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Make it a Safe Harvest Season

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When harvest of silage and high moisture corn began, it was a direct reminder to me how dangerous the farming occupation is. Despite all the modern farm equipment safety advances, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ranks farming as the sixth most dangerous occupation in America. Plus, according to the International Labor Organization, more than half of the 335,000 workplace fatalities around the globe occur in agriculture, making farming one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. Farm fatalities and injuries increase during harvest season. Let's review a few reasons why:

Closing Speeds: The intelligent driver will err on the safe side and leave plenty of room when approaching slow-moving vehicles such as combines or tractors on the road. Most drivers take 1.5 seconds to press on the brake pedal and at 55 mph the distance traveled is already 121 feet. You can do the math but it takes about a football field to stop your car at 55 mph, and that is assuming you are alert! Be extra careful at intersections and peaks of hills on our rural roads. Be extra careful on highways to recognize closing speeds of 65 mph meeting 25 mph. Most accidents happen at dawn or dusk, as they are peak commuting times for drivers. They occur most often when a driver attempts to pass a slow-moving vehicle, or does not realize a farmer is turning or stopping. Most farmers are alert to vehicles on the road and use flashing lights in addition to the fluorescent orange triangular SMV emblem to draw attention to the tractor's slow speed.

ROPS and Seat Belts Saves Lives – Modern tractors with Roll Over Protection Structure (ROPS), plus wearing seat belts, saves lives and prevents injuries. Always use a tractor equipped with ROPS when possible. Keep your equipment in good condition and check to ensure all safety guards are properly positioned. Check to make sure that you have the recommended lighting on your tractor and implements especially when traveling in the early mornings or evenings.

Fatigue – During the harvest time, it is very easy for farm family members to not get adequate sleep, breaks, or meals. In order for you to remain alert during harvest, you cannot sacrifice rest and nutrition. When doing fieldwork, take short breaks throughout the day to get out of the tractor or combine to stretch. Stay hydrated and pack nutritious snacks or meals so that you have energy to complete the day's work.

Turn Off the Machine – Simple to do, but in practice it has killed or injured farmers. Imagine rushing to get into that last field this fall to harvest and you slug the header on the combine. Shut the combine down while doing maintenance and take the key with you, never leave it to chance.

Extra or New Workers – You can blame the safety speech on me! It is important for you to provide all workers with farm safety training related to the task that they will be helping with on the farm. Augers are a rattlesnake ready to bite or kill you. Make sure all safety shields are in place. Tractor, combine, and truck operators often cannot see workers, children, or family members if they are too close to machinery

or behind machinery and people are in a blind spot. Many people have been killed being hit by farm machinery or trucks, especially in backing-up accidents. Always have a **first-aid kit with a tourniquet and have fire extinguishers on all equipment.**

Child Safety: Teach kids and grandkids that machinery and equipment are not places to be playing, and neither are grain bins, especially if you have automatic unloading equipment. By developing no-play areas on a farmstead, you can save young children's lives. For older kids, always provide training for youth workers prior to doing any age appropriate work and check in with them on regular intervals to check on their progress and safety.

Tell family and helping hands where you will be working and when. Keep the lines of communication open. Also, always have a cell phone or two way radio in case issues arise or in case of emergencies or accidents.

Harvest time is a memorable time filled with hard work and family tradition. Keep these and many other safety tips you have learned over the years in mind. I hope everyone has a safe and happy harvest.