



AMERICA'S DEADLY HARVEST

A Safety Program That Works

These Kansas farm families know what it takes to stay alive.

While more than 1,000 people were dying in farm accidents during the 1988 season, Kansas farmers in Sedgwick and Harvey counties were busy living. They harvested their wheat, plowed their milo fields, and put up hay for the winter.

They did the same jobs in 1989, and again, no one died doing them. So far this year, those counties still hold a zero farm fatality record for two years running.

You go to an area like this with images of neat-as-a-pin, hazard-free farms in mind. You imagine that these people must be extremely safety conscious. You see an expansive sky, and acres and acres of waving wheat bordering the roadsides. There is a lush quiet along the miles of county roads. People are friendly and unpretentious. And they all have at least one horror story.

Someone's father lost an eye, a thumb, and a finger—in three different farm accidents. Someone's child is missing a hand, thanks to an unguarded chain. The list goes on.

The blood and tears have given birth to awareness. And in some cases that awareness has motivated farmers in the area.

Lynn Buerki of Sedgwick County is one example. He used to pay his son and two daughters for work done around the farm. At 14, his son cut off three fingers trying to adjust a belt on a mower.

A quick trip to the hospital with the fingers in a glass of cold water saved two of them. But Buerki still brings up the episode when he's asked about his reasons for being safety chairman for six years for the Sedgwick County Farm Bureau.

"To this day, I feel that was somehow my fault," Buerki says. "It hap-

pened 15 years ago, but I still think about it. What could I have done that would have made a difference?"

Educating Responders

Part of the answer to that question seems to have come in the form of an annual safety day Buerki champions. Following the lead of another local farmer, Bruce Ott, Buerki has made the day an annual event.

The goal was to reach farmers, as well as emergency personnel, with safety information. When a large percentage of attendees ended up being from the county's emergency forces, the emphasis swung to them.

Many, Buerki says, had no idea how to turn off a tractor. They didn't know the dangers of anhydrous ammonia, nor did they understand how to avoid becoming victims of their own rescue attempts.

Now, every spring, about 150 members of the Sedgwick emergency medical service (EMS), fire department, sheriff's department, and Kansas highway patrol attend the on-farm demonstrations. They free scarecrow-like "victims" from overturned tractors, combines, and hay balers. When the "victim's" overall physical state dictates, they hurriedly carry him to a nearby Lifewatch helicopter for air transport to Wesley Medical Center.

Assistant Chief Larry Masters has been with the fire department for 24 years. He says the program points out to rescuers how different farm accidents are from auto accidents.

"The equipment is much heavier, and it works differently," he says. "Also, we learn that we may have to rely on a farmer, and that toolbox he has in the shed, to get a victim out. We don't always have the tools to



work with this size equipment."

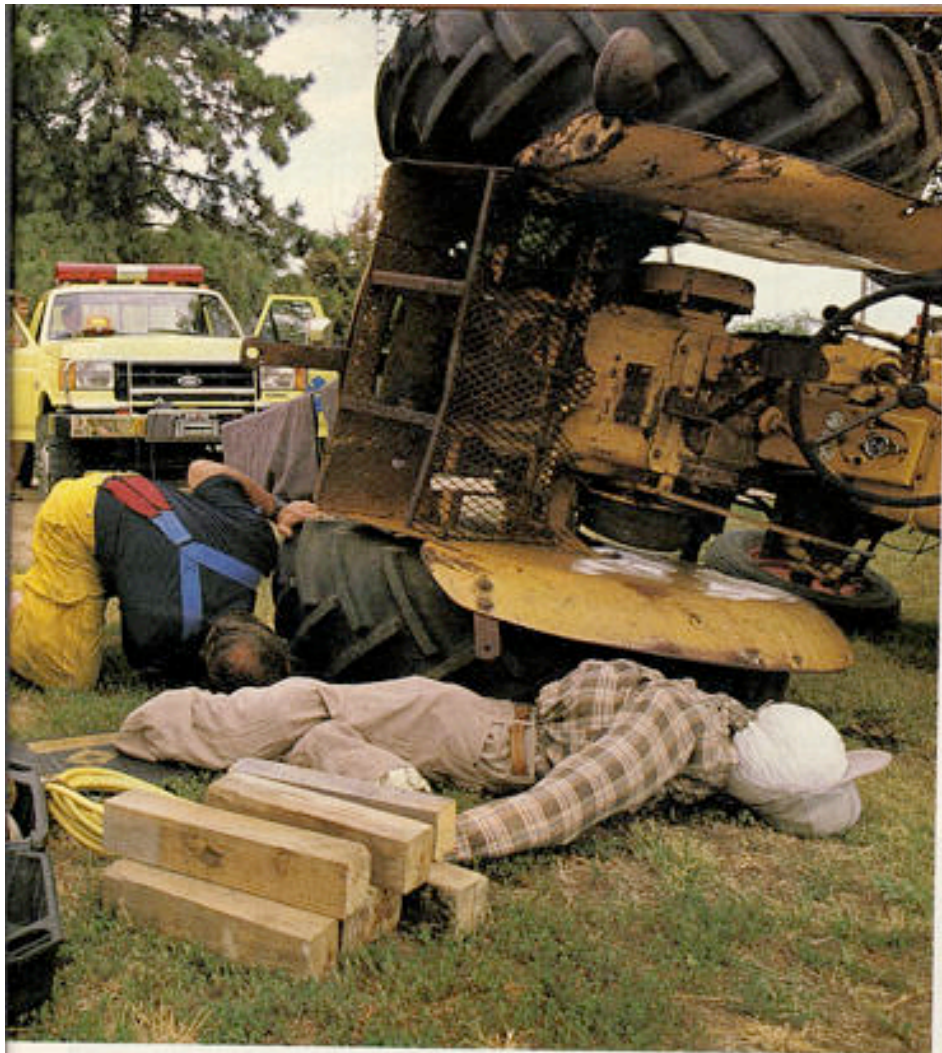
An incentive for the emergency personnel to attend Buerki's training day is six credit hours earned. Emergency personnel must attain 40 credit hours each year to keep practicing. These credit hours mostly come in the form of classes or seminars.

