

Helping Kids Do Farm Jobs Safely: Know Which Tasks Are Appropriate for Your Children

George Cook

Extension Maple Specialist, University of Vermont

Many injuries occur on farms because children are involved in farm work that exceeds their physical and mental abilities. As one father, a fourth generation farmer says, "Our sons help somewhat, when they can. You always have to consider age-appropriate tasks." His other job, as a farm safety and Emergency Medical Services instructor, serves as an acute reminder of the human tragedy behind these statistics:

- About 104 children die each year from agricultural injuries;
- Children younger than 16 years of age are victims of up to 20 percent of all farm fatalities in both the U.S. and Canada;
- Children who do not live on farms are victims of one-third to one-half of nonfatal childhood agricultural injuries.

For farm parents, there is a resource available to help match children's abilities with agricultural job requirements. How much weight can a 10-year-old safely lift? What type of machinery is a child capable of operating? Does your child have good eye-hand coordination? Can an adult supervise as recommended? Suggested parameters for these and other questions are included in the North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks (NAGCAT).

"We hope these guidelines will help promote a strong work ethic for young people by giving them safe and appropriate opportunities for work experience under adult supervision," says Barbara Lee, Ph.D. Dr.

Lee led the team of parents, specialists in both agricultural safety and child development, and other key partners from the U.S., Canada, and Mexico that developed the guidelines. This task was at the request of farm parents who wanted guidance in assigning appropriate tasks to children.

There were five youth advisors to this planning team. Says one 17-year-old participant, "It's a great start, and I'm very enthused. We need to take a stand on safety. The Guidelines can be another useful tool in preventing injuries on farms and raising awareness."

The guidelines cover 62 agricultural jobs focusing on the most common childhood farm jobs (like "feeding milk to calves"). Categories are Animal Care, Manual Labor, Haying Operations, Implement Operations, Specialty Production, Tractor Fundamentals, and General Activities.

The guidelines are based on a child's physical, mental, and emotional development rather than a child's age. "Kids develop at their own pace and are influenced by their environment," Lee said. "If we said a 10-year-old could do a certain job, we might put half of them at risk."

Each individual guideline includes a section on Adult Responsibilities, Main Hazards, Child's Ability, Supervision Required, Training To Do, and Remember - PPE required. These guidelines are colorful and easy to read with practical diagrams and descriptive pictures.

Being a parent always has been a balancing act. Farm parents, in particular, face unique challenges. These guidelines can help them offer their children a

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chance to develop a safe work ethic and gain valuable, lifelong experience.

These guidelines, developed for parents, are recommendations, not mandates. Like recommendations on children's toys and games, the guidelines serve as a point of reference that require assessment and decision making by adults. Says Lee; "We help them make informed choices about activities their children do. Our top priority always comes back to children, a child's first 'job' should be to grow up healthy, happy, and strong."

A new, user-friendly Web site, www.nagcat.org, offers complete information about the guidelines. A professional resource manual and parent resources are available for purchase from Gempler's safety supply company, 800-282-8473 or www.gemplers.com/nagcat.htm. While University of Vermont Extension does not recommend one company over another, this is the only source for these guidelines, at this time.

Reference credits given to Cheryl Tevis, *Successful Farming*, May-June 1999.

