the forefront of new and exciting ideas, after all it was farmers who championed minimal tillage and moved away from the traditional black dirt of summer fallow. The same kind of thinking needs to be applied to safety on the farm. It might be "tradition" to allow extra riders on the farm equipment. And it might be "tradition" to have children around farm machinery, but that doesn't mean it has to be this way.

Build new traditions. Talk about the farm equipment, teach children how they work, show them the proper safety gear, explore your farm together in a safe and controlled way. Keeping children safe doesn't mean that they can't be involved in the farm. Instead, it means that your children will be around to be the next generation of farmers, who will in turn carry on the tradition of a successful farming operation.

Our children are our greatest accomplishment and joy. Let them learn, run, jump, play and work. But let's make sure they do it at acceptable risk levels. Take the time to understand the risks farm children face and how to nurture our future farmers in a healthy and safe way.

For more information about Keeping Kids Safe and Canadian Agricultural Safety Week, visit agsafetyweek.ca. To access the North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural tasks, please visit agsafetyweek.ca and click on Resources.

About Canadian Agricultural Safety Week:

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) is a public awareness campaign focusing on the importance of farm safety. CASW takes place every year during the third week of March. In 2016, CASW takes place March 13 to 19. CASW 2016 is presented by Farm Credit Canada. For more information visit agsafetyweek.ca.