Unfortunately, an incentive for area farmers has been harder to find. Buerki, who was named Kansas Farm Bureau Man of the Year in 1988 and received the bureau's National Safety Award at the 1989 convention, says the situation led him to try a new approach last year.

"We started an annual get-together here in September for farmers," Buerki says. "Everyone was invited. We had a barbecue and a local band right here at the farm. And instead of us doing a program for EMS, they did a program for the farm families on safety and emergency care."

Abandoned Wells Targeted

Safety in Sedgwick County has a long-range view too. Teresa Ott, a member of the Kansas Farm Bu-



(Left) Nearly 150 emergency responders participate in Sedgwick County's annual emergency training seminar. They practice freeing accident "victims" and getting them the necessary first aid. A Lifewatch helicopter is used to transport "victims" to Wesley Medical Center.

(Below) Lynn Buerki, Sedgwick County's safety chairman, says farmers are "so familiar with their equipment that many times safety is forgotten or simply not considered."

Photos: Paul Helgsten



reau's Natural and Environmental Resources (NER) group, focuses her energies on water safety. Goals include the closing of abandoned wells and monitoring of the area's water.

Ott, who farms with her husband, Bruce, says groundwater and well safety are too close to home for producers to ignore. NER has made water-testing kits available across the state. Information provided by the tests is compiled and used to keep track of nitrate and chemical levels.

As for abandoned wells, Ott explains that a five-year-old can easily slip through a section of 10-inch PVC pipe and into a well. Landowners are responsible under Kansas law for plugging these wells. They are liable for injury or water contamination occurring when that is not done.

Estimates for the state indicate that nearly a quarter of a million abandoned wells exist in Kansas.

H.O.T. Training for Teenagers

Harvey County, adjacent to Sedgwick County, has a safety program that rallies around Ray Dilts. Reach-



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ing youths and their families in the community is important to Dilts, who has two sons, Mark, 8, and Brad, 10.

Like Buerki, Dilts became a safety leader after a farm accident touched his family. Carol, Ray's wife, was helping with artichoke harvest in February 1984 when her glove caught in an unguarded chain on the digger.

Ray remembers that "someone screamed. And to this day I don't know whether I hit the pto [power-take-off] lever or the clutch.

"But Carol had laid her hand on a roller chain. It took off three fingers and had started winding her coat up into it. It ended up pulling her head in. Looking back, we were a second or so away from scalping her. Luckily, the machine was fully loaded, so

when it lost power it stopped quickly."

Dilts became safety chairman in 1986. And, having two young boys, he is interested in safety from their perspective. Although Brad and Mark help around the farm, Dilts says their responsibilities are limited. For example, they mow the lawn and run some of the smaller tractors.

"I wouldn't let them on the tractor alone until they could push the clutch and the brakes and stop it. That's the first thing," Dilts says.

"As to when children are ready for that kind of responsibility, I think it varies. My boys have grown up around machinery. I've tried to make them aware. But every kid is different. It's a judgment call."

He adds that a big part of safe tractor operation lies in understanding the machine and in knowing the right way to do jobs.

Dilts emphasizes this in a video presented to 14- and 15-year-olds going through the area's hazardous occupational training (HOT) classes. These classes and a certificate showing attendance are required for youths who look for a part-time or summer job driving a tractor on farms in the area.

