Ladder Safety for Agriculture Meeting Kit



WHAT’S AT STAKE

In agriculture, ladders are part of the everyday routine — whether you’re picking fruit, accessing grain bins, repairing structures, or pruning trees. But one slip, one missed rung, or one unstable base can send a worker crashing to the ground in seconds. Falls from ladders are one of the leading causes of injury on farms and ranches — and they’re almost always preventable. A fall may only take a second, but the recovery could take months — or might not happen at all.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Ladders on farms are exposed to unpredictable conditions that can change in an instant.

Unstable or Shifting Ground — Agricultural terrain is rarely flat or firm. Soil can be muddy, sandy, loose, or uneven, causing the ladder to slide, sink, or tilt. Even a small shift under one foot can send the whole ladder off balance.

Damaged or Weather-Worn Ladders — Some farm ladders stay outdoors year-round, exposed to rain, sun, and chemical sprays. Over time, rails weaken, rungs loosen, and materials degrade. A ladder may look fine on the outside but fail as soon as weight is applied.

Climbing While Carrying Loads — This is one of the most common causes of falls on farms. Buckets of feed, harvest crates, irrigation tools, pruning equipment — anything in your hands reduces balance and prevents you from gripping the ladder properly.

Environmental Conditions — Wind, rain, and heat create extra hazards that workers often underestimate:

- Wind gusts can push a ladder or throw a climber off balance.
- Rain, irrigation spray, or dew create slippery rungs.
- Heat causes fatigue, dizziness, and reduced focus, increasing missteps.

Improper Ladder Positioning – If the angle is wrong or the ladder isn't secured, it becomes unstable the moment you climb. Leaning ladders against soft soil, loose boards, tree trunks, or machinery creates a high risk of tipping or sliding backward.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Staying safe on a ladder in agricultural work means slowing down, choosing the right gear, and following a few smart habits every time. Whether you're pruning, harvesting, repairing, or checking equipment, treat ladders with respect – they're tools, not shortcuts. Use this checklist to keep yourself on solid ground, even when you're working at height.

LADDER SAFETY FOR AGRICULTURE – PROTECTION CHECKLIST

Rails and Frame

□ Check both side rails for cracks, bends, splinters, or soft spots.

□ Make sure the rails are straight and not twisted.

□ Inspect rail end caps (if present) to ensure they are secure.

Rungs and Steps

□ Inspect each rung for looseness, dents, warping, or missing grip surfaces.

□ Confirm rung-to-rail connections are tight with no movement.

□ Check for worn or slippery treads on steps.

Feet and Base

□ Verify ladder feet are not worn, cracked, or missing rubber pads.

□ Ensure feet make full contact with the ground.

□ Look for dirt, mud, or debris that could affect stability.

Locks, Hinges, and Hardware

□ Confirm spreaders and locking mechanisms open and lock smoothly.

□ Ensure no rivets, bolts, or fasteners are missing or loose.

□ Check for any instability when gently pressing the ladder from side to side.

Material Condition

□ Look for corrosion, rust, or chemical damage on metal ladders.

□ Check for rot, swelling, or insect damage on wooden ladders.

□ Inspect fiberglass ladders for UV fading, cracks, or fibers sticking out.

Top Cap and Accessories

- ☐ Make sure the top cap is secure and not cracked.
- ☐ Inspect any attached shelves or tool trays for stability.

FINAL WORD

Ladders make farm work faster, but they also introduce risks that can be avoided with the right habits. Taking a minute to check the ladder, choose solid ground, and climb the right way is far easier than dealing with the pain, lost time, or long recovery that follows a fall.
