Playing Safe on the Farm



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WHAT’S AT STAKE?

Children who live on farms are at greater risk of injury and death than their parents or other farm workers.

Young children in particular need a safe play area of their own where there are no major hazards, so fencing part of the yard close to the house for your child’s use is important. Older children can be taught about farm safety, but still need to be supervised at all times. Most importantly, children learn by imitation. If you practice and value farm safety, so will your child.

WHAT’S THE DANGER?

GENERAL

Children under-15 age group is one of the most vulnerable to work-related farm accidents. Children visiting farms account for 25 per cent of all child deaths on farms.

Common hazards include drowning in dams, tanks and creeks, injury from guns or chemicals, accidents with tractors, quad bikes, motorbikes, machinery, animals and falls from heights. The main risk factors are inexperience with equipment or animals, and attempting to perform a task that is beyond their abilities, farm chores and open bodies of water.

Children can get hurt because they don’t sense danger or know how to stay away from hazards. As children grow and develop, they get stronger and learn to think things through better. Your child should not do any activity that he or she is not physically and developmentally ready for, even if raised on a farm.

Key Points

- Children are not small adults and perceive things differently to adults.
- Children have less strength, co-ordination and understanding of situations than adults.
- Children want to explore, try new things, and push boundaries.
- It’s fun to play on a farm, but farms are not playgrounds.

THE MAIN RISKS FOR CHILDREN

- **Animals** can be unpredictable, especially if startled or protecting their young.
- Children lack the judgement to deal with animals safely and don’t have the size, speed and dexterity to get out of the way safely. Children can also get animal diseases like leptospirosis, ringworm and campylobacter.
- Children lack the judgement, body weight and strength to handle full-sized farm vehicles like **quad bikes**.
- Younger children need to understand that they can be injured when playing on or near **tractors**. Older children are likely to be injured as passengers or while carrying out farm tasks.
- Have a map of all the **water** hazards on the property – rivers, creeks, troughs, dips, tanks, dams and ponds. Water can also burn, especially in the dairy shed where hot water is used at scalding temperatures.
- All farm **machinery** has the potential to harm – even guards could have holes small enough for children’s hands to get through.
- It is the adult’s responsibility to make sure dangerous **agri-chemicals** are stored safely and out of reach of children.

STATISTICS

Children and adolescents account for about 20 percent of all farm fatalities, comprising a higher proportion of the total number of nonfatal farm injuries (National Committee for Childhood Injury Prevention, 1996). It is estimated that 27,000 children under the age of 20 who live on farms and ranches are seriously injured each year. When children who visit or work on non-family farms are included, the total annual injury toll is estimated to be 100,000. (About 800,000 children live in the households of hired farm workers and may work on farms with parents.) In Pennsylvania, 210 farm-related fatalities occurred between 1990 and 1994. Approximately 50 percent of these fatalities were classified as occupational fatalities, mainly due to farm production work. The other deaths were not occupational (i.e., not directly caused by farm production work). Instead, these fatalities were due to the farm “lifestyle” (i.e., leisure-related drownings, deaths of children who were playing in barns, etc.) or related to agricultural services, forestry, fishing, hunting, or trapping.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

FARM EMERGENCY PLAN

The most important feature of child safety on the farm is in the **Plan**

Suggestions include:

- Ensure easy access to a suitable and well-stocked first aid kit.

- Make sure at least one person on the farm is trained in first aid.
- Keep emergency numbers and correct addresses next to the telephone.
- Plan routes to the nearest hospital with an emergency department.
- Regularly talk through your emergency plan with your family and other workers.
- Make sure your children understand what to do in an emergency.

Farm Risk Assessment-Children

It is recommended that you walk through your farm and assess every area according to the age and ability of your child. Try to see things from your child's point of view. What may seem like a dull workspace to you might seem to your child like an ideal spot for play.

Educate your children about what the hazards are and find ways to child-proof these potentially dangerous areas, using fences and locks and removing keys to machinery and vehicles.