Jared Parker, 16, received his certification two years ago. A "city kid" from the town of Sedgwick, Kans., Parker knew nothing about farm machinery before HOT. Now he helps part time on Dilts's farm.

"Those classes taught me how to

Could a Rescue Team Save Your Life?

"By the time they missed him, nothing was showing above the beans in the bin but one hand," recalls Marc Perry, a Georgia emergency medical technician (EMT).

This gruesome story gets better when he explains that, thanks to an Extension class he had taken, the rescuers knew just what to do.

"The people who found him had dug the beans out from around the victim's face so he could breathe. He was down in the center of the bin, and it was like a funnel. Every time he moved, the beans closed in. His breathing was diminishing. We put him on oxygen and used a technique we learned in the class.

"We took an ax and cut half-moon shapes in the bin, and tore those out with a hydraulic tool. It took us maybe 10 minutes to make 15 holes around the bin, at a 7-foot level. We probably dropped 10,000 bushels of beans in less than 10 minutes this way."

As the level of the beans dropped, the rescuers continued trying to pull the man out. "I wouldn't have believed we

couldn't move him if I hadn't seen it myself," Perry says. "Between the four of us, we could lift 400 to 500 pounds. But we weren't budging him, not until the beans got below his knees."

It is respect for situations like this, as well as for farm equipment and chemicals, that Lonnie Varnedoe tries to teach in a one-day course for EMT's. He is a Georgia Extension community development specialist. The course is offered several times a year in counties across the state.

EMT Marc Perry (left) and Civil Defense Director David Fitzpatrick say that rescue workers in rural areas need to know how to react in farm emergencies. Photo: Gary Clark



Varnedoe, who is based in Athens, coordinates the project. He says Georgia EMT's have a good understanding of how to save lives. But they often don't understand how farm equipment works or how substantially it is built.

"EMT's who have taken an auto extraction course, for example, believe they can take the same Jaws-of-Life they use to cut a car into little pieces and go to work on a tractor. It won't work. We're talking about equipment that can weigh 10 to 12 tons."

Other things that EMT's may not anticipate:

- The accident may be a long way from a road. Most rescue vehicles are not equipped to drive through fields, especially muddy ones.
- Automatically grabbing a cutting torch to free someone from equipment in the middle of a hay field can start a major blaze.
- If someone is overcome by pesticide, treatment information is on the label. If it's not apparent what was being applied, farmhands, the county agent, or the local chemical dealer may know.
- Not knowing how a piece of equipment works can lead to further injury. It's important to understand, for example, where hay goes into a baler and where it comes out.



hook up equipment, drive on the road, and be aware of the dangers," he says. "The pto, they told us, is especially dangerous. And when I'm out working, I really do think back on what I learned. I believe it has made a difference with me."

Making a difference is the goal of this as well as the other programs. And they are just a sample of what these counties offer to residents, mostly through the Farm Bureau.

Delbert Ekart, safety director with the bureau, gets most of the credit for the availability of this training.

The Dilts family overcame a potentially fatal incident in 1984 when Carol was caught in a potato digger. Now Ray Dilts is chairman of farm safety for Harvey County's Farm Bureau. Photo: Paul Helstern

It's a Parent's Responsibility

"What do I do with his bicycle? I can't give it away. I can't throw it away. Nothing I think of seems appropriate."

That's the type of question Marilyn and Darrell Adams still find themselves confronted with, four years after the loss of their 11-year-old son Keith.

Although Marilyn knows grief, she hasn't succumbed to it. Today, she says frankly that Keith's death was preventable. That, and a willingness to talk about her situation, has propelled her to a position of prominence in the farm safety arena.

Few can say "no" to a request from Marilyn for help, financial or otherwise. She has the ear of the Bush administration, having persuaded Barbara Bush to accept an appointment as honorary chairperson for "Farm Safety for Just Kids."

She also apparently has the ear of Congress. After her testimony last February before a U.S. Senate committee, \$11.25 million was appropriated for a new farm safety and health program at the Centers for Disease Control.

"Farm Safety for Just Kids," presided over and founded by Marilyn, spearheads a variety of safety awards and prevention programs. As a part of this effort, she has traveled to 16 states outside her native Iowa over the past three years.

She tells children and parents that her son was doing an adult job alone: emptying a gravity-flow corn wagon. When he fell into the wagon, he suffocated. She pleads with the parents to take a second look at what they allow their children to do on the farm.

The exclusive corporate sponsor of her farm safety program has been DowElanco. The company has provided funding for Marilyn's work since 1989. She is actively seeking other supporters, she says, in an effort to fund "Just Kids" chapters across the nation, as well as in Canada. Her goal is to make certain everyone has the advantage of knowing what she learned the hard way.

"Our biggest killer is the extra rider," she says. "Add to that the fact that we give our kids adult responsibilities and leave them unattended. We forget that they are not small adults."

