

Protecting Children on the Farm: The North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks (NAGCAT)¹

Carol J. Lehtola and Charles M. Brown²

Ask yourself this question: If there was a simple way to make your child's life significantly safer, would you take a look at it? When the question is put like that, of course the answer is yes. This fact sheet is about simple ways to make your child safer.

How Many Children Are Injured on Farms?

An estimated 33,000 children incur farm-related injuries each year in the U.S. Over 100 of these children die as a result of their injuries. Most of these injuries result from the direct involvement of children in farm work, and the saddest part is — as most of us know — many of these injuries and deaths could have been prevented.

Children on farms often become involved in farm work based on factors such as their physical size, the sheer need for additional labor, what the parents did when they were children, or the insistence of the child. As a result, many children are injured because they are not physically, intellectually, or emotionally ready for specific tasks. Age is no guarantee; the majority of children injured on the farm are older adolescents, who, because of their

rapidly changing bodies can be much clumsier at 15 than at 12. Also, teenagers may feel they are more capable and less vulnerable, and therefore take more inappropriate risks. Armed with simple information such as this, parents can make better decisions about when and where children can work.

How Can We Make Farm Work Safer for Children?

Never underestimate the value of better information. Information is what makes farming practices in general more efficient and successful, and helps maximize farm earnings. Few farmers would give up the new varieties or cultural practices developed through research. Now researchers are giving insights to safer ways of working.

Greater safety means greater efficiency. That's not always obvious, but childhood death and injury on the farm is costing someone 3 billion dollars a year.

(1) These costs are incurred mostly by smaller farms and family farmers, where most farm work by children is done. Economic costs are no match for the suffering caused by the loss of a child, but it is one

1. This document is ABE296 (formerly AE296), one of a series of the Agricultural and Biological Engineering Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First published May 2000. Minor revision: August 2006. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. Carol J. Lehtola, Associate Professor and Extension Agricultural Safety Specialist; Charles M. Brown, Coordinator Information/Publication Services; Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville.

more reason to adopt safer practices before an incident happens.

About the Guidelines

The North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks were developed to provide parents and employers with better information. Unlike many other industries, there have never been safety standards for agricultural work. The Guidelines resulted from requests by farm parents and a 1996 initiative from the National Committee for Childhood Agricultural Injury Prevention.

Asking (or allowing) children to do work they are not ready for means work that is not properly done at the least and an injured, permanently disabled, or dead child at the worst. The Guidelines answer such questions as:

- How old should a child be to perform a particular task?
- How much and what kind of training are most helpful to children of a particular age?
- When can I leave a child alone to complete a task?
- What are the dangers to a child for a specific task?

The Guidelines look at agricultural tasks in terms of six factors: hazards, injury/disease concerns, recommended procedures, approximate age, level of adult supervision, and training required. Each Guideline is presented in the form of an attractive poster which parents and children can use to learn how to work more safely. The posters give information about:

- Adult responsibilities,
- Main hazards of the task,
- Proper safety equipment, and
- Evaluating the abilities, training needs and supervision level for the child.

Children enjoy having more information about their activities. These colorful materials are an

excellent way to teach them that safety is an essential part of every job, and to train them how to build safety practices into their work.

Currently, guidelines are available in seven categories of farm work: Animal Care, General Activities, Haying Operations, Implement Operations, Manual Labor, Specialty Production, and Tractor Fundamentals. For a complete list, visit the NAGCAT Web site: <www.nagcat.org>.

The Guidelines include:

Animal Care

1. Catching and holding a pig for treatment
2. Cleaning service alley
3. Feeding milk to calves
4. Feeding of haylage/corn silage/high moisture corn
5. Feeding square bales of hay to cows
6. Feeding square bales of hay to horses
7. Leading/grooming animals (dairy or beef)
8. Milking with a pipeline
9. Poultry housing and handling facilities
10. Working with large animals

General Activities

1. Using ATV for farm work
2. Cleaning calf hutches and pens
3. Cleaning grain bins
4. Composting operations
5. Irrigation -- installation, operation
6. Operating a skid steer loader
7. Operating farmstead equipment
8. Repairing fence

