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Tractor rollovers hit close to home: ROPS rebate program can help

Nancy Esser knows agriculture. She grew up on a dairy farm, worked at the National Farm Medicine Center and now manages the University of Wisconsin Marshfield Agricultural Research Station.

But even Esser was not prepared for a spate of tractor rollovers impacting people close to her. The most recent incident involved a member of her research station farm staff, who rolled a tractor in September while off-duty. He was shaken up but otherwise OK. The incident was similar to that of Esser's father, who rolled his cabbed tractor earlier in the year.

After her employee's accident, Esser happened to log into Facebook and found a post from a friend with a similar situation. Her father-in-law drove a tractor into a manure pit.

"This is getting scary," Esser said.

Tractor overturns are the leading cause of farm-related deaths. That's why it's so important that each tractor have a rollover protective structure (ROPS).

The Wisconsin ROPS Rebate Program can help. Run by the National Farm Medicine Center with Auction of Champions donated funds, the program reimburses owners up to 70 percent (maximum of \$865) toward the total cost of purchasing, shipping and installing individual ROPS. The program has installed nearly 90 ROPS during its first 20 months.

A ROPS is an operator compartment structure (usually cab or rollbar) intended to protect farmers from injuries caused by overturns or rollovers. More than half the tractors in Wisconsin do not have this protection. ROPS did not become standard on U.S.-manufactured tractors until 1985. A ROPS, when used with a seatbelt, is 99 percent effective in preventing injury or death in the event of an overturn.

Esser thinks about the three recent rollovers and wonders: how many more rollovers have occurred in Wisconsin in the past few months?

“Years ago when I worked at the National Farm Medicine Center I decided to make a list off the top of my head of people I knew who had been killed or injured to the point where long-term physical-wellbeing had been altered,” Esser said. “I came up with 25 and I didn’t have to think too hard. If I did it again now the list would be longer.

“When you look at it that way, safety really becomes personal.”

Farmers can take advantage of the program by calling the ROPS Hotline (1-877-ROPS-R4U) or visiting the website at www.ropsr4u.com. ROPS Hotline staff research the ROPS options for the tractor makes and models and provide farmers with estimated costs, as well as sources for purchasing the ROPS. When the ROPS is installed on the tractor, the farmers send in their receipts and receive a rebate check in the mail. It's that easy!