Marilyn points out that some of the most innocent objects can be deadly on farms. That big tire



Marilyn Adams
Photo: Dan Miller

that is leaning against a building or a tree, for example, has killed more than once. A small child that tries to climb into the tire can be crushed to death when it falls.

If an accident does occur, and the victim is free enough to move an arm, Marilyn says he should know how to wave in a way that tells people he's in trouble.

"We recommend a victim wave his arms in circles, or any kind of unusual pattern, to draw attention to himself," Marilyn says.

Lastly, she insists that parents listen to their instincts. She says people often tell her of an "awful" feeling they had the day a loved one died.

"If you have a gut feeling, check it out. Maybe everything is OK, and you'll feel a little dumb. Or maybe you'll get there in time to make a difference. You just can't be careful enough with a life, because you can't replace it."

Editor's note.—For more on Farm Safety for "Just Kids," call the National Farm Family Information Center for Safety and Health in Earlham, Iowa, at 515-758-2827.



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Other programs available include safety poster contests for grade school children, a farm family safety seminar, a farm wife tractor program, and cardiac pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training through the Red Cross, Heart Association, or local ambulance service.

Unfortunately, having access to good training doesn't mean that busy farmers will take time to attend. And even if they have attended a safety

seminar, it's not a sure bet that they will put the lessons to use.

For example, the Webers, Marge, 50, and Laurence, 54, of Sedgwick County have been to several meetings. They've experienced near tragedy on their farm—Laurence was once caught in a folding tillage implement. But Marge says sheepishly that she still doesn't know how to turn off the tractor ignition. And Laurence routinely uses an old tractor without

a roll bar and a pto without a shield.

These things don't make the Webers bad or negligent, just real. They know the right things to do. But because of limited time or a misfounded belief that "it won't happen to me," they don't do them. Unfortunately, too many other farmers are the same way—and some of them will die doing the work they love.

By VICTORIA A. GREER

Safety With That Corporate Touch

Prevention is at the core of all good safety programs. And nowhere is that more evident than with some of today's equipment and chemical manufacturers.

Deere & Co., for example, has released five safety patents to the industry, at no cost, since 1971. The first was the rollover protective structure.

Then in 1975, a method for covering power-take-off shafts was developed. In 1982, a tip-up shield on tractors reduced the need for removal when larger pto connections are used. In 1984, a transmission device was introduced that lessens chances of movement when equipment is bypass started.

Just last year, Deere & Co. began equipping cotton pickers with operator presence systems. This stops power to picker heads if the operator leaves the seat for more than five seconds.

And at present, the company is working with American Cyanamid Co. to produce a closed granular chemical handling system.

Murray Madsen, safety engineer with Deere for 13 years, says that in addition, the company gets safety information on equipment use to producers through independent dealers' programs.

This information is available in an 11-segment video, and in brochures, posters, and safety signs.

If despite all of this an accident should occur, Deere has a physi-



Nonlingual ag symbols, like this respirator, are part of the ICI safety program.

cian on call to advise attending doctors. The emphasis is on hydraulic injection injuries.

For information on this service or any of the safety materials, call David Schmerfe at 309-765-8000.

Chemical Safety

Everything you could ever want to know about the safe use of a chemical is probably on its label.

ICI Americas Inc. is making a commitment to take that label information to the field. Its representatives arrange for farm presentations, often held at lunchtime. Safe use of chemicals is explained, along with precautions, for those working in the area.

Michael Tysowsky, manager of environmental and scientific affairs, explains that these presentations are based on a series of ag symbols. The goal is to overcome communication barriers with laborers who do not speak English.

The ag symbols, which are similar to nonlingual road signs, show

the do's and don'ts of chemical safety.

In the event of an accident, Tysowsky encourages the use of ICI's medical emergency information network.

Primarily, it provides antidote information and lab assistance on ICI products. The number to call is 1-800-FASTMED.

For information on this or the ICI lunchtime programs, call, toll-free, 1-800-759-2500.

Take a Pledge

Making prevention personal is the idea behind Du Pont Co.'s "Sixty for Safety." Farmers are urged to take a 60-second break and to sign the pledge and post it.

Whereas, I have
a commitment to family, friends
and others in my life.
Whereas, I believe in
my contribution to the industry
of agriculture and the value of
that contribution to America and
the world.

And whereas,
my commitments and my contributions
are based on my day-to-day
safety as I work on and around my farm.

Be it known,
that I, as one of the undersigned,
am entering into
an agreement with you to
"Live in Safety"
from this day forward.

Copies of this pledge, as well as coffee mugs with the "60 for Safety" message printed on them, are available free from Du Pont. For information, write to Sixty for Safety, Du Pont Co., Walker's Mill 5-170, Wilmington, DE 19880-0038.