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Contact: [Scott Heiberger](#), 715-389-7541

Agricultural Youth Work Guidelines help kids do the job safely

It is well known that work is good for youth, and that agriculture provides opportunities to develop work skills and gain an appreciation for the land. It is also well known that the farm worksite is dangerous, resulting in numerous injuries and fatalities to working youth.

Since 2001, there has been a steady decline in the number of non-fatal injuries to farm youth. Despite this, every 3 days in the United States, a youth dies in an agricultural incident. For youth younger than 16 working in agriculture, the number of fatal injuries is consistently higher than all other industries combined.

The National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety, working with a coalition of farm and ranch parents, and high-profile agricultural organizations, has released the first 20 in a set of 50 [Agricultural Youth Work Guidelines](#). The guidelines are designed to assist parents and supervisors in assigning appropriate tasks for youth who live or work on farms and ranches.

“Too many of these injuries and deaths are associated with youth performing agricultural work that does not match their development level/abilities,” said Marsha Salzwedel, project leader and youth agricultural safety specialist at the National Children's Center. “These guidelines help parents and supervisors determine if a youth is able to safely perform various farm tasks.”

A Steering Committee was formed to help guide the project. Participating organizations included farm and ranch parents, American Farm Bureau Federation, National FFA, 4-H, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Safety and Health Council of America, Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Penn State University, Utah State University, Progressive Agriculture Foundation, COUNTRY Financial, New York Center for Agricultural Medicine and Health, Midwest Organic and Sustainable Education Service, Cullars Farm, Wisconsin Young Farmer and Agriculturalists, and others.

“All incidents are tragic, but ones involving a youth are especially tragic,” said Eric Vanasdale, senior loss control representative, COUNTRY Financial. “I participated in this steering committee because I wanted to make sure clear and easy to use safety materials are available for all farmers and farm workers. I am proud of the materials this group created and look forward to helping create safer working environments on our farms.”

Built upon the 1999 North American Guidelines for Children's Agricultural Tasks (NAGCAT), the updated and interactive Agricultural Youth Work Guidelines are based on the latest scientific research, including child growth and development, agricultural practices, child injury prevention and agricultural safety.

“These guidelines aren’t just a piece of paper anymore,” said Salzwedel. “The new guidelines can be found on cultivatesafety.org/work in an interactive format, as well as in read-only and print versions. Skin tones can be modified to make them culturally appropriate and equipment colors can be changed to make them more appealing to equipment manufacturers. Information on the benefits of farm work, supervision and child development is also available on the website.”

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