

FARM EXPOSURE, WORK PRACTICES, AND PERCEIVED DANGER AS
REPORTED BY FARM CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS

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Purpose: In the United States, two million children live or work on farms. Farm safety day camps were created as one-day educational interventions in an effort to increase the safety and protect the health of farm children. The purpose of this presentation is to examine the dangers on the farm perceived by parents and children who live or work on farms, and to discuss changes in rules and farm safety practices over a period of 18 months following a farm safety intervention.

Methods: Six day camps across the US were purposively selected for a three-year cohort study*. The 4th and 5th grade campers were given a pre- and posttest immediately before and after the camp to evaluate their farm safety knowledge and behaviors. Follow up assessments were conducted by mailed or phone surveys at 1, 6, 12, and 18 months. Parents were also queried at these intervals. Surveys used self report to evaluate current farm practices, changes in farming-related behaviors and knowledge of safe farm practices. All quantitative data were analyzed using SAS; open ended responses were coded by two independent coders.

Results: The results are based on the 375 campers who had farm exposure and their parents. Campers surveyed at one month reported doing the following tasks: 66% fed large animals, 40% fed small animals, 16% drove tractors, and 12% operated other farm equipment. In the follow up surveys, 43% of the children reported that the most dangerous task they encountered was animal related, while 25% of the parents identified machines and tractors to be the biggest danger. One month after the camp, 39% of children reported changes in animal safety practices that addressed the following areas: animal safety (12%), feeding practices (14%), and fencing for animals (12%). Twelve months after the camp, 33% of children reported further changes in the way they did farm work relating to animals. Of the responses, 19% related to general animal safety and 14% to feeding practices. After the camp 36% of children reported being allowed to feed animals, 12% tended animals, and 17% were allowed to drive a tractor for the first time as reported by the parents. One month after the camp, 10% of children reported changes related to tractor safety, and 17% of children at twelve months reported safer behaviors around tractors. At one month 8% of parents reported that they made changes relating to animal safety after the camp. At twelve months 4% of parents allowed their children to perform the additional task of feeding the animals. Over the first year 28% of parents prohibited unsafe tractor practices. When asked why they allowed their children to do more on the farm, the parents most often reported due to age (38%), or because of increased responsibility (23%).

Discussion: The results indicate that children are receiving additional tasks and responsibilities at this age, so it is an appropriate time to teach safe behaviors on a farm. The safety practices that were implemented paralleled the dangers identified by the parents and children. Future camps may want to focus heavily on animals and tractors, which constitute the majority of children's farm chores and perceived dangers.