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What it means to be safe on the farm

*Prepared by CASA for Grainews
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Take another sip of chocolate milk and think back to those good old days when you were a kid on the farm — when you stole eggs from the happy hens, rode with dad on the tractor and broke up bales of hay for the cows. What do you remember most? You were definitely not being safe all the time but then as a young kid, that probably never occurred to you. Right?

Margaret Friesen wondered if today's young kids are any different. Do preschoolers know what it means to be safe on the farm? Friesen is a researcher and professor in the department of occupational therapy at the University of Manitoba. Last year, she received a grant from the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association's CASHP program to study "Children's perspective on farm safety."

Margaret knew that research shows children living on farms are exposed to many dangers in their environment — through play activities and while accompanying adults in their work on the farm. In fact, the incidence of fatal injuries to children, aged one to six years, living on Canadian farms is nearly twice that of the general population.

The rate of injuries and fatalities involving young children decreased somewhat from 1990 to 2005, but numbers have not dropped substantially in the past decade. Friesen wondered if what kids think is safe or unsafe would help safety professionals come up with better ideas to protect kids on the farm. She also wanted to understand family values and beliefs concerning the management of children's safety on the family farm.

She and her team asked seven children, aged five and six (four boys and three girls) and their families to take part in the study. The participants lived on family farms in B.C., Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The children were asked to take digital photos of safe and unsafe situations on the family farm. Parents participated in the photo surveys and in the discussions that followed.

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Farm Safety Tips

- Keep stacks of hay and hay bales away from power lines so you don't have to worry about electrical incidents with loading equipment.
- The best way to deal with any emergency is to be prepared. Always have first aid kits and fire extinguishers handy in every vehicle and building on the farm. Have workers trained in first aid and post emergency numbers and land locations in prominent areas.
- Working with animals can be hazardous. Know the behavior of the animal you're working with to anticipate their actions. Make sure fencing and corrals are in good condition and replace broken or damaged sections immediately.
- Make sure your farm workshop is organized. It should have a designated, secure place for items so nothing falls. Ensure wiring, power cords, plugs and switches are in good condition and that electrical systems have the capacity to handle all loads. A safe workshop is an efficient workshop.
- Take every possible step to reduce the risk of fire at your fuel storage area. Position tanks at least 30 meters from any buildings. Clean up minor spills and keep the fuel storage area free of tall vegetation and debris. Be sure to ground all above-ground fuel tanks with a grounding rod and install quick shut-off valves.

Sharps: a pointed subject

With lambing, foaling and calving season right around the corner, it's time to think about safe handling of sharps.

"Sharps" is the universal term used for items like needles, scalpel blades or broken glass from medicine bottles. In 2009, hypodermic needles with syringes accounted for 32 per cent of the farm tool injuries reported in Alberta. Needles surpassed knives (23 per cent), grinders (16 per cent), cutting torches (four per cent), pitch forks (four per cent) and chain-saws (two per cent), making them the most common hand tool causing injury.

While the pin-prick alone might not be all that scary, what's on the 'sharp' may be more cause for concern. Bodily fluids, blood and residual pharmaceuticals are often present

on these items which could easily introduce infection, toxins or disease into your body. Even if the substance on the needle doesn't directly harm you, the puncture in your skin could leave you susceptible to pathogens from other sources.

The Alberta Farm Safety Program recently published information on handling agricultural sharps called *What's the Point*. The booklet contains easy ideas to begin a sharps safety program on your own farm. Here are some examples:

1. Establish a management system for your sharps
 - Post the Poison Centre's phone number in obvious locations. It is **1-800-332-1414**.
 - Use thick, rigid containers for sharps disposal and use them

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Most farmers work safe everyday

By Diane Wreford, CASA

Most of us want to do the right thing. And most of us do it. Including farmers.

Take a look at the numbers from the 2008 farm safety report card gleaned from Farm Credit Canada's online survey of Canadian farmers.

