



# Safety Champion Retired from Farming, not Farm Safety

Amy Petherick for the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association  
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Even after he retired from farming, Albert Martin never retired from being a farm safety champion.

For more than 40 years, Martin has been involved with the Waterloo Home and Farm Safety Association and he currently serves as the association's current President. For many years, together with his wife Ruby, Martin managed an apple orchard and store, so he remembers how challenging it could be sometimes be to stay focused on farm safety.

"We used to have our annual meetings in the spring and, in the fall, we had safety meetings in different areas," he recalls. "I always tried to go if I could but I was still farming at that time, so my wife would have to look after the apple sales at home."

Martin says it had always helped that there was so much to learn during the farm safety conferences and rallies he attended. But, even more than that, he says that he really enjoyed socializing with other farmers during these events. He admits that it concerns him to see fewer and fewer young farmers joining the safety association today and taking that same time to educate themselves and socialize the way he did early in his career.

"I know you want to get the harvest done in a hurry, but sometimes you have to learn to be a little bit careful," he advises. "I think everything is go-go, and the bigger you get, the more 'hurry' you have. And, if a person is always in a hurry, well, that will likely stay that way."

Still, Martin is reminded of an old saying; 'Hurry, Kills.' Now that everything is bigger, and automatic, farmers have to be more conscious of safety. Or, at least that's how it seems to Martin. It isn't as much of a worry to him if farmers are in the field but, he is alarmed by farmers who take all that big equipment on the road. Particularly, when proper safety precautions aren't put in place.

"Sometimes farmers take chances," he quips. "When an implement dealer takes a piece of equipment out to the farm, boy, they've got strict rules! But, all we can do is tell the farmer what to do and then it's up to them."

Martin says he's been around long enough to know you can't teach someone to change if they're not willing to listen, and he insists he was never perfect himself. But equipment has changed a great deal since he was just getting started he says. Heidi Wagner, a farm safety partner with the Woolwich Community Health Centre, tells me that Martin isn't the only senior member of their local farm safety association to express concern over changes in equipment and the practices of young farmers who are working larger acreages with bigger machinery.

"In the course of their lifetime, they've seen and heard of enough incidents, that they still feel farm safety's an important topic for them to stay involved in, even as they get older and move off the farm," she explains. "Their involvement becomes less hands on, but they're still passionate about it for sure."



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Sure, she says, for some of the retirees involved, they may not be as tech savvy as the younger farmers involved. Or as familiar with the ever-changing rules and regulations which farmers are increasingly required to adhere to. But, the anecdotes and life experience they can draw from or recount for newer farmers serve a valuable purpose as far as Wagner is concerned.

“You know, it’s those coffee shop meetings, the ‘remember when’ and the ‘did you hear’ conversations, that are often just as important as the full-fledged safety rallies,” she observes. “The real story often comes out on the street and in the barn yard, as opposed to what you hear in the press because they’re only privy to certain information.”

On the other hand, Martin insists that the younger members of the association, and Wagner in particular, do excellent work when it comes to engaging with children and teaching them to be safer around the farm. In his experience, he says it can be easy to become too technical with children so “keep it simple!” Of all the safety efforts he’s been involved in with the association, he says he is certainly the most proud of all the annual safety rallies they hosted for local children.

*Authors Note: Each year the Waterloo Home and Farm Safety Association hosts a rally for local families during Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association thanks them for their commitment to farm safety and for being a part of the AgSafe Family.*



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