



Farming Safely More Than a Belief for Brand

Byline: Amy Petherick for the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

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For Dave Brand, safety is a core belief that's evident not only in the way he talks but also in how he runs his farming operation.

Brand, the newest member of the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association's (CASA) board of directors, farms not far from Red Deer, AB, where he, his fiancée and their four kids have a small commercial herd of Simmental beef cattle. Working as a senior manager at a municipality by day, Brand explains that many of his safety practices are habits he's brought home from off-farm work experiences

"I'm an engineer, documentation is our lifeblood," he explains, noting the critical importance of a well maintained paper-trail in the event something goes wrong. "I find, working off the farm, a lot of organizations are very, very, good about safety. In agriculture, safety is more in its infancy."

It isn't that Brand thinks safety isn't important to farmers. He says that working in the same place where he's raising a family or hosting visitors makes it very important to him and he thinks that is pretty standard among farmers. But farmers are often working in isolation and he says it's easy to feel alone when it comes to planning for safety on the farm.

"I think sometimes when you don't even know the resources are available, we tend to struggle on our own, especially in rural areas," he says. "We learn things from people inside our circle of influence."

For Brand, it wasn't until tragedy struck the community he was living in during the fall of 2015 that he became aware of the resources available through CASA. He says the three young sisters who lost their lives in a grain truck were his neighbours. During that time of mourning, Brand says many things came into sharp focus for him. He recalls how suddenly an organization he can barely remember having heard of before, CASA, was speaking to the media on behalf of agriculture again and again. He started hearing about farm safety programs he hadn't known about before and he started hearing from other farmers about their own worries.

"There was a lot of outpouring from the farm community, and the non-farm community, from around the world actually," he recalls. "One of the ones that sticks out in my mind and will always stick out in my mind was a farmer from Kansas, who said his wife asked him if it was okay for the





kids to play on the bean pile; he said ‘Yesterday I would have said yes. Today, I’m not so sure.’ If you can touch people, create that awareness, potentially you save someone from going through a bad situation.”

For him, that’s the essence of any safety program whether it’s CASA’s new BeGrainSafe program or something more like what he learned from Ag in the Classroom. He strongly believes that anything that helps farmers see just how real the hazards are around their farm has the potential to save lives. As a member of the Red Deer County Technical Rescue Task Force, he knows too well what the worst case scenario really looks like.

“We have all seen the doll in the gravity wagon, how quickly it can get sucked down, but it doesn’t reinforce the realism. We all know flowing grain can trap you, but we also tend to underestimate how quickly and how severely,” he says. “First responders see people on the worst days of their lives and our goal is to not have to.”

He explains how, when they train as an emergency response unit, the hope is always that they never have to use the training. He would love to see the same mentality be adopted by the agricultural community. Because unlike productivity or environmental stability, there’s no real measure to show the improvements you’ve made on the farm. “With safety, you can’t predict an incident; there is no measure of what you have stopped from happening,” he points out. “So, it’s very difficult to measure.”

To Brand that means sharing and talking about the near-misses and the experiences all farmers seem to have. Like the time he forgot to point out low-hanging power lines above a driveway to a neighbor who returned a tall wagon. It also means talking and tweeting about what it’s like to watch an adult-sized model become submerged in a grain entrapment demonstration unit. It also means talking to other farmers about his customized farm safety plan. Brand believes that all farmers have to be willing to create, participate and commit to sustainable, on-farm safety practices.

For more information about the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association and how to commit to safety on your farm, visit agsafetyweek.ca or casa-acsa.ca.





Cutlines:

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVE BRAND

Dave Brand 1: Brand operates his farm near Red Deer, AB and also hold off-farm employment.

Dave Brand 2: Brand runs his operation with safety as a core belief.

Dave Brand 3: Brand believes that all farmers have to be willing to create, participate and commit to sustainable, on-farm safety practices.

Dave Brand 4: Brand's farm includes a small commercial herd of Simmental beef.

Dave Brand 5: Dave Brand farms alongside his family near Red Deer, Alberta.

