Background

Many parents working in agriculture are motivated to have their children help them with farm tasks for a variety of reasons: to share the value of agriculture, to get more work done, to spend more time together as a family, and lack of childcare options. While family farms are an important institution, the reality is that agricultural operations are often very dangerous places for children. In fact, each year across the United States, 25,000 children are seriously injured in agricultural-related accidents. This guide was designed to help farmers, farm workers, and others - with an emphasis on small-scale vegetable production - find strategies to minimize the risks involved in having children on the farm.

Some Hazards on the Small-scale Vegetable farm

- Tractors and equipment
- Sharp tools (knives, hoes, etc.)
- Car and truck traffic
- Stacks of boxes and other items
- Sun exposure, dehydration and heat stress
- Cold temperatures

Dust and exhaust fumes
Refrigeration units
Pesticides and other hazardous chemicals
Holes, ditches and uneven ground
High pressure irrigation lines
Drowning risk from ponds, irrigation canals and other water sources

Best Practices

**Keep kids away from tractors and equipment.**
This includes giving kids rides on tractors. Tractors are responsible for 41% of the accidental deaths of children under age 15.

**Don’t mix the worksite and childcare.**
Keep young kids (generally, age 5 or less) out of the production fields. The highest rate of injuries involves children younger than 10 years old who were playing in the worksite. Provide a safe and supervised play area on the farm as an alternative to the production fields.

**Assign age appropriate work.**
Older children (generally, 6 years +) may be able to perform some simple jobs like harvesting or weeding, but each job and child needs to be evaluated together for suitability (see Table 1 as a reference).

**Provide training and supervision.**
If work is assigned, supervise constantly until youth demonstrates mastery of task. Immediately correct unsafe behavior and ask for questions. A child should demonstrate performing a task 4-5 times before being left to do it on their own.

**Know the law.**
There are Child Labor Laws and state laws to help protect children at work, including agriculture. These laws mandate what hours children can work and at what jobs if they are you less than 16 years old.

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**CHILDREN’S SAFETY ON THE SMALL-SCALE VEGETABLE FARM**

**General Resources**
- Cultivate Safety: https://www.cultivatesafety.org/
- Childhood Agricultural Safety Network: http://www.childagsafety.org/
- Marshfield Clinic’s National Children’s Center for Agricultural Health and Safety: http://www.marshfieldresearch.org/nccrahs
- OSHA Youth in Agriculture: https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/youth/agriculture/other.html
- Department of Labor State Child Labor Laws Applicable to Agricultural Employment: https://www.dol.gov/whd/state/agriemp2.htm

**Specific Tools and Guidelines**
- Work Guidelines for Children in Agriculture: https://www.cultivatesafety.org/safety-guidelines-search/?category=familyyouth
<table>
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<th>Growth Stage</th>
<th>Causes of deaths/injuries</th>
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| Birth-5      | • Falling from tractors or heights, such as ladders  
• Ingesting poisons  
• Being run over by tractor | • Never have a child as an extra rider.  
• Lock up chemicals.  
• Store ladders out of sight and reach.  
• Provide a fenced-in play area away from farming activities.  
• Provide maximum supervision at all times because of small children’s poor coordination, high energy, and lack of fear. | • None.  
Children this age should not be exposed to work hazards. |
| 6-9          | • Slipping and falling from tractors, trucks, or heights  
• Becoming entangled in augers, other machines | • Set rules.  
• Discuss safe behavior with children.  
• Assign and closely supervise chores.  
• Talk openly about types of injuries and consequences.  
• Never assign intense, physical chores—they can lead to exhaustion.  
• Play games (with adult supervision) that focus on farm safety issues. | • Tasks of short duration that do not require hand-eye coordination  
• Projects with hand tools, not power tools |
| 10-13        | • Becoming entangled with machinery  
• Hearing loss from exposure to noisy machinery  
• Extra rider falling from tractor or other equipment | • Potentially the most dangerous age because of constant risk taking and ease of distraction and clumsiness—never mistake a child’s size for ability to do work!  
• Enroll child in bike safety classes; always require helmets.  
• Set clear and consistent rules; discuss consequences and rewards.  
• Provide specific education on farm hazard prevention.  
• Plan increases in chores and responsibilities.  
• Start with low-risk tasks; give more responsibility for follow-through with less supervision. | • Hand raking, digging  
• Limited power tool use (supervision); hand tools better  
• Operating lawn mower (push mower, flat surface, under supervision) or garden tractor |
| 14-16        | • Hearing loss from exposure to loud machinery  
• Machinery rollover/roadway accident  
• Power take-off (PTO) entanglement | • Judge size and age to measure maturity for tasks.  
• Be consistent with rules.  
• Provide education from peers with farm injuries.  
• Become involved in 4-H and FFA safety projects. | • Still needs adult supervision but may be ready for more adult jobs such as equipment operation and maintenance  
• Gradually increase tasks as experience is gained |
| 17-18        | • Same as adult risks: respiratory illness, hearing loss, muscle/bone injuries, rollover from tractor, machinery entanglements  
• Additional risk if experimenting with or under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol | • Provide rules regarding drugs and alcohol; open communication  
• Reward for accepting adult responsibilities.  
• Serve as role model—teach younger children farm safety.  
• Parents may still have cause for concern with recklessness and risk-taking and may work side-by-side with young adult until absolutely ready. | • May be ready to work with tractors, self-propelled machinery and other farm equipment, but must earn this responsibility. Should be trained, educated, and supervised at regular intervals. |