

# Protecting the Future of Agriculture

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## **Introduction**

Growing up on a farm has its benefits: fresh air, wide open spaces, and working and playing together as a family. However, farming for kids can also be deadly. At a young age many farm children are often expected to handle tasks or chores beyond their maturity levels. As a result they do not have the judgment to recognize potentially dangerous situations. How can farm accidents involving children be prevented?

The purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which farm children are subjected to unsafe practices. Do children have adequate access to the information they need to be safe living in a farm environment? The information obtained from this research will be used to plan a future campaign promoting a *Farm Safety 4 Just Kids* program in a six county region in northwest Missouri.

This paper will provide background on why farm children are at risk regarding injuries and accidental deaths. It will also share the results and analyze a survey given to twenty-one farmers who are currently raising or have raised children on a farm. The survey asked parents to indicate whether they had ever subjected their children to several practices identified in the literature as being unsafe. In addition, they were to share if they felt farm safety was an important issue, if they had informed their children about dangers on the farm, if their children had ever attended a training session on farm safety, if they had ever had a child seriously injured in a farming accident, and finally to predict the number of children who are severely injured or who die each year in the United States as result of farm accidents.

## **Background**

Most farm children are expected to do various types of chores around their farms, and many experts will agree helping out on the farm can benefit many areas of their development. Howard J. Doss (1997), a safety leader from Michigan State University Extension Office, says, “Reasonable farm work can help build a child’s sense of self-worth, social responsibility and a strong work ethic...” (*Kids and Farm Safety a Must*, p. 1). However, when the tasks are beyond children’s physical or mental abilities, tragedy can occur. According to a report published by the Michigan State University Extension Office, about 300 hundred farm children die annually in the United States (1997). Most of these accidents should not occur. John Shutske (1993) states, “Farm accidents to children are not random. They are very predictable. And almost all of them can be prevented...” (p. 1).

Most parents are aware of potentially dangerous situations on the farm, and they do not intentionally subject their children to harm. However, kids are cheap labor and very available. Many times parents just do not think through the situation when they subject their children to tasks that are not appropriate to their physical, mental, and emotional maturity. Howard Doss (1997) asks, “We do not allow a child to drive a car until they are 16 because of the potential for an accident so why do we let them operate a tractor which is the most dangerous piece of equipment on the farm and which accounts for half of the deaths and injuries that occur on farms each year?” (*Kids and Farm Safety a Must*, p. 1). Parents also need to remember their children are kids! Even though

they may seem mature for their ages, peer pressure and poor judgment may cause them to make bad decisions because they do not realize the risks involved.

Farm parents are reminded often through newspaper and magazine articles the importance of farm child safety. Safety tips such as “[n]ever carry children on tractors or equipment,” “[e]quip all barns, farm shops, chemical storage areas, livestock pens, etc. with latches that can be locked or secured so children cannot enter,” and “[a]lways turn equipment off, lower hydraulics and remove keys before leaving equipment unattended,” are common (Brink, 2001). However, these tips are directed to parents. How well do they communicate the importance of farm safety to their children? When one takes into account the number of children seriously hurt or killed each year in farm related accidents, apparently parents talking to children about farm safety is not enough.

Farm safety training programs directed at children are gaining popularity across the United States. The curriculum is delivered in various ways through school classrooms, 4-H, FFA, and farm safety camps (Brink, 2001). One notable program is *Farm Safety 4 Just Kids* which was created by Marilyn Adams whose 11 year old son was killed in a farming accident. As a result of her son’s death, Mrs. Adams became aware of the disturbingly high numbers of farm children who are killed or injured each year in accidents that are preventable. Now as an advocate for farm child safety, she travels hundreds of miles each year promoting farm safety awareness. The organization is based in Earlham, Iowa, with chapters all over Iowa, in several states, and parts of Canada (*Farm Safety 4 Just Kids*, n.d.).

Since farm safety camps were a new idea to me, I decided to interview someone who was familiar with them. On June 28, 2003, I conducted a personal interview with

Adam Reinking, a hog farmer, from Kingsley, Iowa. As a child, Mr. Reinking had the opportunity to attend farm safety camps, and as an adult he has been a trainer in safety camps for children in Le Mars, Iowa. He is convinced the training sessions which involved children in hands-on safety training is effective in reducing farm related accidents and deaths.

