

Protecting children and young people on farms: advice for farmers

Summary

Many young people work on farms. But working in agriculture can be hazardous, especially for the young. Common farm hazards include dangerous machinery (especially tractors), working high up, the risk of suffocation in grain bins and silos, and exposure to harmful chemicals. Exposure in cold, wet or noisy conditions, physically demanding jobs, and working with animals can also cause problems. But there are things that can be done to control these hazards and risks effectively. By law, as an employer you must assess the risks to young people working on your farm, and put in place measures to protect them, including supplying protective equipment, providing training and supervision, and preventing young workers from carrying out certain tasks. The young people you employ can also help to keep themselves safe, by only using equipment that they have been taught how to use, following the instructions and training they have been given, and keeping informed about the risks they face and how they can be overcome.

Agriculture – hazardous for young and old

Agriculture is recognised as hazardous work, but it is also an industry where children below the minimum school-leaving age, and adolescents under 18, may work or help out. Often this is as family members, or perhaps as part of work experience or vocational training. We do not have accurate figures for deaths and injuries to young people on farms, as the accidents often do not get reported as work-related, especially if the accident is a family member. However, common causes of death and major injury are known to be:

- being struck by a moving vehicle;
- drowning and asphyxiation;
- being struck by a moving object;
- contact with machinery;
- fire;
- contact with animals, which can also lead to illness.

Other hazards and risks include:

- chemicals, pesticides and veterinary products;
- lifting loads that are too heavy for a young person;
- falls from heights;
- electricity.



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Age restrictions

Children under 13 must not work on farms. In some EU Member States children between 13 and the minimum school-leaving age (usually 16) may carry out simple farming tasks. For adolescents over the school-leaving age and under 18, there are still restrictions on exposure to hazards such as dangerous chemicals, noise, and extreme cold or heat, and work that is beyond their physical capacity or mental capacity. Many countries have specific prohibitions and restrictions on the use of machinery by under-18s, including tractor driving and use of other farm vehicles, according to age and level of training. This is for good reason, as, for example, children may not be strong enough to use machines, or they may be too small to reach peddles etc. Check your national legislation for the precise requirements, and follow them.

Assessing the risks

Remember that children only have a limited awareness of risks, and that they may be both physically and mentally immature. This includes your own children, even if they have grown up on a farm. As a farmer, you must carry out risk assessments in order to help you decide what protective measures you need to take to prevent work accidents. You should pay special attention to assessing the risks to children and young people on farms. You should cover not only work activities, but also other hazards that might prove attractive to youngsters. The risk assessment and prevention measures should cover the organisation of work activities according to age and level of instruction, training and supervision.

Assessment and prevention

You need to:

- identify farm hazards and assess the risks to children and young people;
- include both work tasks and risks to children wandering onto your farm;
- re-inspect your farm for hazards on a regular basis, and act on them immediately;
- take account of young people's inexperience, lack of maturity and lack of awareness of risks;
- assign age-appropriate tasks to children who are old enough and physically able to be involved in farm work;
- think twice about the tasks you give to young, inexperienced workers. If in doubt, don't ask them to carry them out;
- supervise young people at all times;
- give clear instructions to young people about what they can and cannot do;



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- provide proper information, instruction and continuous training;
- make sure all adults working on the farm know about the rules and procedures you have in place regarding children and young people, including age restrictions.

Checklist

- are hazardous work areas locked?
- are all barns, farm shops, chemical storage areas, animal pens etc. fitted with closures that can be locked or secured so that children cannot enter?
- are equipment guards in place?
- is equipment turned off, with hydraulics lowered and keys removed, before you leave it?
- are farm ponds, pits etc. fenced in such a way that they cannot be climbed?
- are precautions taken to make sure children cannot access ladders, e.g. to grain bins or hay or straw stacks?
- do you have clear rules prohibiting the carrying of children on farm vehicles?
- do workers know not to invite children into hazardous areas e.g. animal pens?
- are children kept away from moving farm vehicles?
- do you enforce rigorous hand washing before eating?

Some definitions

- a hazard is anything that could cause you harm, for example, a tractor
- a risk is the chance, high or low, that someone will be harmed; by the hazard, for example, being injured in an accident with a tractor
- risk control involves taking steps to reduce the chance, and /or the consequences, of a hazard causing harm., for example, never driving a tractor on a steep slope; wearing a seat belt; never carrying children on tractors.

Further information

- Resources on young people at work and safety:
<http://ew2006.osha.eu.int/>
and http://osha.europa.eu/good_practice/person/young_people/
- Factsheets 61 to 66 on young people covering legal requirements, and advice for employers, supervisors, parents and young people:
<http://osha.europa.eu/publications/factsheets/>



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More information on specific risks to young workers in agriculture:

- http://osha.europa.eu/good_practice/person/young_people/index_topic?topicpath=/good_practice/person/young_people/farm_work_work_with_animals
- http://osha.europa.eu/good_practice/sector/agriculture/index_topic
- http://osha.europa.eu/good_practice/sector/agriculture/index_atoz?letter=Y&kwpath=54161A/54201B/54241C/55841D&kwname=Young%20workers
- http://hwi.osha.europa.eu/ra_tools_checklists/agriculture_sector/publicationFolder_view

E-tool Youth in agriculture:

- <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/youth/agriculture/index.html>