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Dress for Safety on Farm and Ranch

by Linda Manikowske,
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The farm management tools of today appear to be mostly cash-flow sheets, computers, and other high-tech devices that allow South Dakota farmers and ranchers to minimize their risks and operate for one more season. Nevertheless, a farmer faces a greater risk every day, one that he tends to forget about until it happens. It is a risk of a farm accident or an occupational illness.

Fortunately, these times are also high-tech times for personal protection. There are safety devices, protective clothing, and much information available to help us avoid or minimize the risk.

No one is going to force a farmer to take any safety precautions. Safety has to start with you. Safety measures are required in many industries, and workers must wear protective clothing. In farming and ranching, the responsibility rests solely with the individual.

According to the National Safety Council, agricultural work accidents result in nearly 1,900 deaths and 175,000 disabling injuries each year, not counting the additional occupational illnesses and chronic health problems. Nearly half of the reported work injuries might have been prevented or made less severe if the victims had been wearing appropriate protective clothing.

SHIELD YOUR HANDS

Hand and finger injuries are common in agriculture. Proper work gloves can prevent or reduce the severity of many hand injuries and most skin irritations caused by grease, dirt, and chemicals.

You need a variety of work gloves. The right gloves for moving bales are not the right gloves for spreading chemicals. Size is also important. Gloves that are too large are easily caught on moving parts of equipment. Cotton gloves work well for handling light materials and provide adequate protection for routine farm tasks. Leather gloves are better for the tough jobs. They help give a good grip, resist sparks, chips, and

rough or sharp objects, and provide some cushioning against blows.

WATCH YOUR FEET

Most foot and toe injuries occur when animals step on them, vehicles run over them, or moving machinery parts or falling objects hit them. Even if none of these happens, you can take a bad fall if you wear inappropriate footwear. Safe footwear is available that features a steel toebox and a slip-resistant, puncture-proof sole. Bought to fit, they're more comfortable than most other choices you could make.

USE YOUR HEAD

The National Safety Council says that 7% of all farm accidents involve injuries to the head. This is about the last part of the body we ever think of protecting. The famous "hard hat" required in many industries has its place on the farm, too. A hard hat has a rigid shell and an inner web suspension which can be adjusted to fit the individual wearer. The space provided by this suspension is part of the protection from blows to the head by flying or falling objects.

A bump cap is lighter and closer fitting than a hard hat. It will not protect against heavy flying or falling objects, but it does prevent injury from minor bumps and scrapes. It certainly is more protection than the hats most farmers wear.

PROTECT YOUR EYES

Eyes are vulnerable to foreign objects—flying chips, sawdust, broken parts, anything that will move and is small enough. Other major farm eye hazards are anhydrous ammonia fertilizer and other farm chemicals. Splashed in your eyes, these liquids can cause permanent vision damage or blindness.

Goggles offer a good measure of protection and should be worn when doing some jobs. There are several types on the market, and they are inexpensive. Some are ventilated for comfort and can be worn over other glasses. For working

with chemicals, goggles should be unvented to provide protection against splash and vapors.

If you do wear glasses or sunglasses, they should have industrial quality safety lenses which are shatterproof.

SAVE YOUR HEARING

There's a very good chance that the farmer you know has already lost part of his hearing. Farmers are more likely to have hearing loss than people in almost any other occupation. Eliminating noise in the countryside or avoiding long exposure to it may be impossible. But there is protection available. Acoustic ear muffs and ear inserts are two common types.

Ear muffs look like stereo headphones. They are easy to use and can be worn for long periods with comfort. Ear inserts are similar to hearing aids and are placed in the ear canal; they are visible only at close range. They are available as pre-formed or custom-molded rubber or plastic plugs. They must fit well for good protection. If you'll be using them regularly, have them custom fitted. Insert into only clean ears; trapped dirt will irritate and perhaps infect. Cotton puffs or swimming ear plugs are not adequate protection.

The wearing of ear protection can reduce ringing in the ears and stress on the worker in addition to preventing hearing damage. Ringing is an indication that noise levels are too high and protection is needed.

GUARD YOUR LUNGS

Dust, chaff, pollen, mold, and many chemicals are problems with which agricultural workers always will have to contend. Respiratory equipment can prevent serious accidents,

illness, or even death when you are working in enclosed areas that lack sufficient oxygen or contain toxic gases. Protection for your lungs is required in these cases. But even under more normal farming operations you may want or need, to use one of three types of respiratory protective devices:

Type 1 -- Cleans the air you breathe with screening filters.

Type 2 -- Purifies the air by absorbing or repelling harmful materials.

Type 3 -- Supplies air from an external source.

Wear filter respirators when harvesting or when cleaning grain storage but do not use them when spraying chemicals or working with toxic gases. They do not protect from these types of hazards.

Any respiratory protection equipment you select should be approved by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). All devices should specify the conditions for which they are designed and should fit properly.

KEEP CLOTHES CLEAN, IN GOOD REPAIR

It's not enough to depend only on protective safety devices. Your everyday clothing can protect you from farm accidents, too, if it is appropriate to the activity and if it is in good repair.

Open jackets, flapping sleeves, and frayed edges can be easily caught in power equipment. Loose hems, especially at the bottom of pant legs, can cause falls.

Garments that are dusty, dirty, soaked with oil or solvent, or contaminated with chemicals can cause skin irritations.



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