http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/farm-family-s5.jpg



Although National Farm Safety and Health Week has already passed, it's important that we continue thinking about what we must do to protect farmers.

EAU CLAIRE, WI - Farming is one of the most dangerous occupations in America. In 2018, the National Education Center for Agricultural Safety reported 23.4 accidental deaths per 100,000 farm-workers . National Farm Safety and Health Week takes place every year during the third week of September to acknowledge the dangers when farming, especially now, while farmers are harvesting. This year's theme, "Every Farmer Counts," compels us to recognize that behind these alarming statistics, there are lives lost and real families impacted by these tragedies.

As you're reading this, National Farm Safety and Health Week has already passed. Ensuring the health and well-being of farmworkers is something we should take seriously every single day, not just one week out of the year. Our farmers have tremendous pride in what they do and what they produce. Their work in feeding America cannot be downplayed or taken for granted, because we know the health risks that are a part of the job are very real.

Harvest time is especially dangerous for farmers who become exposed to silo gas in their farm structure or become trapped in a silo while it's being filled. Heavy machinery with all the working parts can also be dangerous. All it takes is a lapse of concentration for a moment and a person can get caught in a position they can't get out of. Years ago, I got my pant leg caught in the power takeoff of my tractor and took quite a while to cut myself free. Fortunately, in my

case, my tractor shut down before causing permanent damage. I was lucky.

Keeping hands and legs out of harm's way is not the only approach to avoid injury. Tractor rollovers cause horrific accidents, which is why roll bars are recommended on tractors even when mowing.

This time of year, especially, we're all responsible to look out for farm machinery on the road. Farmers are recommended to have emergency flashers on their machinery, but that doesn't always happen. Farm machinery is generally wide and slow. Even when they're off to the side, it can be difficult to see around them and passing can be treacherous.

Take care when coming across farm machinery on the road. Remember that machinery has the right of way and they won't be on the road for a long distance. Be patient and only pass when the driver signals it's safe or there's a clear vision of the road ahead.

Obvious dangers may cause injury or even death on a farm, but some are more subtle. It's just as important we emphasize the need for mental health support as much as identifying protections for farmers' physical health. In the last couple of years, the loss of life through suicide has taken an especially tragic toll on farming families.

Farming is notorious for being a lifestyle passed on from generation to generation. When economic hardship occurs, like the current dairy crisis, farming families can face terrible stress. Through no fault of their own, a farming family may find themselves facing bankruptcy and the loss of a homestead that's been in the family for decades.

Farmers should know the Wisconsin Farmer Wellness Program , overseen by The Department of Agriculture Trade and Consumer Protection, is available to provide critical support for those experiencing stress or a mental health crisis.



The farming lifestyle is too often romanticized. We see the farming landscape when we drive through the countryside, without taking into account all of the hard, dangerous work actually happening on the farms. Farmers work tirelessly to be sure we have the food we need to keep us all healthy.

Every one of us, but especially lawmakers, need to offer more than rhetoric when expressing how we respect our farm families. We must show we mean it through our actions. Policies must be passed to preserve that way of life and protect our farmers from falling victim to corporate factory farms. We have to get serious and look out for those farmers who look out for us.

So, let’s consider every week to be Farm Safety and Health week for the health and prosperity of our nation.