



COMMENTARY

“The Voice of Manitoba Farmers”

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Are Off-Farm Jobs Decreasing On-Farm Safety?

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The 2006 Census of Agriculture highlighted a major risk factor for farm injuries and fatalities, but the impact was lost in the dollars-and-cents reporting of what all of the statistics mean. The data showed that more farmers are working off-farm jobs today than they were five years ago. In fact, 48.4% of **all** farm operators reported having an off-farm job. About 20% of these worked more than 40 hours a week – the equivalent of a full-time job – off of the farm.

The need for an off-farm job appears to no longer be a temporary issue, and is becoming more accepted and expected way of life. Farmers in that situation are stuck in a Catch-22. They're no longer able to spend the time building up their farm operations to economic viability, or to manage the farm as effectively as possible. When burning the candle at both ends, jobs just don't get done when or how they should.

Farm safety should always be a top concern, but it becomes even more critical for a farmer who is working 40 hours or more away from the farm, and then comes home to put in more hours at farm work. Fatigue and operator burn-out contribute to injuries and fatalities, and so does the risk created when untrained or unaware family members are expected to fill in for farm chores that they may have little experience with.

The rush and the need to bring together “farm time” and “family time” may also have dangerous consequences for our farm children. If a parent wants to spend a few hours with their children on the weekend, after working a regular job off of the farm, it might seem like a good idea to have them “help” with chores and other tasks around the farm. The simple fact is that farm kids are at risk. A recent study published in the Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ) showed that **farm** kids under the age of seven are 71% more likely to die than other children of the same age.

There is no one solution to farm-related injuries for any age group. It requires continual training and awareness. As the weather warms up and the kids on your farm become increasingly interested in spending time with Mom or Dad in the farmyard, it's absolutely critical to ensure that everyone is aware of the dangers of machinery and has respect for the unpredictability of livestock. Let's keep everyone safe.