After hearing Mr. Reinking's testimonial, it occurred to me that I had never heard of a farm safety camp for children in this area. I discovered from the *Farm Safety 4 Just Kids* website that a chapter exists just fifteen miles south of Maryville in Barnard, Missouri. However, I do not recall ever reading about or hearing about this organization. I feel the *Farm Safety 4 Just Kids* program in this area could be better promoted and this will be the objective of my campaign.

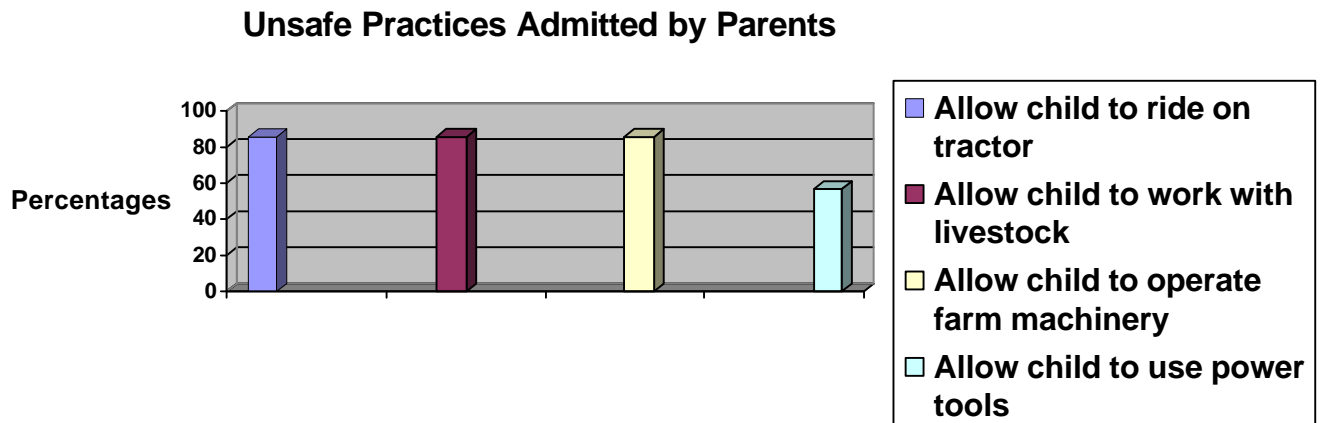
### **Methodology**

I chose the survey as the research method for my campaign, because I felt it would be the most practical way to obtain useful information in a short amount of time. I realize my sample was small and not very diverse and most people taking the survey were from Nodaway County, Missouri. However, for this campaign I felt I needed to target a specific audience. Since the study focused on farm child safety, I felt I needed to survey farm parents.

The purpose of the survey was to determine farm parents' views on child farm safety. I wanted to find out if farm parents valued farm safety on the one hand, but allowed their children to engage in unsafe farm practices on the other hand. I originally asked forty people to take the survey. However, nineteen people did not qualify because they had not raised children on a farm.

## Findings from the Research

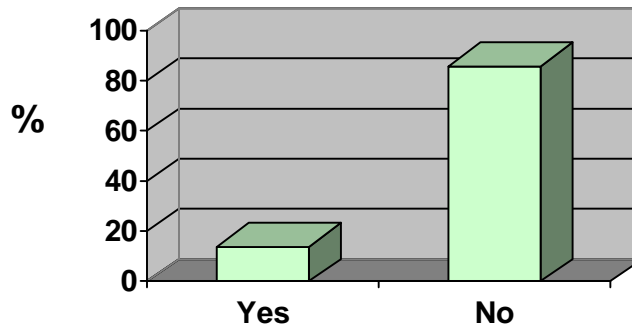
One hundred percent of the farm parents surveyed for this study agreed that farm safety was important and that they had informed their children of dangers of living on a farm. However, all of the parents surveyed admitted that at one time or another, they had subjected their children to practices identified as being unsafe by farm safety experts. These practices are noted in the chart below.



Seventy-one percent of the parents did provide protective equipment (masks, goggles, and gloves) when their children were working with equipment that necessitated it. Thankfully, none of the parents surveyed had had a child seriously injured in a farm accident.

