

Can You Childproof the Farm?

By Amanda Erichsen 

There are plenty of resources available to keep your children safe on the farm

“Children and youth are vulnerable to many of the same hazards as adults who live or work on farms and ranches, but they are far less capable of understanding those hazards,” said Karen Funkenbusch, director of Ag Health and Safety and Missouri AgrAbility Project in the Division of Food Systems and Bioengineering and the Department of Agricultural Systems Management Program.

While parents cannot completely childproof a farm or ranch, they do need to make it as safe as possible, Funkenbusch added.

According to Toby Woodson, program coordinator for the Arkansas AgrAbility Project, examples of common hazards on the farm for those 12-years of age and younger include, entrapment from feet-first entry into small openings, equipment tipping over and lawnmowers. For young person’s 13-years and older, examples of common hazards on the farm include, tractors and machinery, motor vehicles and ATVs (no helmets or seatbelts), and grain entrapments.

“Parents and family members can set and enforce safe limits and can be excellent role models for children by following safe farm practices,” Funkenbusch said.

Precautions for children 10 years and younger:

- Designated play areas, which have physical boundaries to keep them from reaching unsafe areas
- Adequate supervision
- Strong barriers between livestock
- Age-appropriate play equipment

Precautions for children 13 years and older:

- Proper licensing and driver’s education if operating a motor vehicle
- Helmets when operating ATVs
- Hearing protection around loud machinery and fire arms
- Eyewear protection

“I feel compelled to point out that women and young girls often do not receive either formal or informal education in regards to safety issues on the farm and ranch,” Woodson said. “However, the top three injuries and fatalities for this group are run-overs (during hitching and unhitching), livestock and respiratory disease.”

“By knowing farm safety rules, you can protect yourself, your friends and family on the farm,” Funkenbusch said. “The best safeguard against farm injuries is for parents to understand the development of their children and to provide a safe environment for them.”

Equipment Safety Precautions

- Children should not operate or ride on machinery until they complete safety training.
- Children should not play with idle machinery.
- Equipment that might fall, such as the buckets on front-end loaders, should be left in the down position.
- When parked, self-propelled machinery should be locked and keys removed from the ignition. A tractor PTO should be in

neutral when not in use.

- Know where children are whenever operating machinery.
- Children should ONLY operate an age-appropriate ATV and wear an approved helmet.

Animal Safety Precautions

- When around farm animals, children should remain calm, move slowly, avoid making sudden jerks or movements, and always approach them from the front so they can see what you are doing.
- Children should not scream or run around animals, because it will upset the animals.
- Children should ask an adult before they approach an animal.
- Children should wear a helmet and other protective gear when riding a horse.

The Department of Agriculture reports there are 2.2 million farms in the U.S., with an estimated 1 million children living on these farms. According to Blueprint for Protecting Children in Agriculture: The 2012 National Action Plan, in 2009, an estimated 15,000 nonfatal injuries occurred to children.

“Prevention includes preparation,” Funkenbusch said. “Teach children what to do in an emergency. Even a 3-year-old can press a button on a programmed telephone. Since most children under age 8 are not good readers of unfamiliar words, use symbols on your emergency telephone list.”

Use the following resources to find safety information and programming for your family.

- Missouri: The Seasons of Safety Farm & Rural Health and Safety Program at the University of Missouri Extension, visit <http://agrability.missouri.edu/ruralsafety/index1.asp>.
- The Missouri AgrAbility Project, visit <http://agrability.missouri.edu/>.
- Farm Safety For Just Kids, call 1-800-423-5437.