

Data shows more needs to be done to keep kids safe on the farm



Byline: Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

We can all agree that farm safety is more prominent now than a few decades ago.

But while Canadian farms are becoming safer, hazards still exist, and it's clear that there is still a long way to go with farm safety – particularly when it comes to children and youth.

The latest Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting (CAIR) data highlights some concerning statistics about child and youth deaths related to agriculture. CAIR is the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association's national surveillance program coordinated by the Injury Prevention Centre at the University of Alberta.

According to CAIR data, from 1990 to 2020, a staggering 435 children and youth lost their lives due to agriculture-related incidents, with children ages one to four having the highest number of deaths of those under age 19.

Farms and ranches are not just workplaces but also areas where people live and play. As a result, while other industries see occupational injury victims almost exclusively in the 18- to 65-year-old range, children sadly account for a significant number of fatalities in agriculture.

What's contributing to so many agriculture-related fatalities among children and youth? According to the CAIR data, the majority (65%) of children and youth deaths were caused by machinery, and most of those incidents involved a tractor. Runovers accounted for 32% of child and youth deaths, followed by rollovers (15%) and drownings (11%). However, the second-largest category for mechanisms of injury – "other" – underscores the various hazards on the farm that can cause injury.

Unsurprisingly, the leading cause of death differs when looking at the unique age groups. The CAIR report indicates that runovers are the leading cause of fatal injury for children under the age of nine, followed by drownings. In contrast rollovers are the leading cause of death for youths aged 10 to 19.

Most of these victims (67%) were not working at the time of the tragic incident but were in the area of farm work. One in three (65%) of victims was the child of the owner/operator of the farm, with visiting child/youth representing 10% of victims, followed by hired workers at 9%.

It's important to keep in mind that these statistics are more than just numbers. They're a sobering remind of the need to protect the well-being of kids on the farm.

What can you do to keep kids safe on the farm? While farm kids are known for growing up quickly because of the environment they are brought up in, remember that they're still kids. So, ensure any tasks you give kids on the farm are age-appropriate. While kids might be living and playing on the farm, it's also a workplace with plenty of hazards. Take time to create a designated play area, put barriers where possible around areas kids shouldn't access (such as bodies of water or heights), and always provide adequate supervision.

Remember to discuss safety regularly with your kids, making it a routine part of conversations, and lead by example by demonstrating safe practices in your own actions.

Together, we can create a safer, more sustainable, and vibrant future for agriculture, and make these troubling statistics a thing of the past.

Kids FarmSafe Week is a new public awareness campaign hosted by the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association with the aim of promoting the safety and wellness of children and youth on Canadian farms. For its inaugural year, the campaign is taking place May 13-19, 2024 and is presented by BASF Canada Agricultural Solutions. More information can be found at www.kidsfarmsafe.ca.

The Canadian Agricultural Safety Association is a national, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the health and safety of farmers, their families and agricultural workers. CASA is funded in part by the Government of Canada under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal, provincial and territorial initiative. For more information, visit www.casa-acsa.ca, find us on Facebook or LinkedIn, or follow us on X @planfarmsafety.