



Protecting what matters: An interview with Farm Safety For Just Kids

Farm Safety For Just Kids is rooted in preventing farm tragedies like the one its founder, Marilyn Adams, experienced on an Iowa farm in 1986. Her 11-year-old son died in a grain harvesting accident.

Since then **Farm Safety For Just Kids** has advocated for preventing farm accidents for nearly 30 years. As part **National Farm Safety and Health Week** we sat down on the front porch with Education Director Shari Burgus to learn more about how families can make safety count for children on the farm.

What's one practical way for farm families to protect children on their farms?

One of the easiest things to do is to designate a safe play area, especially for younger kids. Agriculture is the only industry where the worksite can be mere feet from the home. It provides tremendous opportunity for kids but can be challenging.

Ideally the safe play area would be fenced off, but you can walk an imaginary boundary with kids to show them where they're allowed to play freely. Reinforce the idea that they must have an adult with them outside the boundary.

What is something farm owners can do to make sure their farms are safe for the children who come to visit?

Whether it's family or a field trip, have a plan for children who visit your farm. Think about the hazards on your farm from a child's perspective. Most children are very curious and will seek out things that look exciting, move fast, or move other things like livestock and farm equipment.

Right before you head out go over a few safety basics with children. Don't wait for them to ask—set boundaries and limitations up front. Have interesting options such as the apple tree full of apples, the kittens in the barn, or taking a pickup ride to the cattle pasture. Stick to the limitations you set so there are no arguments.

Many children want to help out with farm tasks as they grow up. What can parents do to determine the best work for children on the farm?

Age-appropriate chores are an important part of childhood. Taking into consideration that every child is mentally and physically different, even at the same age, can make things complicated. **The North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks** (NAGCAT) is a good place to start.

Youth lack experience and often training which makes them more susceptible to injuries. Youth often want their elders approval and may tell an employer he/she is more capable than they actually are. NAGCAT covers a variety

of farm tasks with a series of straightforward yes/no questions tailored to the child and the task. NAGCAT makes easier for parents to gauge whether their kids are ready for a new chore.

Should parents supervise children on the farm?

Always. It's that simple.

Children love the equipment on the farm such as tractors, combines, and ATVs. Can children ride with their parents?

Unfortunately, it's just not safe for kids to ride on equipment. It's just not worth the risk.

We realize this is a controversial approach to what has become a very beloved part of agriculture but we know the greatest percentage of fatalities among youth on farms involves machinery. A cab doesn't make farm equipment safer and a rollover protection system (ROPS) only protects the driver.

Farm safety—is it just for kids?

Absolutely not! Farm hazards are equal opportunity dangers. Kids are at risk because they don't understand the danger and lack physical strength, but adults are just as susceptible.

Farming and ranching is not easy, and adults feel the pressure during times like harvest. Often that results in cutting corners and skipping safety checks.

Lead by example. Slow down and remember that your kids—or grandkids—are always watching.

For more information

This article is part of a series of articles for **National Farm Safety & Health Week**, "Safety Counts: Protecting What Matters." Read the other articles in the series.

- Rural Roadway Safety: **Three ways for farmers and drivers to share rural roads.**
- Health: **Stay healthy during harvest with rest breaks.**
- Children: An **interview with Farm Safety For Just Kids Education Director Shari Burgus** about making safety count for children on the farm.
- Confined Spaces in Agriculture: **The habits of highly effective grain handlers.**
- Tractor Safety: **For farm equipment, it's one driver. No riders.**

For more tips on how to protect children on the farm, visit the **Educational Resources** section of Farm Safety for Just Kids.

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