

**Canadian
Agricultural
Safety Week
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FACT SHEET #7

THE CANADIAN FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE

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Older farmers must consider hazards

Although people aged 60 and older comprise just 13 per cent of Canada's total farm population, they account for over 33 per cent of traumatic farm related fatalities, according to a 2002 report released by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

"The unfortunate part is that investigations show that most of these incidents were preventable," explained Glen Blahey, who chaired the 'Making Farming Safe for Senior Farmers' study by the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association supported by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in 2002. "What's needed are more awareness, education, and process change."

For farmers 60 years and older, the report identifies tractor and equipment rollovers (23%) as the leading cause of death, followed by being pinned or struck by a machine (12%).

In order to reduce hazards, the report suggests older farmer be mindful of the changes occurring in their bodies as they age. The effects of physical conditions, medications and lifestyle can put them at greater risk of injury or death. Other factors such as glasses and medications can affect balance, and physical conditions such as arthritis and shortness of breath also have the potential to place older individuals at greater risk of injury.

"By being mindful of these conditions, we hope older farmers can plan work activities to safely accommodate any personal limitation resulting from the aging process, medical conditions or other factors," explained Blahey.

To help senior farmers gauge some of the hidden dangers of farm work, the study suggests examining the risks and physical requirements of various jobs. For example, in the process of feeding a large round bale of hay to a pen of cattle, the worker may have to get off the tractor and remove the twine from the bale. The most recognizable hazards include cattle crowding to eat, a slippery uneven walking surface, bulky winter clothing, and noise. To perform this job safely, the worker will need the balance, physical strength, and dexterity to move among animals, as well as peripheral vision.

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One of the most tragic aspects of the injury or death of older farmers is that the hazards can almost always be controlled to reduce or eliminate the risks. “Perhaps one of the easiest ways that older farmers can avoid injury or death is by acknowledging their physical limitations and the inherent hazards of their workplaces,” explained Blahey. He suggests older farmers continually analyze the risks of their working conditions to ensure the work is still safe for someone of their age and condition. “There is no reason for farmers of any age to get hurt through the course of working,” explained Blahey.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture along with the Farm Credit Canada, Canadian Agricultural Safety Association, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada want to remind producers that most farm-related risks can be reduced by assessing the hazards and planning to work around them.

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