GENERAL FARM SAFETY SUGGESTIONS FOR CHILDREN

It is impossible to make your farm completely safe, but you can minimize the risks. General safety suggestions include:

- Fence off a safe play area close to the house.
- Fence off all water sources such as dams, ponds, septic tanks, sheep dips, pools and creeks.
- Make sure that hazardous areas are locked and inaccessible.
- Lock up chemicals and guns.
- Ensure electrical equipment and other dangerous materials are out of reach of children.
- Don't let your child ride on farm machinery, such as tractors and quad bikes.
- Ensure your child doesn't have access to any ladders and doesn't climb to heights (such as on hay stacks).
- Teach children about both the positive and dangerous aspects of livestock and farm animals.

FARM RULES FOR OLDER CHILDREN

Older children can help around the farm, but they still need to be supervised. Suggestions to encourage responsibility and caution in children include:

- Teach safety rules that apply to the different areas of the farm.
- Make sure your child understands that certain areas are out-of-bounds for them – for example silos, grain loading areas, farm machinery and animal pens.
- Be consistent, and if your child breaks the rules, firmly re-explain the hazards and consequences.

FARM SAFETY – LEAD BY EXAMPLE

- Children learn by imitation. A child is more likely to be safety conscious if you are. Make sure your child sees you performing tasks safely. Explain the potential for danger and how injury can be avoided. Lead by example:
- Don't let your child, or any other person, ride on farm machinery that

isn’t designed for passengers.
- Limit the use of motorbikes and quad bikes. Make sure your child has appropriate training if using these, and do not allow untrained visitors to use this equipment.
- Always use safety equipment, such as helmets, goggles and gloves, where necessary.
- Walk around operating machinery instead of stepping over it.
- Fit roll-over protection (ROPS) to your tractor.
- Switch off equipment before altering the settings.
- Refer to warning labels and follow directions.
- Let others know where you are going, what you’ll be doing and when you expect to return.
- Talk frequently to your child about the safety rules of the farm.
- Remove the keys from all farm vehicles when not in

CHORES ON THE FARM

Have your child do chores and activities that are appropriate for his or her age and stage of development. To prevent injury on a farm, make sure your child:

- is supervised
- is always in a safe place
- has the right training
- always wears the right safety gear
- does not operate farm machinery (e.g., tractors, ATVs) until 16 years old

If you show your child how to do a job, it is easier to learn. A responsible adult (who knows how to do the job) must always supervise until a child can do the job safely. You can reduce your supervision over time once a child can consistently do the task safely.

Before you ask your child to do chores on the farm, think about how old he or she is. North American Guidelines for Children’s Agricultural Tasks (NAGCAT) has suggestions for the right chores for children (7 to 16). Remember, all children are different.

To prevent injuries, think about your child’s size, strength, and endurance. Your child must not carry more than 10 to 15 percent of his or her body weight. Don’t let your child do anything with repetitive reaching up. Never let your child work until he or she is exhausted. Before deciding on your child’s chores, think about your child and these factors:

- attention span
- balance
- comfort with heights
- comfort with animals
- speed and reaction time
- side (peripheral) vision
- can use equipment
- allergies (e.g., insects)
- can be responsible
- can work independently
- hand/eye coordination
- takes risks (is impulsive)
- remembers details well

- is coordinated (can use both feet and both hands at the same time)
- knows about hazards and what to do
- Even a coordinated child or teen can be clumsy while having a growth

Conduct Effective Safety Audits

Another important way to promote safety with children is to conduct periodic safety audits of your farm and home. By targeting and correcting hazards, parents take a major step toward protecting their children from unnecessary tragedy. Farm safety inspection checklists and related information that can be used by parents and farm families for auditing purposes are available from county extension offices.

Children should be involved in the audit to increase their safety awareness and knowledge of injury prevention.

