Build safety for your farm visitors

Byline: Robert Gobeil for the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association
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On farms across the country, there's no shortage of visitors coming and going throughout the year. Visiting a farm isn't without risk. Anytime people are in a situation where they could be in contact with animals, farm equipment, or other hazards like water, there is potential for injury.

While many farm operations are accustomed to regular visitors, it's in a farm's best interest to provide these visitors with a basic orientation when they first enter the property. Regardless of whether the people visiting are suppliers and contractors, or friends and family members, producers are responsible for their safety.

The good news is that developing a visitor orientation doesn't have to be a difficult task.

Start by assessing and documenting any safety risks before visitors come to your farm. Are there areas that are off limits (such as bins, crop protection storage areas, lagoons, etc.)? Are there areas of your farm that are fine for adults to visit, but not for children? Are there areas on the farm that are accessible to contractors and suppliers but not friends and family? These are all great questions to think about before visitors set foot on the property.

Another point to consider is any limitations a visitor might have. Walking through grassy areas with ant mounds or gopher holes might not seem too risky, however, falls, especially for older adults, can lead to serious injuries and other complications. Other limitations might include lack of training or awareness on the operation of farm machinery or equipment. Keep that in mind before allowing any visitor to perform farming tasks.

It's also good to consider personal protective equipment. Depending on the safety risks you've identified, any necessary personal protective equipment should be provided during the orientation (and if you've taken the proactive step of asking visitors to bring their own equipment, then you're already ahead of the game). It's also a good idea to

lead a walkthrough of certain areas so that visitors get a visual understanding of where they can and cannot go, as well as an awareness of the safety risks. Remember to lead by example during the orientation and wear the appropriate personal protective equipment.

While some of these farm hazards may seem obvious to those who are around them every day, it's important not to assume that other people will already be aware of the associated risks. Even if signage is in place on the property to identify any hazards, make sure to explain the risks during the orientation. Take time also to highlight the key points of your property's Emergency Response Plan, like where the designated meeting (muster) point is and who to call in the event of an emergency.

Once the orientation is complete, make sure it's documented and signed off by both the visitor and person providing the training.

Even though creating and implementing a visitor orientation takes a bit of work, it's well worth the effort in order to protect the well-being of every person who visits. And that's an important priority for all Canadian producers.

This safety advice article is a part of Canadian Agricultural Safety Week. Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW) is an annual campaign held the third week of March of each year. In 2019, Safe & Strong Farms: Build an AgSafe Canada, takes place March 10 to 16. CASW is presented by Farm Credit Canada. For more information visit agsafetyweek.ca.

Cutline RobertGobeil: Robert Gobeil is the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association's Ag Health and Safety Specialist.

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