It turns out that three out of four Canadian farmers replace guards on machinery such as augers and PTOs. Seventy-nine per cent of them train new workers in good safety practices. Eighty-nine per cent handle equipment safely and 93 per cent work hard to keep their kids safe on the farm.

Most farmers incorporate good safety practices into their work every day. That's what the numbers say. They paint a positive picture of safety habits on most Canadian farms. Yet those same farmers told the same

surveyors that while safety is a priority on their farms, they don't believe most farmers pay enough attention to it!

Their general perception of farmers is that old habits, lack of time and high costs of safety modifications prevent most farmers from paying enough attention to good safety practices. Most farmers who replied to this survey thought most farmers take safety shortcuts to get the job done.

But the survey results clearly show that most farmers do the right farm safety thing. They may not have a detailed safety plan and they admit to working too long when they're too tired, but most of them practise good farm safety. They're farm safe. That's something to celebrate.

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When it's not just a funk

Suicide is a leading cause of death in Alberta. One in four Albertans have been affected by suicidal behaviour and/or death by suicide. Talking about the problem of suicidal behaviour in our communities will not cause it to happen. Increased awareness of the risk factors involved and how to help others to get help is one strategy for prevention.

The Suicide Prevention Resource Centre developed the Men at Risk Program in 1999 to address the problem of suicide in men. It is now being delivered in the Camrose, Lloydminster and in the Peace Country areas of Alberta.

More than 450 people die from suicide in Alberta every year, claiming more lives than motor vehicle fatalities. Men are at least four times more likely to die by suicide than women.

Men at Risk is a suicide prevention initiative program targeted to adult men working in trades, industry and agriculture and those who interact with them. This includes men and women such as spouses, family, friends, co-workers, neighbors and advisors.

Through workplace meetings and community presentations, Men at Risk delivers information and ideas for healthy ways of coping and what to do with someone at risk for depression and suicide. Workplace based, community and provincial sources for getting help are also promoted.

The unique feature of the Men at Risk presentations is that a volunteer male Facilitator shares his personal story about stress, depression or risk for suicide. The Facilitator also talks about how and where he got help. The volunteer's story sends a personal message from one man to other men that it is okay to get help when needed.

How does depression affect men?

Depression affects men and women in many similar ways but many men will try to hide or deny their depression. Men have been socialized to be strong, to be in control and if they are having difficulties to just "cowboy up". Often a woman will talk to someone or seek help, a man doesn't want to be seen as weak or unable to solve his own problems. Men tend to avoid seeking help and often try to find other ways to deal with stress and depression. Men need to understand that depression is an illness, not a weakness.

How and why is it different than in women?

One way of describing the difference is that women get sad and men get mad. For example, a woman who feels down, helpless, worthless, hopeless or guilty will probably talk to a friend or visit her healthcare provider.

According to a 2007 literature review done by the Alberta Mental Health Board for Men at Risk, men may display irritability, body pain and cognitive difficulties. Other symptoms may include reduced ability to cope with stress, anti-social behaviour, low impulse control, abuse and anger.

A man with depression also may:

- Deny that they might have a problem.
- Try to mask the problem by turning to alcohol or other substances
- Throw himself into work as an attempt to avoid dealing with the issue.
- Act out by behaving aggressively or doing something dangerous or self-destructive.

Unfortunately, these behaviours make it harder for men to get diag-



nosed and treated and can actually make the depression worse.

What are signs and symptoms of depression in men?

- General aches and pains, such as headache, backache, blurred vision, indigestion.
- Withdrawal from people.
- Loss of interest or enjoyment in activities
- Change in sleeping patterns – sleeping more than usual or less
- Appetite changes
- Decreased ability to make decisions or concentrate
- Difficulty completing daily tasks, trouble finishing projects
- Feeling worthless, hopeless or helpless
- Feeling tired and worn down
- Thoughts of death or suicide

As devastating as depression can be, the good news is that in most cases it's treatable. If you experience any of the above symptoms for more than two weeks, or if you feel that any of these symptoms are interfering with your life, see a physician right away. Not getting the help you need will only make the problem worse for you and those around you.