Think about past “close calls” or potential future situations that might cause injuries. Determine the factors that were or could be responsible for a near-miss and attempt to explain those factors to children who are mature enough to understand.

Practice good housekeeping. Be sure to safely store items that cause injuries, including tools, equipment, power cords, fence wire, and baler cord. Heavy objects such as tractor tires should not be propped against walls or fences because they could fall over and crush a child or adult. Always place the bottom rungs of fixed ladders out of reach of children or fit the ladders with barriers. Store portable ladders away from dangerous areas.

Don’t create new hazards when storing items. Haphazardly stacked lumber or poorly stacked cut logs can topple and kill a small child.

Pesticides and other toxic materials like dairy pipeline cleaner should be kept in a locked storage area. Also secure treated seed and fertilizer.

Place appropriate warning decals on tractors, machines, grain bins, silos, wagons, and any other potentially hazardous item. Explain the significance of these warning symbols to children.

Maintain safety zones around buildings and structures. Some structures are extremely dangerous places for children. Special fencing and barriers need to be placed around or over these structures so that children cannot enter them. **Dangerous areas** include:

Silos: These are particularly dangerous because of gases and running machinery during the filling and unloading of silage and grains.

Grain bins: The grain inside can turn into “quicksand,” especially during bottom unloading. Many children have drowned in bins being unloaded.

Farm ponds and manure pits: These are potential drowning sites with gasses and low oxygen hazards. Always make sure that ponds and pits are inaccessible to children!

Barn hay-drop openings: Fractured skulls and deaths have been caused by falls through a hay-drop opening during play.

Children should be able to reach feed and water containers from outside an animal's pen or corral. Regularly make time for family safety briefings that include instructions for handling and reporting emergencies.

SIX SAFETY SUBJECTS

1. Safe Play

Make sure your child has a safe area to play in with protected boundaries (e.g., fence). Put up barriers to keep your child away from hazards (e.g., swamps, dugouts, septic tanks, wells, lakes, grain bins, sand pits). Make sure there is good air flow in root cellars to avoid suffocation hazards. Mark electric fences with a flag or sign and teach your child to stay away from these areas. Make sure your child doesn't play on or near farm machinery.

2. Farm Equipment

Keep farm equipment safe and stored in a locked shed. When not in use, make sure machinery always has the parking brake on and take the keys out of the ignition. When operating farm machinery, wear snug-fitting clothing, tie back long hair, and don't wear a scarf. Don't drink alcohol or use drugs when operating machinery. Keep your child out of grain wagons and grain storage areas. **Don't** carry passengers on farm equipment (even the back of a pick-up truck).

3. Firearms

The Canadian Pediatric Society states that firearms should not be kept in homes or environments where children and adolescents live or play. If you do keep firearms in your home, keep them in a locked storage case. Make sure they are not loaded and safety clips are on. Lock ammunition in a different storage case, away from firearms. Teach your child the dangers of firearms. **Don't** let your child handle firearms unless he or she is trained by a certified instructor.

4. Equestrian Safety

Have a regular routine to check and maintain horse riding equipment. When working with or riding a horse, make sure your child wears an approved equestrian helmet. While riding, make sure your child is **supervised** by an experienced rider.

5. Animal Safety

Stay with and supervise your child when he or she enters an animal pen.

Teach your child to treat livestock with respect and not to startle animals.

6. Fire Safety

If you burn anything in a rural area, use a fire-safe container with a grate on top. **Only** responsible adults should oversee a burning fire.

When refueling machinery outside, do it away from open flames or lit smoking materials (e.g., cigarette).

