



Statistics Show Senior Farmers Need Safer Practices

By Alana Fearnall for the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association
 Word Count: 627

The good news is statistics indicate that farm fatalities are declining. The bad news is that for older farmers the fatality rate is much higher than any other age group.

Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting (CAIR) found that fatality rates are highest for older adults, aged 60 and over. In 2012, the fatality rate for older adults was 22.2 per 100,000. Compare that to adults in the 15-59 age range, which was only 4.2 per 100,000. Both groups, despite a sizable variation in fatality rates, are continuing to see fatality rates decrease at a 1.1% average each year. Glen Blahey, Agriculture Health and Safety Specialist for the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA), says it is important for senior farmers and their families to have conversations about aging and discuss making modifications to daily routines to keep everyone safe.

“As people age, there are changes that occur in their body,” he says, “these changes can present significant hazards because people attempt to perform tasks with the same degree of skill, or dexterity, that they did earlier in their lives.” However, the good news is that overall, agriculture-related fatalities are declining, and Blahey says there are two major reasons for this. “The work environment is getting safer - equipment design, and technology. And because of heightened awareness,” he says. “Discussing farm safety is no longer considered a taboo.”

Even though senior farmers experience fatalities higher than other age groups, that does not mean older farmers have to stop contributing to the farm. Learning how to identify hazards in the workplace can be a useful practice for all operations and can keep experienced farmers contributing longer and in a safe way. More importantly, having someone with the life experience, and wisdom, still working in agriculture helps to make the transition process smoother from one generation to the next.

“Wisdom, experience, and physical presence is important to the farm,” Blahey emphasizes. “Take advantage of all experienced farmers have to offer, and suit the work to the best of their abilities.”

CAIR indicates that these older adults (aged 60 and up) consistently have higher fatality rates than children and adults. Clearly, a prevention strategy on the farm that specifically addresses older farmers’ safety is needed. Blahey explains that work has been done on injury prevention strategies; a project report titled “Making Farming Safe for Senior Farmers” lays out some advice.

According to Blahey, performing a job safety analysis is essential. There are five critical steps. The first step is identifying specific jobs. Look at your farm and figure out what jobs each person performs on the operation (and write it down). The second step is to break down each job into tasks. In the third step, each task is then examined to determine the minimum ability to safely perform the task, any potential hazards and personal risk factors. The fourth step involves determining an action plan to eliminate or reduce the hazards of each task. Finally, the fifth step is about making the necessary changes and taking the time to provide effective training to all employees, young or old.



Dow AgroSciences





Blahey reminds everyone that farming has been a different experience for every generation. Although younger farmers may be used to working around large machines, a senior farmer most likely got started in times when these large and technologically advanced machines weren't nearly as common. "50 years ago, farming was an extremely labour-intensive practice and it didn't matter what type of farming you were doing, there was just a lot of physical involvement," he says. As the times change, technology advances, farms grow, and farmers age, the hazards change as well. Learning how to adapt to these changes can ensure a longer and rewarding career.

For more information about "Supporting Seniors" including a Job Safety Analysis template, visit agsafetyweek.ca.



Dow AgroSciences

