

## **Safe Tractor and Machinery Operation Training for Youth**

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In farming there is a strong tradition of having children help out with farm chores. These experiences are great for instilling strong work ethics and responsibilities in children. However, farm work poses many hazards for youth. In the US, it is estimated that approximately 104 youth under the age of 20 die each year from agricultural injuries. The latest research has found that between the years of 1995 and 2000, an estimated 695 youth died on US farms with most of these deaths occurring among youth 16-19 years old. Farm machinery was the single biggest cause, accounting for 25% of deaths to youth under the age of 20.

The US Department of Labor's Fair Labor Standards Act has declared certain agricultural tasks to be hazardous to youth under the age of 16. These tasks are listed in the Hazardous Occupations Order in Agriculture. Employment of youth under the age of 16 for these hazardous tasks is illegal except for certain exemptions. Youth under the ages of 16 are not allowed to operate tractors and farm machinery for anyone other than their parents. However, the Tractor and Machinery Certification course will allow exemption from this law for 14 and 15 year-olds. Youth who will only be working for their parents are encouraged to attend Tractor and Machinery Certification courses even though they are not mandated to do so. Farm safety education is a major part of the certification courses.

Cornell Cooperative Extension's 4-H Youth Development program and high school agricultural education programs offer Tractor and Machinery Certification courses. In New York State in 2006, there were thirty-two 4-H Tractor and Machinery Certification courses held with 263 youth who received certification. To find out if there is a course offered in your area, contact your local county Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) 4-H Educator or check the Cornell Cooperative Extension listing of courses and local contacts at: <http://nystractorsafetycourse.pbwiki.com/FrontPage>.

These courses cover the safe operation and routine maintenance of tractors and machinery. Certification courses are 24 hours long and are delivered over a number of weeks. Most certification courses are offered in the late winter to early spring months. The certification courses offer many hands-on activities and feature supervised time operating tractors. Students will also complete a written and practical exam at the end of the course. New educational materials and standards for the certification courses have been developed through the National Safe Tractor and Machinery Operation Program. You can view these materials and learn more about the certification program at this website: <http://www.nstmop.psu.edu/> or contact Kimberly Fleming, State 4-H Program Specialist at (607) 255-6506 or e-mail: [kff2@cornell.edu](mailto:kff2@cornell.edu)

Anyone who successfully completes a Tractor and Machinery Certification Course in New York is eligible to compete in the New York State 4-H & FFA Tractor Operators Contest that will be held on August 9, 2007 at Empire Farm Days. As in the certification course, participants in the state contest complete a parts identification test, written exam and the tractor operating course.

The New York Center for Agricultural Medicine & Health (NYCAMH) assists county CCE programs with farm safety training. In addition NYCAMH staff is available to conduct on-farm

safety surveys with 4-H clubs here in New York. NYCAMH is available to go to agriculturally orientated 4-H clubs as part of their meetings and have the 4-H members complete a walk-around safety survey of a 4-H leader's farm or another 4-H member's farm. In this activity, the club members would be broken into small groups and given different sections of the safety survey. After the club members complete the walk around-survey, we will bring the members together and each group would report on their findings. We will then use the safety survey findings to discuss various aspects of farm safety. A copy of the completed survey will be provided to the farm owner. All results of the on-farm safety surveys are kept strictly confidential. This service is available at no cost and is made possible by a grant from the New York State Department of Labor Hazard Abatement Board.

If you would like to schedule a farm safety presentation for your 4-H group, please call us at 800-343-7527 extension 239 and ask to speak with Jim Carrabba, Agricultural Safety Specialist. Or you can e-mail me at [jcarrabba@nycamh.com](mailto:jcarrabba@nycamh.com). A program of Bassett Healthcare Network, NYCAMH is enhancing agricultural and rural health by preventing and treating occupational injury and illness. Visit us on our website at [www.nycamh.com](http://www.nycamh.com).