KEEP THE WORKPLACE SAFE

On the farm, make sure the:

- machinery works well
- machinery and farm vehicles have safety features (e.g., guards and shields, rollover bars, seat belts)
- tools are the right size for the child doing the job (e.g., ladders, cutting tools, brooms)
- hot water tank is set at 49 °C or 120 °F or lower
- You can also prevent injuries on the farm by making sure you have:
- nonslip surfaces
- good indoor air flow
- places to wash hands
- no electrical hazards
- a safe, secure climbing structure
- barriers between animals and your child
- Your child needs to wear safety gear including a fitted respirator, work boots, eye protection, ear protection, gloves, snug-fitting clothes (e.g., pants, long-sleeved shirts), a tie for long hair, a helmet, and sunscreen.

When working on the farm, your child must have a way to call for help (e.g., cell phone) if needed. You must also have an emergency plan with a planned escape route.

When your child works, make sure he or she takes breaks and drinks lots of fluids.

FINAL TIPS FOR CHILD SAFETY ON THE FARM

- Walk around the farm with children and identify hazards together.
- Adult supervision is vital – for young children it must be close and active.
- Lead by example, for example always wear an approved helmet on a quad bike.
- Think about having safety fences around play areas, animal pens, work areas and water spots.
- Keep doors shut or locked so children can’t get in where they shouldn’t.
- Use safety guards on all machinery.
- Store dangerous agri-chemicals safely out of children’s reach.
- Remove keys from doors and vehicles. Never leave vehicles unattended with the motor running.
- Make sure it is safe to reverse farm vehicles. Walk around the vehicle and check that children are a safe distance away before starting the engine.
- Children should not ride on tractors, quad bikes or on the back of utes.
- Road safety on private and public roads is vital. Have children in car seats and seat belts when in cars, utes and trucks.
- Make sure children wear high-visibility clothing when out and about on farm.
- Teach children to wash and dry their hands after touching animals.
- Cover tanks and wells with child restraint covers or fill in disused ones.
- Tie spare tractor wheels to walls or lie them flat so they can’t crush a child.
- Make sure children ride bikes that are appropriate for their age and height, and are in line with manufacturers’ specifications.
- If children are riding a smaller model farm bike, they need to wear an approved helmet and closed-in shoes. An adult should always supervise them.

- Teach children the dangers of speeding and uneven ground.
- Make sure children know what to do in an emergency: what to do, where to go and who to call. Teach children basic first aid.
- Make it a rule for older children to always say where they are going.
- Children do listen, understand, remember and apply rules over time. But things change so farm safety needs constant attention.
- The Health and Safety at Work (General Risk and Workplace Management) Regulations 2016 (the Regulations) require that a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that no worker aged less than 15 years is present in an area of work, or carries out work of a type that is likely to cause harm to their health and safety.

SUPERVISION! SUPERVISION! SUPERVISION!

Although performing a thorough safety inspection and Job Safety Analysis are important steps to prevent injuries and fatalities, appropriate supervision is still the best preventive measure. Small children must always be supervised. It is not enough to tell them to “stay away.” Young children want to be with their parents and often forget what they have been told when they see mom and dad working in the field or driving a tractor. Always remember that helping children learn is a slow process that requires patience and understanding—rules and instructions may have to be repeated each time a child performs a job or is in a potentially hazardous situation. Providing this kind of constant supervision and instruction is often difficult, though. Many farm parents hold jobs away from the farm, and there are times when parents must work to get the chores done. Accordingly, parents should anticipate the need for child care, determine how long that care will be needed, and make arrangements in advance.

As a child grows older, constant supervision becomes less necessary. However, providing supervision remains an important factor in encouraging smart, lasting, and safe work habits. Also, as children get older and are able to handle more substantial work, parents must be prepared to start them slowly, spending time to properly train and enforce safety rules.

FINAL WORD

Conclusion

Farming is not just an occupation but a way of life. A very high value is placed upon the traditions that farming families have created and maintained throughout many generations. Perhaps someday farming will become a less dangerous occupation rather than being one of the most dangerous.

Farm parent want to continue the rural tradition with children and keep them safe.

- It is important to realize that not all children are the same. Children of the same age have differences in size, physical ability, cognitive ability, and communication abilities. This is why adequate supervision is a crucial.