What are ways men can get help?

- Realize that you are not alone, that depression is a common condition. If you had a heart problem, you wouldn't resist seeing a specialist. Mental health issues are no different.
- Take action; talk to someone you trust; your spouse, a family member, or a close friend.
- Eliminate alcohol or drugs, get enough sleep, and find an exercise or activity that helps you relax.
- Learn more about managing stress and depression.
- Book a complete check up with a physician.
- If you have an employee assistance program through work, give the EAP a call. The contact is 100% confidential.
- Check out the list of contact numbers and resources in this article.

How can others help?

- If someone close to you is experiencing more than two or three of the symptoms listed above and is not taking active steps to get help or seek treatment, your friend or loved one needs you.
- The most important thing you can do is to be understanding and supportive. Talk with him about what he's feeling and remind him that depression is treatable and doesn't mean he's weak or flawed in any way. Encourage him to go out for a walk with you, or to participate in an activity that he used to enjoy.
- Comments like "snap out of it" or "get over it" are not helpful. One of the major symptoms of depression is lack of energy and motivation. Your support and gentle pushing could be enough to get the man in your life on the path toward recovery.

- If you feel he needs more help than you can provide, help him get what he needs. You may have to take the initiative and make medical appointments for him. Go with him if he is unwilling or unable to do it himself. Most important, be patient. Recovering from depression will take some time.
- Be sure to take care of yourself. Depression can spill over into the lives of everyone around the individual. Caring for a depressed person requires love, commitment, and patience. And you can't be an effective caregiver if you're slipping into depression yourself.

Recognize the early signs of stress, depression and risks for suicide and get help. Learn what to say and do with someone at risk.

Contact numbers and resources:

AHS Mental Health Services – check your phone book or online <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/services.asp?pid=styp&type=25>

Physician or Health Care provider

Men's Support Groups

Alberta Health Link (24/7) 1-866-408-5465

Mental Health Help Line (24/7)..... 1-877-303-2642

AHS Addictions Help Line (24/7) .. 1-866-332-2322

Contacts for the Men at Risk Program:

Sandra Loades, Men at Risk – Camrose and Area – Phone (780) 679-1241

Neil Harris, Men at Risk – Lloydminster and Area – Phone (306) 825-5523

Barbara Campbell, Men at Risk – Grande Prairie Area - Phone (780) 539-0210

Online Resources:

In Crisis Now – www.metanoia.org

DepNet – <http://depnet.ca>

Beyond Blue – www.beyondblue.org.au

Blue Pages – <http://bluepages.anu.edu.au>

Mood Gym – <http://moodgym.anu.edu.au>

Canadian Mental Health Association – <http://www.cmha.ca>

Information on Seasonal Affective Disorder - http://cmha.ca/bins/content_page.asp?cid=3-86-93&lang=1

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health – <http://www.camh.net>

Government and industry work together to improve farm safety

A new advisory council, including members from industry and government, will be formed to work together on ways to reduce injuries on farms and ranches.

A Farm Safety Advisory Council, co-chaired by government and industry, will be formed in response to recommendations from industry stakeholder consultations. The Council will advise the government on how to enhance farm safety education and training.

“This Council will bring industry and government together to find ways to reduce farm injuries without increasing the regulatory and financial burden on our producers,” said Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Jack Hayden. “We need to work together to find solutions.”

In 2009 and 2010, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development and

Employment and Immigration consulted with more than 20 stakeholder groups to get their input on how to enhance the health and safety of people working on farms and ranches in Alberta. All of the major commodity groups were included in the consultation, representing approximately 50,000 producers. The consultation report, Stakeholder Consultation: Occupational Health and Safety, is available on the Agriculture and Rural Development website.

The co-chairs and Council members will be announced in the new year. Members will include representatives from farm safety organizations, municipalities, agricultural organizations, and farm workers. Individuals selected will have diverse backgrounds and a strong commitment to improving farm safety in Alberta.

Once established, the Council will

develop a joint industry-government action plan on farm safety, addressing the coordination and communication needs identified by industry in recent consultations. The plan will be submitted to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for government consideration.