9. Running pressure washer
10. Using a tractor-mounted front-end loader

Haying Operations

1. Baling hay
2. Cutting hay with a pull-type mower/conditioner
3. Loading square bales onto the wagon
4. Moving round bales with a three-point hitch bale mover
5. Raking hay
6. Unloading hay/hauling load of hay from field

Implement Operations

1. Fieldwork with three-point implement
2. Fieldwork with PTO-implements
3. Fieldwork with remote hydraulics
4. Fieldwork with self-propelled equipment
5. Fieldwork with trailing implement
6. Planting small grains
7. Spreading solid manure
8. Unloading grain
9. Unloading silage into an upright silo
10. Using an auger wagon

Manual Labor

1. Bending
2. Climbing
3. Detasseling corn
4. Hand harvesting vegetables
5. Hand weeding
6. Harvesting strawberries

7. Harvesting tree fruit
8. Lifting
9. Picking rock
10. Pruning trees and vines

Specialty Production

1. Harvesting ginseng berries
2. Harvesting ginseng roots
3. Trimming Christmas trees
4. Riding setter to plant tobacco in field
5. Topping tobacco
6. Stripping tobacco
7. Harvesting tobacco
8. Working tobacco in the shed/house
9. Fieldwork with horses and trailed implements
10. Hitching/unhitching trailed implement to horses

Tractor Fundamentals

1. Tractor operation chart
2. Driving a tractor
3. Hitching/unhitching trailed equipment
4. Hitching/unhitching three-point implement
5. Connecting/disconnecting hydraulics
6. Connecting/disconnecting PTO

Sample Guidelines Content

The following information is presented in the Guideline "Hand-harvesting vegetables":

Adult Responsibilities

Adults need to make sure:

- Child has safe transport to field

- Re-entry standards are followed
- Work area has no hazards
- Child has no insect allergies
- Child wears long sleeve shirt, long pants, wide brim hat and sunglasses
- Break areas are provided away from work with bathrooms and water for drinking and washing hands
- Child has at least one ten-minute break every hour
- Child drinks a quart of fluids every hour

Main Hazards

- Sun can cause heat exhaustion
- Contact with chemicals can cause illness, now or later
- Repetitive motion can strain muscles and injure back and joints

Remember! (Recommended Safety Equipment)

- Non-skid shoes
- Good handwashing
- Gloves (may be leather or moisture resistant)

Can your child do this job?

Ability:

- Does the child have at least a 10-15 minute attention span? For example, can the child play a board game for 20 minutes?

Yes.

No. STOP! Children who work beyond their attention span are easily distracted and more likely to be injured.

- [Several other questions follow in the Ability section.]

Training:

- Has the child been trained to use cutting tools?

Yes.

No. STOP! Tools must be used safely to prevent injury.

- [Several other questions follow in the Training section.]

Supervision:

- Can an adult supervise as recommended?

Yes.

No. STOP! The right level of supervision is key to preventing injuries.

Supervision: What's the right amount?

Here are suggestions—but remember, it depends on the individual child.

- Age 7-9:

LIMIT job to 15 minutes

NO cutting tools

WATCH constantly

- Age 10-11:

LIMIT job to 20 minutes

NO cutting tools

WATCH nearly constantly

- Age 12-13:

WATCH constantly at first if the child uses cutting tools. When child shows he or she can do the job, **CHECK** every few minutes

- Age 14-15:

CHECK every few minutes. When the child shows he or she can do the job, **LEAVE** him or her for 15 to 30 minutes.

Additional Resources

Check with your county Extension office for the location of a Farm Safety Day Camp being held in your area.

For more information about children and farm safety, contact the following organizations:

- Florida AgSafe

Web: <http://www.flagsafe.ufl.edu>

Telephone: 352-392-1864, ext. 223

- North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks

Web: <http://www.nagcat.org>

- National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety

1000 North Oak Avenue, Marshfield, WI
54449

Telephone: 800-662-6900

Fax: 715-389-4999

Web:

<http://research.marshfieldclinic.org/children/>

- Farm Safety 4 Just Kids

P.O. Box 458

Earlham, Iowa 50072

Telephone: (515) 758-2827 or (800) 423-5437

Web: <http://www.fs4jk.org>

References

(1) Childhood Agricultural Injury Fact Sheet, Rural Injury Prevention Resource Center, Dec. 1995, National Farm Medicine Center, 1000 North Oak Avenue, Marshfield, WI 54449-5790.