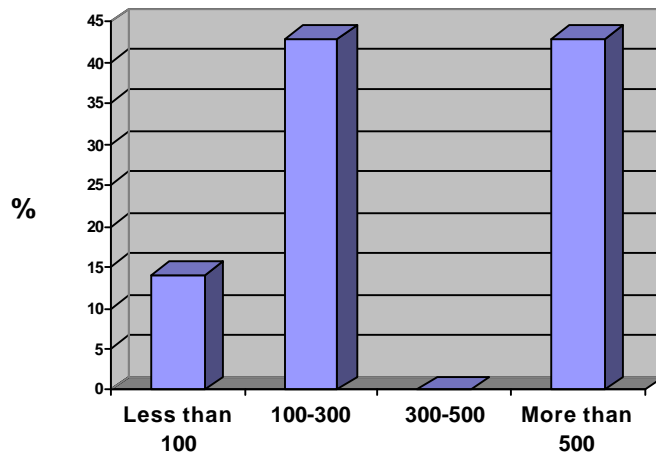
Only fourteen percent (or three) of the farm parents surveyed said that their children had attended a training session on farm safety. Two of the three respondents to this question were from Nodaway County while the other respondent was from Iowa. Looking at it another way, children from eighteen parents surveyed had not received additional instruction on farm safety outside of their homes. See chart on next page.

## Have your children ever attended a training session on farm safety?



An interesting statistic can be noted in the chart below. When asked to predict the number of children who are seriously injured or killed each year in the United States in farm related accidents, forty-three percent predicted between 100 and 300 and forty-three percent predicted between 300 and 500. These respondents were all from Nodaway County. However, the respondent from Iowa predicted less than 100. This farm parent sent his children to a farm safety camp. In the community where he lives, he reports there are relatively few child related farm accidents.

**Farm Children Fatality Predictions**



### **Discussion of Findings**

While farm parents do agree that farm safety is an important issue and they say they inform their children of farm hazards, they still allow their children to engage in unsafe practices. Given the high number of deaths and injuries of farm children each year from accidents that are preventable, it appears that additional training for farm children is necessary. The good news is that there are programs already developed to educate farm children on living, working and playing in a farm environment. However, these programs are not promoted very well in northwest Missouri. As a result of this research, I was introduced to the *Farm Safety 4 Just Kids* program. I intend to contact Melissa Price, Barnard, Missouri, for more information on the local Show-Me chapter. My objective will be to plan a campaign which will make the public more aware of the necessity for this program.

## **Summary**

Every year hundreds of children are hurt or killed working or playing on their families' farms. This study has made me much more aware of the need for programs which promote child farm safety. I look forward to learning more about the local chapter of the *Farm Safety 4 Just Kids* program and planning a campaign to promote it in the northwest Missouri region.

# Appendix

## Parent Farm Safety Survey

Please respond to the following questions by circling Yes or No.

- |  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. Have you ever allowed a child to ride on a tractor with you?  | Yes | No |
| 2. Do you keep poisons, chemicals, and fertilizers locked away?  | Yes | No |
| 3. Do your children help you work with or move livestock?  | Yes | No |
| 4. Do you allow your children to operate farm machinery?   | Yes | No |
| 5. Do you allow your children to use electric power tools?   | Yes | No |
| 6. Do you provide protective equipment (helmets, gloves, goggles, etc.) for your children when they are working with equipment that necessitates it? | Yes | No |

If so, what equipment do you provide?

- |  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| 7. Do you feel that farm safety is an important issue?   | Yes | No |
| 8. Have you informed your children about dangers on the farm?  | Yes | No |
| 9. Have your children ever attended a training session on farm safety?   | Yes | No |
| 10. Have you ever had a child seriously injured in a farm accident?  | Yes | No |
| 11. How many children do you think are severely injured or die each year in the United States as a result of farm accidents?<br>Less than 100 _____ 100-300_____ 300-500_____ More than 500_____ |     |    |

12. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_ What are their ages? \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for taking the time to respond to this survey.**

## **Interview with Adam Reinking**

**June 28, 2003**

1. What is the name of the safety camp you participated in?
2. Where it is located?
3. How often does the camp occur?
4. What was your position at the camp?
5. What age group did you work with?
6. What did the children learn?
7. What as the duration of the camp?
8. How was the camp taught?
9. What age group of children is the camp geared towards?
10. In your area of northwest Iowa, how many child-related deaths and accidents occur annually?

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