For more information on Alberta’s Farm Safety Program, the Farm Safety Advisory Council, and the stakeholder consultation, please visit www.agriculture.alberta.ca/farm-safety.

**“Better a thousand times careful than once dead”
- Proverb**

What it means to be safe on the farm continued from page 1

Those discussions were revealing. Here’s a snapshot:

- Children consistently identified “standing in front of the truck” or “behind the semi,” and moving parts on farm equipment as unsafe. Not all children, however, indicated whether it was unsafe to stand behind or beside a moving vehicle, suggesting that they had a less-than-complete comprehension of the safety of this activity.
- Some children indicated that their play areas, including play structures and the garden or the areas surrounded by grass or near the house, were considered safe.
- Children described several unsafe places including roads,

dugouts or wells, areas with chemicals, gas tanks, old barns/sheds and areas with sharp objects, such as nails or metal that could cut them or cause infection.

- Children identified cows as both safe and unsafe. They were considered unsafe as they could kick or charge at people, or sometimes a “shocker was used” to control them. They were described as safe if behind a fence when touching them. Pigs were described by children as safe to look at, but unsafe because “they can bite,” and that “you should not put your hand out to them.”
- Children reported they were safe when they were with a parent or “big adult.” This was true for riding on a tractor, feeding

calves or being in a machine shop.

So what did their parents think about the findings? Friesen notes several parents expressed surprise that their kids remembered as much as they did from their teaching but they were also dismayed at what the child did not remember or when the child could not say why something was not safe.

The team expressed concern about the parents’ skills and priorities about how to teach both safety and promote family values about farming. They said it was clear that this area needs further exploration and study to come up with a “better” way to teach safe behaviours in a way that is acceptable or consistent with family values about farming.

each time – milk jugs are too thin.

2. Train handlers to practice safe sharps handling skills

- Pick the correct needle gauge for the job – needles do bend and break with pressure.
- Only recap the needle if you are not going to use it right away or plan to transport it to another location. We suggest you use the one-handed scoop method or a re-capping device.

3. Store sharps and medicines neatly and out of reach of children

- Proper labeling and storage is essential in improving efficiency and safety.

The Alberta Farm Safety Program also has warning labels available free of charge to help you clearly mark your storage area. Upon request, Alberta Farm Safety Coordinators can mail out the *What's the Point* informational booklet and labels.

Working with agricultural sharps can be a dangerous job! Implementing a sharps management system and practicing safe sharps handling skills can help you have a safe, poke-free, spring season.

For more information, visit the Alberta Farm Safety Program's website at www.agriculture.alberta.ca/farm-safety.



Use a thick, rigid container similar to this one for home made sharps disposal. Be sure no hands or fingers can be inserted into the lid of the container.

Most farmers work safe everyday continued from page 2

And yet, we know that over a hundred people – young, mature and in-between – will die on Canadian farms this year. So what's to be done? Would broadcasting to one and all the positive attitude and practice that is the community norm – the normal behavior, what most people do – in Canada's farming community help all farm families farm safely?

Perhaps it's worth a try. At least that's what Jeff Linkenbach and his team from Montana State University told about 150 participants in the Montana Summer Institute this July. Linkenbach is the director of MOST of US at the Centre for the Study of Health and Safety Culture at Montana State University. He's also the leader of a Positive Community Norms (PCN) team.

He says upfront that PCN is an evolving and growing field of research and practice, but he holds that challenging people's commonly held perceptions about their environment and the behavior of their peers will build the energy and willingness of the community to engage in healthier, safer behaviours.

For instance, you know that statistics of fatalities on the farm and photos of tractor rollovers are not enough to change your behavior and make you safer on the farm. It can't happen to you, right?

You'll be hearing and seeing more of this positive attitude in ag safety messaging throughout the country in the next few years. It's already in use in the UK where a video "Embrace Life" has gone viral – and has made a safety difference. Check it out at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-8PBx7isoM>.

Alberta Farm Safety Program

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