

## **Farm Safety Advocates Are Unsung Heroes**

*By Cyndie Sirekis*

As agricultural advocates, farmers and ranchers are passionate and knowledgeable about a broad swath of subjects. They advocate to elected officials and non-farming members of the public both formally and on an *ad hoc* basis. Topics include everything from animal agriculture to private property rights to estate tax reform.

Farm safety advocates are much less visible to the public and strive to appeal to a different audience—America’s farmers and ranchers themselves...the men and women who produce the food our nation eats, with their hands in the dirt and watchful eyes on the horizon from sun-up to sundown.

Although strides have been made in reducing farming-related injuries and fatalities in recent decades, producing food remains one of our nation’s most dangerous occupations.

That is why Farm Bureaus are making safety a top priority this spring across the country through the Agricultural Safety Awareness Program. As a part of ASAP, March 7-13 has been designated as Agricultural Safety Awareness Week.

This year’s theme, “Growing the Most Important Crop,” emphasizes making farms and ranches safer for farmers, their family members and employees, with special emphasis on children.

People of all ages, but particularly children who live on farms, are at risk of injuries on the farm. Educating adults about reducing risks to the children in their care is critical to preventing farm and ranch incidents and fatalities.

“Too many children are injured or hurt each year,” explains Jimmy Maass, safety coordinator for Virginia Farm Bureau. “We hope that our participation in this program will help us teach farmers and their families how to be safe and protect their children on the farm.”

According to the American Farm Bureau Federation, 100 children die in farm accidents every year in the U.S. and many others are injured, often seriously. That’s why during Ag Safety Awareness Week and throughout the year, state Farm Bureaus focus on making farms and ranches safer for farmers, their family members and employees.

“We strive to educate as many people as we can, about as many topics as we can each year,” Maass says.

Practicing caution around livestock on the farm and ranch, saying ‘no’ to children playing around grain stored on the farm, and practicing ‘tough love’ when it comes to riders on tractors are among the key topics network members are focusing on this spring. In doing so, they willingly put themselves in front of fellow farmers and ranchers, caring enough to say, “It’s time for some changes on your farm and I’m speaking up for the sake of your children.” In doing so, they play a role in changing the way people think about farm safety, which is ultimately what prevents unspeakable tragedies. That is why America’s farm safety advocates, as they quietly walk among us, can truly be considered heroes.

The Farm Bureau Safety and Health Network is made up of professionals affiliated with state Farm Bureaus who share an interest in decreasing safety and health risks associated with agricultural and rural life. For more information on agricultural safety, visit: <http://www.agsafetynow.com>.