



Indiana Farm Service Agency
5981 Lakeside Blvd.
Indianapolis, IN 46278
317.290.3030, ext. 317 – office
317.407.5759 – Julia Wickard Blackberry

Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services
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Op-ed by Julia A. Wickard
State Executive Director, Indiana Farm Service Agency

Farm Safety: A Serious Business

As harvest is underway in the Hoosier heartland, how fortunate we are to benefit from the hard work and dedication of America's farmers. National Farm Safety and Health Week is this month. As we reflect on the agricultural abundance we enjoy in Indiana and this Nation, let's acknowledge the risk inherent in this occupation. As these hard working men and women are creating this agricultural abundance – food, feed, fuel and fiber – over the next several months, they must be ever-vigilant for their own safety.

From their toil on farms, we have an abundance of healthy food to sustain us and make our lives enjoyable and a wealth of materials for clothing and manufactured products. Every day our lives are touched and enriched by the fruits of their labors.

Indiana's farm families are among the most productive in the world. An amazing bounty is produced on the idyllic family farms we picture in our minds. But while living and working on a farm might seem like an entirely wholesome and stress free existence, there are few jobs in America that are more dangerous.

The National Safety Council consistently ranks agriculture as one of the most hazardous occupations in the United States. A recent survey by USDA's National Agriculture Statistics Service showed 200,000 work-related injuries occurred on U.S. farms annually. Farm family members accounted for 65 percent of those injuries.

We often think of dangerous jobs as firefighters, police officers, or miners. But according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, agriculture faces an extremely high fatality rate of nearly four for every 10,000 farmers. Only fishermen, loggers and aircraft pilots have occupational fatality rates that are higher.

Dangers built into agricultural work include harsh weather, difficult environmental conditions, operation of heavy machinery and equipment and working with dangerous materials and chemicals. Tractor roll-overs and ATV accidents continue to be responsible for a great number of adult and adolescent farm fatalities on our Nation's farms. Accidents happen in any field, but in agriculture, accidents frequently can be fatal.

I fondly look back on my childhood on the farm and cherish the hours spent riding on the tractor with my dad, or taking care of the Angus cattle herd. I still marvel at how quickly he then, and still today, can plant a crop, bale a field of hay or sort cattle. I also remember the fear I have had many times with the "close calls" on the farm with either the crop or livestock operation. He could easily have been severely injured. Our family farm does its best to practice farm safety every day.

My dad has been lucky, but others have not been. For every serious agricultural injury, the victim will have experienced 10 close calls and 30 cases of personal property damage. It is so easy to become complacent in daily farm work that safety basics can be overlooked. Farm safety has to be constantly reinforced.

Please join with me in expressing our appreciation and gratitude to our farmers and farm families for their phenomenal contribution to our very well being. At the USDA Farm Service Agency, we are taking this opportunity during harvest to raise the awareness of farm safety to help them stay safe, healthy, and on the job. After all, it is the very practice of farm safety that sustains the health of our Nation's farm families. Here's wishing all Indiana farmers a productive and safe harvest!