

Farmers can Learn from Others Who Paid the Ultimate Price¹

Howard J. Doss²

Looking back just the past two years I have a list of Michigan agricultural related deaths that tell details that everyone connected with agriculture can learn from. If I look only at tractor related injuries resulting in death and those who were operating or riding on an agricultural tractor I have the following brief comments about what happened in 1992 and 1993:

"Tractor -- rear upset, pulling a stump"

"Extra rider fell off tractor..crushed by tractor tire"

"Tractor upset to the rear pulling a tree"

"Tractor rolled over on road pulling a load of lumber on wagon"

"Cut corner too short on road, rolled over in a ditch"

"Died trying to pull fence post with tractor..hit operator"

"Extra rider crushed in side roll over in a gravel pit area"

"Tractor operator was run over trying to start tractor from ground"

"Extra rider fell off tractor, struck by fail mower"

"Tractor slid off icy roadway and rolled over crushing operator"

"Extra rider fell off and struck by field mower"

"Tractor side roll over, operator found in roadway ditch under tractor"

These situations are real and did happen to Michigan farmers and others who were riding on agricultural tractors. My condolences to those who recognize a friend or relative in the above listing. Yes, most readers understand each of the situations which caused the accident because they likely have taken the same risks, but the outcome wasn't as tragic.

Readers might make the mistake of saying that it can't happen to them because they are careful, it only happens to the other guy. But the facts show that a tractor accident can happen to anyone, evaluating risks and being prepared in the event of an accident is the key to safe tractor operation.

- Never take a risk that you know you shouldn't! This includes taking extra riders on the tractor, even for just a short drive; using a tractor for a job where a bulldozer is needed, such as pulling stumps or large rocks; etc. If you feel there is a risk involved in a task, then there likely is and other options should be considered.
- Remember, accidents do happen, even to the safest tractor operator. To reduce the risk to yourself, take necessary precautions. Make sure your tractor has a roll over protective structure (ROPS) and a seat belt.

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2. Howard J. Doss, Safety Leader, Agricultural Engineering Department, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1323.

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FALL INTRODUCTION SET FOR FARM-FOR-LIFE SAFETY SELF EVALUATION SHEETS

A new approach to helping farmers evaluate and reduce the health and safety risks they take on the farm is in the final stages of development. This new series, *Farm-For-Life* (FFL) takes a proactive approach to educating and encouraging farmers to examine the potential hazards on their farms and in their management practices.

FFL takes the same type of approach on encouraging farmers to adopt safe management practices as the successful "Farm-A-Syst" project took on helping farmers with surface and ground water protection. Education is stressed in the publications and farmers are supplied with evaluation methods to point out safer ways to do a task.

Unlike a simple checklist, which only provides the farmer with a "yes" or "no" response to a potential hazard, FFL takes farmers on a "walking tour" of their operation and helps them to critically examine their operation and practices.

Farmers then have the opportunity to rank themselves to determine an overall safety factor for an individual task and are provided with information about safer options.

This proactive approach of self-education by farmers, providing them with safety options, and encouraging them to adopt safer practices will have a greater impact than simply answering a "yes" or "no" questionnaire. It is felt that this approach, where the farmer does his or her evaluation instead of an insurance company or a state or federal agency, will be less intimidating and more effective because the farmer is allowed to take the decision that best fits the situation.

What do you think about this option for risk reduction on the farm? If you would like to try the first topic in the new Farm-For-Life series, send your name and address to the above address. Final drafts of the first five FFL fact and work sheets are expected by late summer or early fall. Topics covered in the first five are:

- Tractor Safety
- Grain Bin Safety
- Farm Equipment Safety
- Machine Shop and Farm Building Safety
- General Health of the Farmer and Family Members

The *Farm-For-Life* series is produced by the Michigan Agricultural Health Promotion Project in the Agricultural Engineering Department and is funded by a competitive grant from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health.